



The Family That Wasn't

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The Family That Wasn't is a humorous fable of how our families live inside us. It will appeal to both teen and adult readers. The 13-year-old narrator, John Boggle (whose real name is John Bazukas-O'Reilly-Geronimo-Giovanni-Li Choy-Echeverria), finds his family so impossibly crazy that he cannot stand living with them another moment. He invents a new perfect family so convincing that he suddenly finds himself living inside this imaginary world. But John finds that he too has changed. He sees his too perfect image in the mirror and begins to wonder if it is all some kind of mistake. Only trouble is, now he can't remember who he is. He only knows that he must leave this family at once. His sole clue is the name, John Boggle. To find his true family he embarks on a cross country quest. Along the way he encounters other characters who have also lost touch with their families. Together they must find a way to reconstruct the connections to bring back the family that once was.

The Family That Wasn't Details

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Author : Gene Twaronite

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From Reader Review The Family That Wasn't for online ebook

Gene Twaronite says

Gene Twaronite

Precious says

Originally posted at Fragments of Life.

John Boggle was not comfortable with his family. Each member had his-her own brand of craziness. His brother, Bruno, was a giant who was fond of performing surgery on animals and singing the blues with his harmonica and zither. His half-sister was weirdly fascinated with the planet Venus and claims the existence of Venusians. His mother works at a garbage collecting facility, constantly bringing home 'good trash' that they could still use. Her collection ranges from disgusting to out of this world. His grandmother, although too old, was strong and wise. She was the sanest of the family.

To make things worse, his aunt, Sister Mary Majello came to live with them after her convent got converted into a condominium. She was a member of the Sisters of Creation, a group of nuns that believed all creatures were created equal in God's eyes. And a mysterious person, Vinnie, who claimed to be his uncle, had showed up on their doorstep saying he was from Lithuania. The clash of personalities usually ended up in complaints and arguments. There was never a dull moment in the family. But John was sick of it all. He wanted a better family, a perfect one. So he began to escape his reality through writing one of his own.

The search for his family was long and at some point, totally hopeless. But he didn't give up. The perseverance to find his family and find his purpose was admirable. Soon he found people who experienced the same thing. They lost their families and were bound together by that similarity. Could they find them before it's too late?

The Family that Wasn't is a funny fantasy that will appeal to both young and old readers. I felt that I was watching a cartoon show in my head. Readers will like this light, hilarious and crazy read. But it's also filled with good content, tackling the relationships and issues within a family; it unravels the imperfection and shows the beauty of it.

Jason says

goodreads win.

1 (amazon please note this is a perfect example of why we need a .5 system.... seriously!!)

Disclaimer good reads win. Autographed by author. Super love that. still in editing mode.

So content... what is it about?

A boy, challenged and exhausted by the history of his family—which we will find out he doesn't fully grasp at the time, nor does he fully understand its significance—reaches his breaking point. We have a sister that thinks there is life on Venus. We have an older brother who is slightly demanding in the sense that he is basically a bit psychotic in the beginning and dissects first stuffed animals in this sort of Victor Frankenstein-esque way, then moves onto live specimen. We have a mother who, while having a solid job, comes home with an amazing collection of recycled material that have little to no physical use. Then a step father who has numerous jobs, and seems to not be able to focus on one or the other; adhd? bipolar?

Reaching his breaking point the Boy, John Booggle having an endlessly long name, shortened it making it easier to write and tell people. He enters a world of literature bliss; or so he thinks. He creates a creative, yet very simplistic new life. Entering this new life he discovers that it contrasts greatly with his expectations and his requirements. He gets confused, unable to remember his old self and therefore suffering from a strong case of disequilibrium. John ventures out to recreate his life one member of his family at a time.

I'll break up lost stars into categories:

- 1 star: Reader population

This was the more confusing part of the book. So what does amazon say about the intended population, well they say "Though geared for middle grades (ages 8-12) it will also appeal to readers of all ages"

This is flaw number one of the book. It seems to very much waver between all three populations: 8 to 12 y/o, Young adults, and adults. The problem here is the wide spread between populations. In this struggle it doesn't really have a reader's base at all. Topics of physical abuse, with highlights of beatings, over indulgence in alcohol and the consequences adults may have in restraining themselves, as well as the discrete echoes of molestation on the back of simplistic, younger prose and writing style just doesn't fly. It creates points of chaos for the reader, eliciting uneasy feelings, as well as a global feeling of 'I was like 'this just doesn't work. The wide spread topics, that steadily increase and decrease in intensity create this push and pull feeling'. Adults? teens? Young teens? who knows; frankly I stopped caring.

