



## The Perfect Family

*Kathryn Shay*

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# **The Perfect Family**

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## **The Perfect Family** Kathryn Shay

What happens to the "perfect family" when the future suddenly changes in the most unexpected way?

Seventeen-year old Jamie Davidson doesn't think being gay should be such a big deal...until he comes out to his parents and friends. Even as Jamie celebrates no longer needing to hide his true self and looks forward to the excitement of openly dating another boy, the entire Davidson family is thrown into turmoil. Jamie's father Mike can't reconcile his religious beliefs with his son's sexuality. His brother Brian is harassed by his jock buddies and angry at Jamie for complicating all their lives. Maggie, his mother, fears being able to protect her son while struggling to save her crumbling marriage. And Jamie feels guilty for the unhappiness his disclosure has caused. Every member of their "perfect family" must search their hearts and souls to reconnect with each other in this honest, heartwarming, and hopeful look at the redemptive power of love and family.

## **The Perfect Family Details**

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Author : Kathryn Shay

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## From Reader Review The Perfect Family for online ebook

### Trevor says

Couldn't decide whether to give this book 3 or 4 stars, in the end decided upon three for a number of reasons:

- 1) A bit too much religion in it for my liking
- 2) Twists in the story were flagged well in advance
- 3) Not all of the main characters were well rounded

Having said this though it was a heart felt story, about a teenage boy coming out to his family and the impact this had on all his family and friends.

The ending was a bit too syrupy for my liking, but it was an easy read, and gave you food for thought.

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### Crystal says

Why I read this book: I love participating in Pump Up Your Books book tours and when I saw Kathryn Shay's name as one of the authors I really wanted to be a part. I've read at least 3 of her books and enjoyed all of them and thought this book sounded interesting.

How is this book driven: Character all the way - the events are important, but what the characters do and go through is pivotal to the book.

My Thoughts: The Perfect Family is a very impressive endeavor on Ms. Shay's part. She has taken a subject that everyone knows about and most everyone has an opinion on, homosexuality and worked it out from all sides. What would it be like for you as the mother of a son who figures out that he is gay and doesn't want to hide it? What about for the father who is a strong proponent of the Catholic Church? What about the virile, attractive older brother who is a jock? What about the boy himself and friends and other family members? The amazing thing is Ms. Shay handles this with grace without portraying anyone as a bad guy (well except for a few true bigots in the story). But most of the main characters aren't really sure what they should feel and fall into that gray area that I believe most of us are in.

First I should state I am a Christian, but I found Ms. Shay's book very thought-provoking and eye-opening. I am one of those who truly believes we should love everyone so I really felt for Jaime in this book. I felt for most of the main characters. Ms. Shay did a great job developing the characters so they were multi-dimensional and their struggles felt very real. I honestly felt I was alongside of each one going through the feelings with them. They storyline grabbed me and didn't let me go.

I didn't feel like an agenda was being forced on me with this book either, I really felt it was there as a book to read and enjoy and maybe educate a little on the subject of loving those who are homosexuals and accepting

them as part of society, not ostracizing them. It is an absolutely beautiful and heartbreakin book.

The character I could most relate to was obviously the mother, Maggie, as I think most moms and most women can. All she wants is everyone around here to be happy and she thinks she's the key to doing that. What mom or woman doesn't think that? I am struggling with it myself. But the truth is one person cannot make the whole family happy, they all have to work together to do it. I could also see Michael's point-of-view. I am not Catholic, but the Methodist Church shares a lot of the same views, but I love that he was a balance, he struggled and was not a characterization of a heavy-handed Christian. It was a struggle for him to take his beliefs and form them in with his life and the fact that his son was gay.

I just can't say enough about this book. If you enjoy thought-provoking fiction along the lines of Jodi Picoult I think this is a book for you. It's an amazing read and one I found hard to put down.

My Rating: 4.5/5.0

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### **Sandy Samuel says**

#### **Not for the faint of heart**

I don't want to say I enjoyed the book. That feels wrong somehow. But I was very impressed. It's so well-written and I got really caught up with the characters. I highly recommend it!

