



Family

Ian Frazier

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Family tells the story of Ian Frazier's family in America from the early colonial days to the present. Using letters and other family documents, he reconstructs two hundred years of middle class life, visiting small towns his ancestors lived in, reading books they read, and discovering the larger forces of history that affected them.

Family Details

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Author : Ian Frazier

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Florence says

What a thorough job Mr. Frazier has done in presenting his family from the early nineteenth century to the present day. He covers their activities in great detail, commenting on their daily activities, their idiosyncracies; the kind of information that gets passed on through oral sources. In addition to the family lore a bit of history, philosophic and religious viewpoints are presented. His ancestors participated in the civil war, at the battle of Chancellorsville, they were among the titans of industry in a postwar boom, and they were also ordinary farmers and shopkeepers. When Mr. Frazier hits the road to retrace the places where his ancestors lived, the story becomes most engaging.

Ronald Wilcox says

Frazier took his research into his family's genealogy and made it into a mostly enjoyable reading experience because of the details he was able to gather about his ancestor's lives. He is able to really portray some of the Day to day experiences from delving deep into family papers. The major drawback is when he digs into the details of the Civil War in too much depth, drawing away from the connections to his family. A very good read for history buffs and for those interested in genealogy.

Michael Parks says

Love this book, so much.

Pete says

if you described this book to me i don't think i'd want to read it, or at least i would be skeptical. this is somewhere between (an even more) non-fictional david copperfield, studs terkel, and old weird america stuff. there's nothing entirely original about where frazier sets his eyes (the civil war, family life in the 19th century, briefly glances elsewhere) except for the nature of his weird eyes. the stuff about his particular family was a harder sell for me -- they're interesting but not that interesting, and i was really apprehensive about the dead brother material -- but frazier mostly gets away with it by cutting up his approach into little paper flowers. the big soaring thing at the end about how you don't have to have faith to believe (in america, not god, he sort of does this nice switcheroo between the two at the end). anyway, i dug this book a lot and also stole some of his sources to use for my own research. if you're allergic to memoir, you can probably skip the second half, although i wouldn't say frazier is really writing memoir -- more like documentary non-fiction that happens to concern his own family and their life and times.

Clytee says

This was written in 1994 before Ian Frazier got famous. But, I think it is a great example of narrative historical non-fiction as applied to family history, which is what I want to try to write. He put his family history in the context of what was happening at the time of specific ancestors which really helps "flesh out" genealogy. Very readable.

Alicia says

I read this book to see how a great writer writes about his family. No surprise -- Ian Frazier's book is unique. He starts with his great-grandparents, all of whom were living in Ohio or Indiana. In many respects, their stories are typical of striving middle-class Americans of their time. The book delves deeper as Frazier brings the narrative into his immediate family -- he is the oldest of five children -- and a time period many of his readers can remember. His father was a chemical engineer for SOHIO and his mother was an actress in local theater who also taught school. He has interviewed many relatives, family friends, and others to tell a story of love, sacrifice, struggle, loss, and other family mysteries. It is told honestly and warmly.

Paula Hebert says

I was surprised to see that this book was given 4 stars in the book lists. I became intrigued with the book when I heard the author read an excerpt from it on a prairie home companion, so went off to the local library, and dived in,. ian frazier comes from a very old american family, that can trace itself back to the 1600's, and who all seemed to be fanatical savers of documents, receipts, diaries, journals, letters, playbills, etc. so when his mother passed away, and he started going through all of her papers, he struck the mother lode in terms of geneology. I guess the 4 stars could qualify just in sorting through all the data. this is basically a family tree, and much of it is as dry as day old toast, like reading deutoronomy or leviticus, but if you are a good skimmer, and can get past those parts, there are many fascinating pages, filled with the day to day minutia of the life of the early settlers: the description of the forests west of the appalachias, so dense and oppressive that the pioneers would become ecstatic if they came upon a clearing of only 200 yards; the way new log cabins would sprout new growth for years after being built, and become as green as the woods around them; hoiw a hollow sycamore tree could hold 15 men standing, and would often be used as an outbuilding, with a door over the hollow. it also describes trends in thinking and believing, faith and education and offers excellent commentary on why this progressed as they did. all in all, a very interesting and informative book, great for history buffs.

Linda says

I have always loved family stories and memoirs, and I have done a good bit of genealogical research, so it would follow that I would really enjoy this book, which has been on my "to read" list for a long time. I'm sorry it didn't work that way. I'm glad that Frazier included family tree charts for both his parents, which I referred to many times, especially in the beginning of the book. I found that parts of it dragged badly, although I was more interested near the end when Frazier tells of his parents and grandparents and I got a better idea of the person that Frazier is. I'm not sorry I read it, but it wasn't the great read I had hoped for.