- 1 star: contrived plot, characters, and transition

The back of the book recalls previously written material and tries to compare them with The Family that Wasn't there. These include Tim Burton and The Wizard of Oz. Let's take the latter. We all know about this story, either through reading it, watching one of the many films, or through pop culture. However, the difficulty in reformatting any previous work is trying and often an arduous experience for a reader, and this book has difficulty establishing its uniqueness. I found it troubling that it echoed Dorothy's ease in finding each of the characters along the yellow brick road. It also echoed and regurgitated all the themes, particularly the metaphorically and philosophical achievements of the casual stumbling upon of characters; woops, high there, teach me something. For me it was a clear-cut, copy of the previous work. It wasn't fresh, it wasn't unique, and it was extortionately over-worked.

The singular ease in which John transitions from one character to another was too simplistic, lacking in detail and didn't reflect the internal reflection we would expect from our lead character. This would have been its little wow factor—to borrow a phrase from Heidi Klum, re: Project Runway—. Again it failed even at this

task. AND SERIOUSLY! this should have been obvious given the plot. The introspection that did occur straddled the young adult/adult audience. Those flash backs were totally not appropriate for a younger audience.

Tim Burton was another one that the back of the book referenced. I didn't see this in any way other than the items that help with the John's survival. It did have a creepy factor, which was totally different from a Tim Burton film, so congratulations on achieving this separation; however it's probably far easier to go from the visual platform seen in movies to a dimensional written form. The creep factor of the characters was unique, however I felt that in many instances this went too far, dominating the writing.

We have a bit of Neil Gaiman, particularly Caroline. Family doesn't pay attention to me... ooo a doorway to another world.... hey look at that a parallel world. Awe caring moments of family reunification... CONTRIVED! TRITE.. REDUNDANT!

One thing that I think writers will, and other do experience when writing is how to separate self from book. A slight example is the overly explored nature of Two Boys Kissing by David Levithan. One needs to perfect a certain degree of pullback to stop the real world from invading the novel. This book falls flat in this regard, exploring more the meaning behind writing for the character, and rather what SEEMS like the authors own feelings and thoughts about writing; all fine and good if touched on lightly rather than in a verbose manner. The areas of abuse and neglect just seemed slammed in the lines, rather than woven into the overall book.

Minus 1 star: over embellishment:

This book could have been at once expanded OR edited down. It's a short piece, but the huge focus on details—many of which were situational or related to the characters past—really was disrupting to the novels focus. I found it troubling that it pursued this angle and relied on physical location, such as road signs and routes, rather on the details that would have explained many of the faults referenced above. The reliance on past family configurations, such as whose aunt was whose sister, was so overly constructed, over worked that it diminished the already fractured, and under-developed elements. It was disappointing to find that these elements were the primary way through which character development was established, as it is only one characteristic of the character, and thus the characters felt under-developed. It begged for an edit in which these elements would have been reduced or where contributing contributions to other areas of character development could have been further explored.

MINUS A STAR:...

I am no spelling queen—evidence by my reviews—but, seriously, was this thing edited at all?!

So where did the novel shine?

The central theme of a character that re-writes his history can be interpreted in many ways on a global scale.

firstly, since this character is in his teenage years, this is a perfect example of self-image, finding self, and integrating existing elements of ones life into this reformatted version. This works more globally rather than closer up; more birds eye view. So teenager gets made at family, teenager escapes into this sort of creative journal that reflects introspection and a conscious effort to combine self and others. Good element, just slightly faulting on its execution.

Secondly, metaphorically this book could reflect the same feeling as the one previously stated, but more in a push back feeling. Teenagers and adults all feel a bit of a struggle—to put it mildly—with their families'. The concept of creating a false reality and exploring it is a good core idea and is probably one of the easier ways of conceptualizing this text, as the better executed concepts; reality, struggle, reformation focusing on self rather than others. This may seem redundant of the above interpretation but it does contain some subtle differences.

