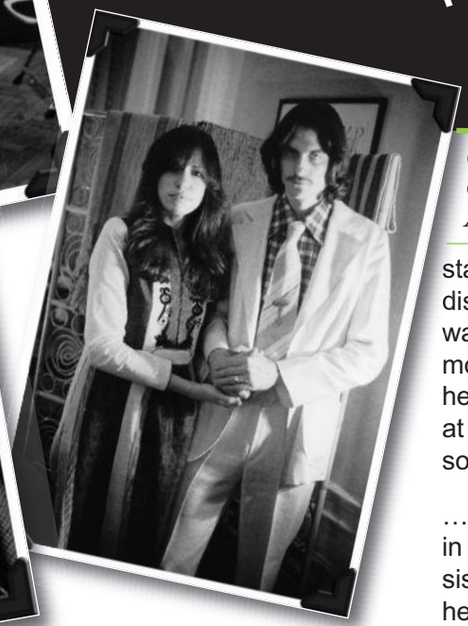
Carole, Joni & Carly:

No More "Anticipation!"

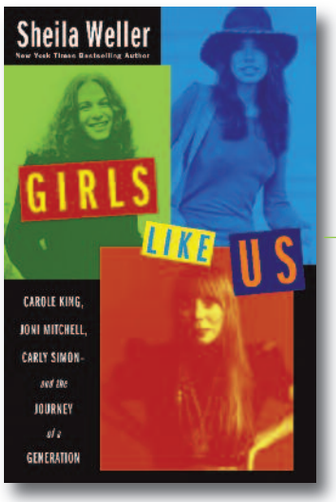
The Book (and their secrets) Are Out!

By Tobi Schwartz-Cassell with Jeanne R. Smith



Clockwise: Carole King and Gerry Goffin (Michael Ochs Collection/Getty images); Carly Simon and James Taylor (Peter Simon); Author Sheila Weller; Joni and James Taylor (Sherry Rayn Barnett)

The following is an excerpt from *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon and the Journey of a Generation.*



Carole and Joni were in many ways opposites. Carole was Everywoman; Joni, the Bohemian. Carole was a craftsman, a tunesmith; Joni, a poet, an artist. Carole was a comforting, accessible friend; Joni, the object of women's awe and men's infatuation. Carole (having had three children) was maternal; she lived by adding. Joni was solitary; she lived by relinquishing. Carole's songs celebrated easy-to-grasp feelings in an optimistic spirit by way of clear, infectiously rhythmic expression. Joni's songs described complex needs and emotional states; they did not skirt pessimism; and - like the astonishingly original Laura Nyro, the only other female singer-songwriter Joni respected - she had begun to use her voice like a jazz instrument, with abrupt shifts of tempo, octave, mood and volume.

But Carole and Joni were also alike: both were raised in lower-middle-class households. Neither was a sister (Joni, literally; Carole, functionally), and neither had a sister; the idea of confiding in women - that brand-new coin of the realm - was not second nature to them, nor was the inclination (Joni's "exposed nerve endings" and confessional songs notwithstanding) to bare their souls to friends. They shared a vague distrust of the chattering classes' "talking cure" and, in different ways, were self-directed. Both were instilled with traditional morality and had paid the price for defying it: Carole, bearing her first child at barely past seventeen; Joni, giving up a baby at twenty-one. Both were naturally ambitious; neither had sought to submerge her talent in a traditional female role…

…Unlike Carole and Joni, Carly came from a big family awash in estrogen. Carly, her two older sisters, and their sometimes-sisterlike mother (Andrea Simon loved not just to gossip with her daughters but also to flirt with their boyfriends) filled the house with grandiose female dramas and set up for Carly's lifetime comfort with and appreciation of female friends. "More than Joni and Carole, Carly is a woman's woman - the notes and gifts, the concern, the phone calls," says Betsy Asher, then wife of James Taylor's manager, Peter Asher, and a woman who was the chief hostess (and secret keeper) to L.A.'s rock world.

"When we were growing up, women were shown on TV in big flouncy dresses, kissing refrigerators," muses Sheila Weller, author of a new book that lifts us out of the 50s and plops us right smack dab into the 60s.

Of Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon and the Journey of a Generation, Weller said, "I always wanted to write about the journey we all take (into womanhood) and these three women were always in the forefront of that dream."

The germ of the idea sprung from the Sara Davidson book, *Loose Change*, in which the lives of three Berkeley women are chronicled against a backdrop of sixties sex, drugs and rock and roll. Weller, a *New York Times* bestselling author and a graduate of Berkeley herself, recalls, "Just after my son was born, it hit me that I should tell this story in the same way. In *Loose Change* the lives of the three best friends are woven into an account of middle class girls' coming of age. I wanted to do the

same thing, but I knew it would be a huge risk to write about three well-known women who weren't best friends, in that intertwined, novel-like mode."

As the book explains, life was never dull for Mitchell, King or Simon, with their Top Ten hits, Grammies galore, marriages and layered love affairs deep in California's renowned Laurel Canyon. And Weller discloses some secrets that until now had been carefully guarded.

"Few of King's fans know that on the day that Kennedy was shot, Carole King, her husband, lyricist Gerry Goffin, and singer Jeanie McCrea were in the studio recording together." Where the situation becomes skewed is the fact that, at the time, Goffin and King were married with two daughters of their own, and Jeanie was pregnant with Goffin's baby. The Goffin-King marriage ended in the late 1960s; Goffin never married McCrea, and though the three children lived apart, they were brought up as siblings.

"But even after their early careers reached their peaks in the late 70s, there was still so much more to tell! Look at the exoticism of Carole's life in Idaho! Here's this middle class Jewish girl from Brooklyn living in the mountains in a cabin with no running water, alone with her kids. She home-schooled them and woke up every morning at five to milk the goat. I think that was gutsy and tremendously admirable, to stretch so far from her childhood roots.

"And we tend to think of Joni as a sensitive, high-voiced girl, but she was wonderfully eccentric, really out there! She dressed up as a black pimp, drove across the country in a red wig with a fake name and knocked on the doors of gnarly old Nashville legends. This is not the ethereal girl anymore. This is a real funny broad!"

Weller continued, "And Carly, who's considered so sophisticated and privileged, having socialized with Jackie O. … you don't think of someone that polished being so vulnerable and unfiltered." (Weller even reveals in the book who "You're So Vain" was most likely written about!)

"Each of the three had a lot of pain in different ways, but they never sank to pity or self-destructiveness. The guys may have done drugs to excess, but the three women absolutely did not," says the author. "It was their middle-class-ness, their decency and sensibility that appealed to me. They kept working. They kept going, and they still do."

Weller notes, "This book has shown me just how much love there is out there for these women. There've been lots of books on Jagger and Dylan and Neil Young … and they're great. But I wanted to say, 'Let's hear it for the girls!'" g

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