

The Inventors: A Memoir



In the fall of 1970, at the start of eighth grade, Peter Selgin fell in love with the young teacher who arrived from Oxford wearing Frye boots, with long blond hair and a passion for his students that was as intense as it was rebellious. The son of an emotionally remote inventor, Peter was also a twin competing for the attention and affection of his parents. He had a burning need to feel special. The new teacher supplied that need. Together they spent hours in the teacher's carriage house discussing books, playing chess, drinking tea, and wrestling. They were inseparable until the teacher resigned from his job and left. Over the next 10 years, Peter and the teacher corresponded copiously and met occasionally, their last meeting ending in disaster. Only after the teacher died did Peter learn that he had done all he could to evade his past, identifying himself first as an orphaned Rhodes Scholar and later as a Native American. As for Peter's father, the genius with the English accent who invented the first dollar-bill changing machine, he was the child of Italian Jews - something else Peter discovered only after his death. Paul Selgin and the teacher were both self-inventors, creatures of their own mythology, inscrutable men whose denials and deceptions betrayed the trust of the boy who looked up to them. *The Inventors* is the story of a man's search for his father and a boy's passionate relationship with his teacher and of how these two enigmas shaped that boy's journey into manhood, filling him with a sense of his own unique destiny. It is a story of promises kept and broken as the author uncovers the truth - about both men and about himself. For like them - like all of us - Peter Selgin, too, is his own inventor.

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