Likewise, this possibly reflects digesting the struggles one has with deficits in impulse control, modulating emotions, as well as one's control of anger. This is quite possibly the easier way of interpreting it. Teenager gets made, flips out in an FU manner, and then gets so angry he wishes his family was dead. His mind doesn't understand how it drifts in all sorts of distorted ways, and therefore he develops this overly simplistic manner of exploring what it would be like if those members actually vanished, actually ceased to exist, actually died. This is reinforced by harmful events caused by an absent father and child abuse. I buy into this one more because it's so abruptly resolved.

Further more—and this goes for each of the above—whatever the source may be, John realizes he can't escape those things which happened in the past, nor can he ultimately rid himself of the strife between family members and self; a sentiment echoed explicitly throughout the novel, and one which is directly explored, in a very upfront manner at the beginning of the novel.

Another aspect i found to be a strength of this book is the issues explored. if one is to provide this book to someone fourteen and up, with a heavy interest/investment to exploring partner with a son or daughter—elevating the rehashing of abuse and the inability to integrate it into self—then we have a book that is more refined, yet still imperfect; it just rises slightly above the heaviness of previously established faults.

Also, it was an easy read, which may contribute to the fact that in SOME cases the subplots and explicitly the undertones of abuse may be explored in a more relaxed, calm manner which would provide an interesting juxtaposition between emotionally hard topics and a softer manner of exploring them.

Half way through

upon finishing and closing the book

Amanda (Good Choice Reading) says

There's such a thin line between middle grade and young adult that I'm not so sure there's a definitive line at all. I realized by the blurb that this was more middle grade than the young adult I typically enjoy, so I wasn't sure if I wanted to take the chance. However, the concept and the cover drew me in, so I decided to give it a shot.

I'm glad I did. It started off a little slow as we are introduced to how John's crazy family came to be, but it soon picks up and the action doesn't stop from that point on. Each of the characters had these quirks that would drive any child crazy, and a few of them reminded me of people in my life.

While it was geared toward younger readers and I normally don't enjoy such a thing, it definitely drew me. I felt like I was in the middle of a Tim Burton movie. It had that dark humorous feel to it, and I could definitely see it as a movie. A fun read!

Aside from being fun, it makes you think about how fragile families truly are, and the fact that there is usually one person who is the rock of every family. I have many branches of family and have witnessed this myself numerous times; the death of the family rock causes the family to fall apart. It--for lack of a better word--sucks. Nevertheless, it's definitely a reality and a clear parallel in *The Family That Wasn't*. I encourage you to read this one if you get the chance!

Aaron Lewis says

I really appreciated how Gene took the time to set up the story. With lines like "I didn't mean to do it - things just got out of hand" the first chapter was devoted solely to hooking the reader. The next several chapters introduced this crazy family and the events that led to the book's misadventures. It took a little too long to get to the meat of the story for my taste but the set up was interesting and funny enough that it kept my interest despite its length.

I see this as a great stepping stone book for elementary and middle school students as it deals with a lot of different content areas in a simplified manner. Not only is it a solid entry level fantasy story with a minimum of moving parts, but *The Family That Wasn't* also contains all of the elements of a quest: a hero, a search, mystical tools, signs, and a lesson that is learned by the end. It also contained hints of deeper issues (such as hints there was a funny uncle in the family) but it was done so in a very skillful manner in which it could either be glossed over or discussed in more detail quite easily.

The voice Gene lent to John Boggle was captivating. Not openly funny John's humor was in his turn of phrase and the book was liberally peppered with kidisms (moments that are funny simply because of how the kid responds to it).

Although, *The Family That Wasn't* is advertised for teens and adults it is definitely a book I'd recommend to elementary and middle school students. As a teacher I'd also recommend *The Family That Wasn't* as a read aloud book.

-Aaron

Babs says

Be careful for what you dream / wish for it might just come true. John's dream comes true and he is now loved, rich etc all the things he wanted. But at what cost. He goes off to hunt his old family as he feels guilty and realizes there might not be a better place then home.

I enjoyed this book. It will appeal to both teenagers and adults. The story was humorous at times which help with the dark side of the story. I thought the characters were well thought out along with the story line. I understand there will be another book and look forward to reading it.

