

THE PERFECT FAMILY

"Author's Excerpt"

Advance Praise for *The Perfect Family*

“*The Perfect Family* is the perfect read, a poignant and realistic look at the things that take a family apart, and the way love can bring it back together. Written with grace and sensitivity, this novel celebrates the healing power of forgiveness and understanding.”
—Susan Wiggs, *NY Times* Bestselling Author

“*The Perfect Family* is a novel, yes, but also a tool for change. It should be in school libraries, psychologists’ offices, and on teachers’ bookshelves! Parents and students alike can learn from the Davidson and Crane families. As described in the manuscript, love and support can defy discrimination!”—Stacy B. Killings, PhD, Certified School Psychologist, Gates Chili High School

“The image of the ‘perfect’ family is shattered when the youngest son announces he’s gay. Warmly poignant, realistic, dramatic, and honestly presented, Shay’s story is an engrossing family saga for the modern world.”—Pat Cooper, *RT Book Reviews*, 4½ stars

“After 20 years of educating on gay issues, *The Perfect Family* provided me with a fresh, soulful, and enlightening coming out story. I would recommend *The Perfect Family* to anyone who wants to understand the innumerable issues that face a family when a child’s reality collides with a family’s expectations.”—Scott Fearing, Outreach Director, The Gay Alliance of Genesee Valley

“Kathryn Shay has written an emotional, dramatic, and engrossing story relevant to our times, our lives, and our perceptions about love. This is a tale that had to be told, and it will enrich everyone who reads it. I read with rapt attention.”—Stella Cameron, *NY Times* Bestselling Author

“It’s been a long time since I’ve read a novel that so comprehensively and compellingly speaks to a teenager’s coming out experience. Societal, religious, and family system factors are beautifully addressed in Shay’s narrative. As a UCC minister, I particularly appreciated the help given to the family and the solace they find in churches like ours. I will recommend *The Perfect Family* to any family with a gay or lesbian child or to anyone who wants to learn more about what life is like when a gay youth has the courage to come out.”
—Reverend Lee Ann Bryce, United Church of Christ Minister

“How does a family redefine itself after its identity has been shattered? How can love survive when the people we love most reveal that they aren’t who we thought they were? In *The Perfect Family*, Kathryn Shay explores these questions with fierce honesty, courage, and abundant grace.”—Judith Arnold, romance and women’s fiction author

Praise for Kathryn Shay

“Kathryn Shay never disappoints!”—Lisa Gardner, *NY Times* Best-selling Author

“Kathryn Shay is a master at her craft, deftly weaving emotion, romance, realism, and intrigue to create a love story that you’ll never forget.”—Catherine Anderson, *NY Times* Bestselling Author

“Kathryn Shay’s storytelling grabbed me on page one and her characters held me until the very last word. A definite keeper!”—Barbara Bretton, *USA Today* Bestselling Author

“Poignant and compelling, this novel reinforces Shay’s well-earned reputation as a first-rate storyteller.”—Shelley Mosley, American Library Association

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by

Kathryn Shay



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Author's Note

Dear Readers,

Several years ago, in between my other contracted books, I started writing *The Perfect Family*. Then, however, it was titled *A Mother's Story*. It didn't take me long to realize this tale was everybody's story, so the book was renamed. It also went through many iterations. Believe it or not, the first draft was in first person. The first three drafts didn't have a secondary storyline. And with each version, the characters kept getting more complicated and deeper, the plot more complex, and the themes more life-changing.

The reason for this is because what happens when a kid comes out to his parents is more complicated, deep, and complex than anyone can imagine. The disclosure doesn't have to be painful, but it does change a family's life. At least that's what happened to me. My son is gay and when he told us, all I wanted to do was assure him that I loved him and handle the situation well. I didn't know then it wasn't all up to me. Extended family, the church, school, the neighbors, best friends were all affected by his coming out and they affected our family during that time. The book isn't autobiographical. It's fiction. But many of the events in the story happened to us, or happened to families of other gay kids I knew. Some of it is gleaned from what I read after my son's disclosure. I don't think it should matter how much is true or not for our family because all of it is true for some gay teen, somewhere, who comes out.

