

Book Review: Family Family
By Laurie Frankel

Thanks to NetGalley and Henry Holt and Co. for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "Family Family" is scheduled for publication on January 24, 2024.

India Allwood is a highly successful, well-known actress who has just finished a film about adoption – a subject she is well versed in. But she's disappointed in the film, and lets it be known.

"Not all stories of adoption are stories of pain and regret. Not even most of them. Why don't we get *that* movie?"

Having been adopted many decades ago, I understand her perspective. While nothing is perfect, my life was not filled with pain and regret. I wouldn't trade my family or upbringing for anything in the world.

But I also understand the questions raised and issues addressed in what is, overall, a well-written story about families. They come in all shapes and sizes – some conventional but many not – and each is as likely to be fraught with trauma, heartache and happiness as the next.

India has placed two children for adoption – one when she was a pregnant teenager just getting ready to graduate high school, the other as a college senior. Several years later, as her acting career is poised to kick into high gear, she adopts (rescues is the more appropriate term) four-year-old twins from a horribly abusive household.

The narrative, which alternates between present time and India's high school, college, and early acting career years, introduces us to a wide range of interesting and colorful characters.

- Robbie, her high school sweetheart and first love
- Camille, the single woman who adopts India's and Robbie's daughter
- Davis, India's college boyfriend
- The Andrews, a gay couple who adopt India's and Drew's son
- Fig and Jack, the twins India adopts
- Rebecca and Lewis, the daughter and son India placed for adoption

India's non-supportive comments about the newly released film spark a firestorm not just among executives at the studio, but across social media. She is slammed by protesters on the right and advocates on the left. Her 10-year-old twins, Fig and Jack, decide their mother needs help, so they call on family.

This, in my opinion, is where the storyline and character actions become a bit unrealistic. For example, the twins find Rebecca through social media and convince her that her presence would help their mother, so the 16-year-old jumps on a plane and flies into town. Soon after Fig (remember, she's only 10-years old) locates the Andrews couple and, via a phone call, convinces them and their son, Lewis, they're needed for a potential medical emergency, to which they fly across country without even questioning India.

Questions abound. Would a parent (India) really tell her adolescent children not only that she had previously placed two children for adoption, but offered up their names? And would adoptive parents tell their adopted child everything (full names

included) about their birth parents? Can a 16-year old purchase a plane ticket (apparently she swiped her mother's credit card) and leave town without being noticed? How gullible is an adult who gets a phone call from a 10-year old he never met and immediately takes the whole family across country? I have 10-year-old grandchildren. They're great, but they could never pull off such a rouse.

Family Family provides important insight into adoption, and is an easy read that – other than the bumps in the road I raised above – flows smoothly from cover to cover. I give it 3.5 stars, and welcome your feedback.