Aimee says

"The Family That Wasn't" was entertaining and only took me a couple hours to finish. When I heard the plot of the book, I knew it would be interesting and the book delivered. Even though the book started off a bit slow, there was a lot of character development for John's family, the rest of the book sped by. Usually I am not one for added length to books, but I actually wish there was more of "The Family That Wasn't". I think the book would have been better if there had been more time spent with John on his cross-country quest. I also wish there had been a bit more conflict, things just went a little too easily for John on his quest. There were some set backs, but I wish there had been more of a climax.

I liked how John changed when his family changed. It really showed how interlocked ones identity is with their relationship with their family. We'd like to think that our lives aren't shaped by our family, but that would be a lie. John's family wasn't all together terrible, excluding one person, but it was definitely understandable why he would want a new one. I'm sure many kids have felt that they would like a new family at one point in their lives- this book is something that they can relate to. I know I used to think about how my life would be different if I had a different family and now that I am older, I know that a different family could not love me more. This book does a great job of showing readers why having the "perfect" family is not necessarily better than having the slightly crazy family you were born with.

Overall, this book was a fun, quick read. I would recommend it to anyone who has thought about replacing his or her family or who just thinks that this sounds like an interesting plot. It kind of reminded me a bit of *Coraline*, but not nearly as creepy.

*I did receive a copy of this book for review.

Rebecca says

The Family That Wasn't is an interesting story that focuses on John Boggle (Boggle is actually just an acronym for his actual last name of Bazukas-O'Reilly-Geronimo-Giovanni-Li Choy-Echeverria) and he one day writes his family off and ends up going on an adventure to get them back after the new family he created turned out to not be so fantastic.

The Family that Wasn't is a really quick read so it didn't take me long to read through it at all. It starts off with a little bit of background into John's family history which I thought was really good as it really put the

story into perspective and set the scene for the rest of the book.

I went into *The Family that Wasn't* with no expectations because I had no idea what it would be like. I have to say that I found it to be quite entertaining and a nice little story that is quite unlike any other I have read for a while.

The characters in *The Family that Wasn't* are all very unique and very interesting characters. I'd say there would never be a true dull day in the Boggle household.

If you're looking for a quick but highly original novel that focuses on family then give *The Family that Wasn't* a go because it is quite a good story.

Laura says

What a fun, quirky, eye-opening story that really reminds you that you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family, and also that the grass isn't always greener on the other side, although it may appear that way from where you're standing sometimes. John Boggle who's the main character is a 13-year old boy who hates his family, and thinks they're weird, and doesn't want people to know how weird they are, so he constantly escapes up to the attic and writes about a family that he wishes he was a part of, but when his dreams come true, and he has a whole different family, he misses those that he prayed and dreamed of getting away from for so long.

This book not only has some great messages, and remembers that family is such an important bond whether you think your family is weird or not. I found this book to be laugh-out-loud funny at parts as well as heartbreakingly sad at others. It was such a mix of emotions but I loved every minute of it. My only complaint about this book is that I wish it was longer, because I didn't want this story to end!

FTC Disclaimer: I did receive this novel from this Author for review purposes, this review is my honest opinion.

Jade Eby says

Originally published at my blog Chasing Empty Pavements

When Gene Twaronite contacted me about reading and reviewing his two novels *The Family that Wasn't* and *My Vacation in Hell*, I was a little apprehensive because they seemed geared towards the MG audience and not that I have a problem with that, I just wasn't sure if it was going to be my cup of tea. BUT, I was so surprised by these novels! I absolutely loved them!

The Good: Oh my lord, this book was hilarious. It was tongue-in-cheek funny and from page one, I knew I was going to be laughing throughout this book. And if you think about it, I can't think of ONE person who hasn't in their lifetime wished they had a different family. I know I have. What if we all just wrote ourselves into the perfect family and left the ones we were born into?! I loved the concept, the premise, the characters! All extremely well written. I love the journey John must take in order to bring back his family. I really see this novel AS a MG or very young YA, but anyone of all ages can enjoy this book. It speaks to all the ages!

The Bad: There were a couple of over the top passages that I thought the story could have done without, but that's pretty much my only complaint.

I give this one an A!

**I received this book free from the author in exchange for an honest review. All the opinions are my own and I was not obligated to write a favorable review.

Kayla May Helzerman says

I won this book in a giveaway and I can not wait to read it.