I love this book with all my heart and soul because it tells a story I badly wanted to tell. I want the book to offer hope to teens and parents who are going through the situation we experienced. I want both teens and parents to learn something about the process. I want to alert people to the fact that with love, sincerity, honesty, and a little help from their friends they can experience the ups and downs of the coming-out

process with grace, integrity, and hope. I think my family did it this way and I couldn't be prouder of them.

I hope you enjoy the book. You can contact me via e-mail at kshayweb@rochester.rr.com to let me know your thoughts.

Or visit me online at:

www.kathrynshay.com

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www.myspace.com/kathrynshay

www.facebook.com/pages/Kathryn-Shay-Fan-Page/241178789369

To get a free copy of a CD by the real person Jamie's character is based on, order *The Perfect Family* from www.BoldStrokesBooks.com and receive it with your order. Or check out www.kathrynshay.com/current.perfect.family.html for availability from the author.

Dedication

For my son Ben. I love you.

Jamie had been magnificent in *Brigadoon* and his drama teacher said he'd be a top candidate for a drama scholarship if he sent out a tape of the performance with his college applications next fall. Brian was flying high because he'd been chosen captain of the baseball team, and Mike was happy with his church activities. She and Mike were doing okay, too. Thinking of last night's lovemaking, she sang louder.

Jamie appeared in the doorway of the laundry room. "Rockin' Mama!"

Glancing up from Mike's shirt—she was trying to get a stain out of the sleeve—she grinned and lowered the music. "Hey, buddy."

"You sound happy."

"I am." She angled her head to the CD player. "Reminds me of my old boyfriend."

"Yeah? Do tell."

She shrugged. "Not much to tell. He was pretty well-off. Grandma Lorenzo didn't like him, so I snuck out to see him."

Slouched against the doorjamb, her son cocked his head. "I'm sorry you had such a tough childhood."

"You know what I finally figured out? Some people have wonderful childhoods, then hard times with their kids. I had it bad when I was young, but hit the jackpot with you guys. I wouldn't trade the two."

"And you might even get your sister back."

"I will, Jame. I know it."

"It's so weird, having three people in my family I've never met."

Gertrude Lorenzo's legacy. Though she tried not to ponder what her mother would do when she found out Caroline was in their lives again, fear washed over her like a cold shower at unexpected times like this.

Jamie sank down on one of the two steps that led to the laundry room from the hallway. Buck came up and nosed at him, wedging in the space between the doorway and Jamie's knee. He began to rub the dog's neck.

Maggie stopped scrubbing and watched her son. "You want to talk, honey? You seem, I don't know, sad. Or nostalgic."

"Maybe nostalgic."

“Is it the letdown from the play? You always feel blue after the school musical is over.”

“No. It’s not that.” He bit his lip. “I gotta talk to you, though.”

Her pulse rate sped up. Good news never followed that statement. She dropped the shirt on the washing machine and leaned against it. “Shoot.”

“I have a date Friday night.”

“That’s good, isn’t it?”

“I think so.” His gaze locked with hers. “I hope you do, too.”

“Of course I do. Can we meet her?”

“It’s not a her, Mom. It’s a him.”

“A him?” She stared at her son blankly. The sound of the refrigerator across the room, the ticking of the clock on the wall seemed unnaturally loud. When the realization hit, her mother’s heart tightened in her chest. “You have a date with a boy.”

A long pause. “It’s okay, isn’t it?”

Please, God, let me handle this right. After a moment of speechlessness, she said, “O-of course it is.”

Jamie’s fingers tightened on Buck’s collar. Suddenly he seemed smaller, more fragile, in his jeans and sweatshirt.

Maggie crossed to him, knelt down, and took both of his hands in hers. His were freezing cold. “Honey, you know there’s nothing you could ever tell me, ever *do* or feel that would make me love you less.”

A frown. “Yeah, I know that.”

Well, she’d done that right. At least he knew her love was unconditional. But oh my God...the ramifications of his admission were far reaching.

“I just...I don’t want this to make you sad. Especially now that you’re so happy about Aunt Caroline.” He glanced down at the linoleum, then back to her again. “Are you upset?”

“That you’re gay?”

“Yeah.”

You have no idea.