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### **Hilcia says**

he Perfect Family by Kathryn Shay is a contemporary family story about the struggle a family goes through while coming to terms with their seventeen year-old son Jamie's sexuality after he discloses that he is gay.

Mike and Maggie Davidson have, what many would consider, the "perfect family." They love each other and their sons, athletic eighteen year-old Brian and artistic seventeen year-old Jamie. Both are excellent young men, well-liked, doing well in school, and getting ready for college. As Mike says at the beginning of the book, they "have so much to be thankful for." However soon after Mike makes this statement young Jamie finally reveals to his family that he is gay and the struggles begin.

Mike, Jamie's father, is a religious man and has always felt the comfort and reassurance that participating in his community church give him on a personal level. Reconciling what his religion dictates, faith (two different things as presented by Ms. Shay), and the fact that his son is gay summarize Mike's personal struggle. Then we have Brian, a young man who is torn between loving his brother and best friend, peer pressure, and religious beliefs reinforced by his father.

Finally, we have Maggie whose family was torn apart while growing up because of the church. Maggie not only fights for Jamie, but her already negative feelings about the church place her in a precarious position with her husband Mike. On top of that, Maggie must take her son Brian's feelings on the subject into

consideration. There's a danger that their family might split apart. Can she find an alternative and keep her family intact? That's her struggle right there.

But of course the family is not only affected by their internal struggles, they also have to deal with external pressures: school, neighbors, family members, church officials and friends affect the Davidsons, making this a well-rounded story as the family experiences disappointments and finds support from the most unlikely of places. Shay balances out the Davidson's issues by showing how different families react to the same situation. She highlights a different side of the story by featuring how Jamie's boyfriend Luke and his family deal with his coming out to family and friends.

The Perfect Family is narrated in the third person perspective, so although the story begins with Jamie's coming out to his family, Shay gives each family member a voice and explores their thoughts and feelings about this subject. As a result the characters are well-drawn, realistic and believable as are the circumstances surrounding them. I personally couldn't stop thinking about them for days after finishing the book.

Kathryn Shay approaches this story from personal experience, although she stresses in the Author's Note that the story is not autobiographical. However, she also points out in the same section that some events that occurred during her own son's coming out experience are used as a base to tell Jamie's story. It is perhaps the author's personal experience, combined with her writing talents, that make the characters and circumstances in this book feel so real and unforgettable.

The Perfect Family is a well-paced and well-written, engaging read. I became so invested in this characters that I didn't want to stop reading until I finished the book. I was impressed with the direct way in which Shay approaches and discusses important subjects; from differing psychological and religious views on homosexuality, to suicide in gay teens, to religious and community based venues that provide support and can be accessed by teens and families. Yet all these subjects are made very "personal" in a way that makes this an entertaining and educational read at the same time.

I see this book as a must read for families whether their teens are coming out or not. Specifically recommended to those who just want to be aware or who are interested and want to know how to be of help to that friend or neighbor. Highly recommended to all.

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### **xbmbgrl says**

The Perfect Family is a book that is hard for me to review. The author goes to great lengths to point out that it isn't biographical. As a mother that has no issues with her children's homosexuality and no religious indoctrination to overcome, I could not relate to any of the issues that seemed to stand so solidly in the way of loving their children ~ no matter what. I suspect that I may be in the minority with this view, which means the book may be a lot more meaningful to other readers, but for me, as pure fiction, the book left me neutral.

Many of the interpersonal problems the family struggles with seemed self inflicted and unreasonable to me. I wish the book had centered more on the feelings and actions of the son's coming out. Instead it veered off into extended family and long standing religious dysfunction that derail it. I expected to be able to relate to the mother, and I could with regards to the issues she faced within her family regarding her son revealing his sexuality, beyond that I felt lost amongst the rest of the family, work and friend drama.

This book has so much focus on the religious aspect, not only of homosexuality, but also of a few other long

standing unresolved issues between other family members I felt manipulated at times. At other times I was baffled by the weight given to the opinion of people that just don't matter. I loathed the husband. He hid behind his religion, as so many do, to justify unrecognized but all too apparent, "conditional love."

