

Fun^{for} the Whole Family

A Novel



Jennifer E. Smith

NATIONALLY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Book Club Kit

Letter from the Author

Dear Reader,

I should start by admitting something: I've never been to North Dakota. Like the Endicotts, the family at the center of this novel, I grew up keeping a checklist of states, eager to make it to all fifty, to be able to say I'd seen them all. Every summer, my family would take a road trip to a different area of the country, and it became a tradition to keep count of how many places we'd visited. As an adult, travel has continued to be an important part of my life, and I've kept up my list. In recent years, I've been able to tick off a few of those last stubbornly remaining ones: Arkansas and Alabama and Mississippi, among others. By now, I've been to 49 out of 50. Which means that I've very nearly seen it all . . .

. . . all except for North Dakota, which is where most of this novel takes place. So why did I pick the only state I haven't been to as the backdrop for this story? Because I wanted the cozy feel of the book to exist in its own little bubble, rooted in my imagination more than anywhere real. And because I thought it would be fun to set it in a state that's so frequently the last one people visit that they actually have a Best for Last Club. And perhaps because I wanted an even better excuse to visit someday and complete my own list all these years after I started it.

But as much as this is a story about travel, the heart of it is really about family. And one of the things that's most special to me about this book is that I was building my own family at the same time I was creating this fictional one. I started working on *Fun for the Whole Family* the same month I embarked on my journey to become a single mom, writing those early pages alongside fertility treatments. I inched my way through a first draft during my pregnancy, then later finished it while my newborn was sleeping on me. I made mental notes during nighttime feeds and brainstormed during early morning walks with my son's little body warm against mine. I revised it as he grew, stealing hours while he napped, and finally came to the end as he approached the toddler era, working away in an office that used to be full of books but is currently full of wooden trains and stuffed animals and broken crayons.

Now, just as my son has turned two-and-a-half, this novel—this other big dream of mine—is finally going out into the world, and it means so much to watch it fly away and into the hands of readers, this tale of new beginnings, and of family, and of love. I can only hope it brings you half as much joy as it's brought me, and I'm very, very grateful to you for reading!

Cheers,
Jennifer E. Smith



Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how each sibling felt about their mother, and how their feelings evolved throughout the story.
2. Which Endicott sibling did you relate to the most?
3. What lessons about family and togetherness can be drawn from the Endicotts and their stories?
4. Discuss the dynamics between each of the siblings. What unites or divides them? Did you find yourself taking sides with one or more of these characters?
5. The novel is narrated from different perspectives, places, and timeframes. How did this affect your reading experience? Did it draw you into each character more?
6. What role do secrets play throughout the novel?
7. *Fun for the Whole Family* is about grief, forgiveness, and family. Which theme resonated the most with you?
8. Over the course of the story each character experiences love, loss, and/or a change in fate. What do you think the novel is saying about the bonds of family in the face of difficult times?
9. What did you think of the ending of the book? Where do you think all of the siblings end up in the future?
10. If there's one question you could ask the author—about her own family life, her writing process, or what she hopes readers will take away from *Fun for the Whole Family*—what would it be?

Playlist

Listen [here](#).

Born to Run – Bruce Springsteen

Go Your Own Way – Fleetwood Mac

Fast Car – Tracy Chapman

Two of Us – The Beatles

Baba O'Riley – The Who

I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles) – The Proclaimers

Ain't No Mountain High Enough – Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell

America – Simon & Garfunkel

Like a Rolling Stone – Bob Dylan

Where You Lead - Carole King

The Joker – Steve Miller Band

Here I Go Again – Whitesnake

Dreams – The Cranberries

American Pie – Don McLean

Jack & Diane – John Mellencamp

Take Me Home Tonight – Eddie Money

All Through the Night – Cyndi Lauper

Forever Young – Rod Stewart

Southern Cross – Crosby, Stills & Nash

Homeward Bound – Simon & Garfunkel