Jamie says

This book is a concise genealogy. I read it for my historical research methods class at SUNY Brockport. The sub-topic was genealogy, and our million page papers were on our own family histories. I think it is a great thing to do for yourself and your family members, because when I found my grandfather's grandparents in England and Germany, my great Uncle Henry was ecstatic because he finally knew information he couldn't remember from his childhood. However, I don't know all that much about Ian Frazier, and I am not being mean but I really don't care about his life. I would only recommend reading it if interested in compiling your own genealogy.

Tamarasoo says

i'm ashamed to say it's been a long time since i read nonfiction besides biographies, but it has. this book was pretty much a biography in some ways about the author's extended family--Frazier describes in detail the character of his remote and close family members as he learned about them while doing genealogical research. But it was more than a biography in that it gave a very detailed history of small town life in midwest America pretty much from the Revolutionary War to the author's own modern-day generation. I learned a lot about the Civil War and the early 20th century oil and soap industry and the demise of the Cuyahoga River that led to its catching on fire and small town Ohio and Indiana life through the past 200 years that I can relate to my own ancestry. Interesting. Worth the detour from fiction and inspired me to be sure to read some more NF in the near future.

Nate says

Ian Frazier researches and reports on the people in his family tree.

Don't read this book unless you're really into other people's family history. Frazier's homage to his family is interesting in parts but very dry and scattered in others. There are huge sections of the book that describe historical events without mention to his family members. For instance, he spends 15 pages describing in great detail Lee's charge in Virginia (maps, letters, analysis of strategy) only to indirectly bring it back to his great-granduncles. As in, "oh yeah, these 2 dudes were in that charge somewhere, I guess."

For me his book began and ended with his brother's death.

Dawn says

When he died, Stonewall Jackson, who was a profoundly religious man, said, "let us cross over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees."

Ian Frazier writes, "Before the Civil War, America didn't know if it was a country or lots of different Promised Lands. People invented the America they wanted to live in and then struggled to live there. Across the river and under the trees combined all these invented countries into one. Across the river and under the

trees descended like a beneficence in the last moments of a fierce man's life and crystallized his fierceness to purity. Across the river and under the trees carried no demurring sub-clauses or riders. It included us all-- people Jackson considered infidels, men he would have shot unblinking in life. Across the river and under the trees was poetry to equal the nation-building poetry of Lincoln, and the only line of poetry to come from the South in the war. Even though Stonewall Jackson fought for the Slave Power and though his faith is beyond me, and though he did not like newspaper correspondents and though he killed the boy whose family had the shoe store and though the flag of his cause still scares me when I see it on the radiator grille of a truck in my rearview mirror and though I am more than glad his side lost, I dream of across the river and under the trees."

I have something profound to ponder today.

Matt says

I love Ian Frazier's writings. He takes writing seriously, and he talks his subjects and his readers seriously. But he does it in a humble way; without injecting his own ego into his impressions and writings.

I love how he brings his reader along with him in his journeys and studies. He writes in a manner that engages the reader personally, rather than a manner that simply results in words on a page. I feel like I'm in the passenger seat beside him, so to speak.

"Family" is a story about his own family, but its also a story about the America that his family worked, lived, educated, worshiped, and fought in.

There really isn't much about his family that is overly remarkable, other than they are a lot like the rest of us. Holidays, school, jobs, births, deaths, grudges, and times of coming together. Sometimes we understand our own families (and selves) by learning about others. I certainly did.

Rocco Versaci says

A thoroughly researched book in which Frazier retells the story of his family by tracing his roots back to Revolutionary War days and up through the present. He has a wonderful storyteller's voice, and each page is packed with original insights and unique turns of phrase. Taken as a whole, this book represents one of the noblest objective of the writer: to rescue the past--in this case, his own--from obscurity.

Nina says

Who would have thought somebody else's family history could be so interesting and moving! I could identify with the author -- my age, child of a chemical engineer who had 6 kids. He wove in American history around the experiences of his ancestors. Put them in proper context. 'I would.. carry a mortgage and fret about money just like my dad, and he and my mother would accompany me through a life that would be much like theirs, and at every step I would compare myself especially to him, would judge if I was doing better or worse than he had done at being middle class and putting kids through school and not terrorizing my family

and staying between the lines while trying not to forget what it is I actually want to do. And unknown things would happen, and sooner or later I would die too -- I understand that now, clearly, the way you suddenly become aware of the sky and the diving board after the person in front of you has jumped -- and my kids perhaps would see me off as I had seen my parents off, or perhaps not." I am inspired to do our own family history in similar style, but fear it would never come to pass before the last generation dies.