As the dramatic high point occurs, which was telegraphed well before it happened, it had the usual effect of shaking up the parents. Making them see what's important and helped to resolve some of the conflict.

All in all, the book was interesting but I didn't find many of the characters to be real. They felt stereotypical. Too often their actions were a mixture of unlikely perfection or conversely contrived and unrealistic in their outrageous reactions. The only two characters that seemed to act realistically were both of the brothers.

In the end, it seemed to be a how-to book for parents in this situation to contemplate finding a different more accepting church, join PFLAG and finally, all find their compassion. Honestly, had the book been autobiographical, I think I would have found it more interesting.

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### **Dixie LoCicero says**

This is a true story about a family (Mom, Dad, sons Brian & Jamie) in a relatively conservative smaller town. Brian is a baseball star, Jamie is in to acting in plays. Dad is a staunch Catholic, following the tenets of his faith strictly. Mom comes from a family where the mother kicked out her sister for dating a married man & later marrying him. She hasn't seen her older sister in many years, has no idea where she lives. This has caused her to question Catholicism as the priest encouraged her parents to disown their daughter. Now, Jamie decides to come out to his family, friends and classmates. He meets another guy on the baseball team who is also secretly gay. They decide come out together because they want their relationship to be equal to their friends who are dating.

Jamie's mom accepts him for who he is, even though she doesn't understand it completely and worries about how others will treat him. Brian has problems accepting that his brother is gay. The Dad is totally upset about what the church will think. His boyfriend's parents are even less accepting.

Very well-written book about how everyone in the families react to news about Jamie being gay. Mom's sister comes back in to her life & it's amazing how some people can't decide to love their own children unless the Church says "it's okay".

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### **Robyn says**

Perfect. Utterly perfect. I don't think I've ever read a book that's portrayed the process of a teenage boy coming out to his friends and family that is as real, true and heartfelt as *The Perfect Family*. There was always something that was just not right with other books. Family accepting things too easily, or not at all. Friends as well. Or the gay teen being too hard on himself, wanting to change. Not so in this one.

Jamie is sixteen years old and has figured things out - he's gay, and he's done hating himself for it. He's ready to come out. His family isn't so ready. Before, they had the "perfect" family. Two teenage sons who got

along perfectly, parents that were still happily married. Perfect. But everything gets ripped apart when Jamie tells his secret. Suddenly, things aren't as perfect, cracks are showing in Jamie's family. His father, Mike, still loves Jamie, but his religion makes him believe that homosexuality is a sin. Jamie's older brother Brian is taking his cues from his father, and things are only getting worse when people from school find out and start ragging on him too. Jamie's mother Maggie is the only one Jamie can really turn to... Or is she? What about Luke, Jamie's new boyfriend, who is having troubles with his parent's accepting his sexuality as well.

The characters were so wonderfully written. The Perfect Family offered several different perspectives, making it that much more enjoyable. Each character was inspiring and true and they made the novel what it was. Jamie was certainly my favorite character, but he wasn't the only character I loved. Really, I liked them all, even the characters that were meant to be disliked. I didn't like them because I liked them as people, but for what they brought to the story. It just wouldn't have been as strong of a message if every character was okay with Jamie being gay. There had to be some people who had problems with it, because there is in real life, and the story would have been less without them. Because of these characters, the homophobic ones, the characters got a chance to learn from it and grow as people. Which is exactly what they did. Especially Jamie and Maggie.

Maggie was an exceptional mother, and, aside from my own, I couldn't think of a better mother. She was supportive and loved both her sons no matter what, through everything. Even when Maggie was still trying to sort things out for herself he was there for her boys, particularly Jamie, who needed someone on his side who was okay with who he was and didn't want to change him for it. Like Mike. Mike had the most problems accepting Jamie as is, and at first I didn't really like him for it. He kept telling Jamie that he loved him, and that he always would, and then he'd say that he didn't "get" why Jamie couldn't change. He wanted Jamie to be "normal" and was upset when he realized that it wasn't something Jamie wanted to - or could - change. As Mike is dealing with his acceptance of his son, he also has to deal with his marriage crumbling. Because while Mike is sorting things out, he's making a mistake or two along the way, causing Maggie to distrust him. Their deteriorating marriage was just another thing on the least of what I love because it's so real.

And then there's Brian. Brian is a great big brother and person. He started off that way, anyway. But once he found out that his little brother was gay he got a little off course. Brian couldn't really understand it, but what he did know was that people from school were finding out and were asking him if it ran in the family! Brian had a girlfriend and knew he wasn't, but it was really getting to him. He just wished Jamie would have kept this secret a secret. But he didn't, so he has to deal with it. And he tries. He really does. But then he finds out that his brother is dating a guy on his baseball team - Luke Crane. Soon Luke starts taking hits in the locker room. Brian can't decide if he should defend Luke or not. He doesn't want people to start calling him gay again, but Luke is a good guy and his brother cares a lot for him. One thing's for sure though - no one messes with his little brother!

Aside from Jamie and Maggie, Brian was my favorite character. He grew a lot over the span of a few months, and I hope that he will continue to grow and become more accepting of Jamie. While he often made mistakes and said stupid things, he really was a great big brother.

Before I forget, I want to talk quickly about Luke. I liked his character a lot as well, and his was possibly the most heartbreak. His parents were truly accepting, particularly his father. And while, again, it is real, and really happens, it is tragic. I don't get why people just can't accept someone for who they are. Do you outcast someone because they like blonds instead of brunettes? No. Then why should you outcast someone because they like guys over girls? Instead, you should celebrate their courage on coming out, and love them for who they are. But, because Luke's family wasn't like that, he was facing his own struggles, and eventually hits his

lowest, making for an excellent climax. If not a slightly predictable one. Which is the only not so positive thing I have to say about the entire book.

Crap. This review is getting a wee bit long. So I should probably just shut up, right? I can't help it! I love this book and I have a lot to say about it! Just one more paragraph, I promise!

So, to sum things up. I obviously loved this book. (Even the religious aspect didn't deter me!) It was everything great all wrapped into 264 pages. The Perfect Family was the most heartbreakingly inspiring and wonderful coming out novel I've ever read, and I'd like to see many more like it. (If they could ever live up to this! My standards just went up about twenty notches!) I'd recommend this book to everyone, young or old, boy or girl, gay or straight, or anything in between. I'd especially like to see those who are a little homophobic read this. They just might get a different perspective. I've awarded The Perfect Family 5/5 stars, not for being the perfect family, but for being a perfect read, one I'm sure I'll be rereading soon. I'm looking forward to reading more novels by Kathryn Shaw!

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### **Anna says**

This book feels a bit rough around the edges, especially when it tells instead of shows. On the other hand, it's a fascinating read, about a Catholic family's reaction when their son comes out of the closet.

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### **Jo says**

I loved this book, the challenges that religion and religious beliefs versus what is happening in your family throws up. How different male and females react to news that their son is gay. How friends and family struggle to come to terms with how others react towards them.

Great read

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### **Mariana says**

Do you want to cry? Have your heart squeezed tight? Well, this is the book for you! There is no way you can read this book without crying, absolutely no way... at least for me. I started reading this book this morning and could not put it down. I cried on the train, I cried on my conference call (was totally not paying attention), I cried during lunch, I cried on the way home... I have the biggest headache right now O\_o

This is the story of a family that had their foundation rocked when the youngest son (Jamie) openly declares his sexual orientation as gay. The father (Mike), a devout Catholic, struggles with this; the mother (Maggie), a psychologist, knows all the right things, but struggles with what this means to her son and family; the older brother (Brian), the star high school athlete, struggles with how this affects him and his standing in school and how it clashes with how his father is raising them as devout Catholics. And most importantly, Jamie... how this declaration affects him personally, his family, his friends and his future.

It is an EXTREMELY emotional story. It hurt to read this family struggling. It also shows how religion can really affect a person's ability to cope with revelations in their lives. Although there was a happy ending, you know there are so many times that there isn't. It hurts the heart to think of all those struggling with no one in

their lives to affirm that they will be OK and that living a life of true self is always best and fulfilling.

This family story touched me deeply. There has been no similar circumstance for me, but such is the gift of this author that she made me want to hug this family and tell them they had people on their side.

I highly recommend this book.

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### **Just says**

Jamie has a massive secret - he is gay and decides to come out to his family. The fallout of his revelation threatens to tear his family apart.

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### **Karen says**

After reading MM romance for months now, this was a really interesting detour! I really enjoy reading about the coming out experience for men, but this was the first book I've read that tells about that experience from the rest of the boy's family's point of view.

Maggie and Mike are middle class, church-going, suburban parents with good jobs and settled lives. Their two high school sons, Brian and Jamie, are good students, popular, well-adjusted, and never get into trouble. It is "the perfect family". Maggie had some issues growing up, primarily related to her mother who is cold, controlling, and incapable of feeling or showing love, but she prides herself that she has overcome this, and is a supportive, loving wife and mother.

And then Jamie reveals that he is gay, and he wants to be out not just to his family, but to the world in general.

Maggie is supportive, but it is admittedly a huge shock to her, and the guilt she feels -- wishing Jamie wasn't gay, wishing this didn't happen to her family, resenting him because she is choosing sides within the family to support him -- is understandable and real. Mike is absolutely floored. He is devoutly Catholic, and believes in all the church's teachings and tenets, to the point that he even tries to talk Jamie into reparative therapy at one point. He sees Maggie's support of Jamie to be a violation of his religious beliefs, and therefore, of him as well. And Brian is caught between his desire to support his Jamie and his boyfriend (though he too feels that being gay is sinful, although not to the same extent that his father does), and demands from his coach to be a man and let the locker room homophobic bullying go on.

The book drags a little bit, because all of the conflict is internal, with the characters avoiding one another and a lot of internal monologue. That being said, it was totally believable. Each one of the family faces choices that are potentially self destructive, and they go down these paths. The family comes very close to breaking apart completely. But eventually they do pull back together, and it is clearly because, before everything else, they love each other. The road to acceptance was especially difficult for Mike, because he had to repudiate some of the church's teachings, after feeling he'd built his entire life on them. They come to the end of the school year battered, but intact. No longer so sure that they have the perfect family, but sure of their love for each other and confident of the future. Maggie and Mike retain their faith in God, though Maggie finds another church, and Mike joins a group that is trying to reform the Catholic church from within. I have to

admit I was pleased to see that, as so many people seem to think that Christianity and homosexuality are mutually exclusive -- in some ways, this book was a bit like an advertisement for the United Church of Christ (the congregation Maggie ultimately chooses to join)

Overall, I thought this was a great book. I liked that Jamie's point of view was not the dominant one of the book. I loved that there was an HEA, because I could easily have seen this go another way.

My only real complaint was a pet peeve. For some reason, no-one in the book could say more than one syllable of anyone's name. Jame, Mags, Bri. . . People, these are only 2 syllable names, shortening them any further is just really annoying!

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### **Jennifer says**

From My Blog...[return][return]The Perfect Family by Kathryn Shay is a novel based on the Davidson family and what happens within the family when they learn their son is gay. Jamie is 17 years old and believes it is time to inform his family and friends that he is gay. Jamie is looking forward to being able to be himself around those he cares about, yet unprepared for the intense and diverse reactions to his announcement from family and friends alike. The Perfect Family takes a look at how one announcement; a boy speaking the truth, can change an entire family, friends and neighbours. Shay does an excellent job in portraying the differing opinions to Jamie's announcement and through dialogue, descriptions and realistic characters, the story comes across as an honest look inside one family's life with a wonderful ending. Thankfully all families are different and some handle the news far better than the Davidson's initial response. I think The Perfect Family would make for an excellent choice for book discussion groups due to the controversial issues and I would not hesitate to recommend The Perfect Family to any reader.

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### **Robin says**

Mike and Maggie Davidson have been married for twenty years. They have two sons; eighteen-year-old Brian and seventeen-year-old Jamie. Their lives are going smoothly. They are considered the perfect family...until Jamie reveals to his family that he is gay. Maggie talks to Jamie and tells him that she supports him. Mike is having a hard time balancing his love for his son with his religion. Brian is hurt that his brother never told him his secret. Everyone has to reconcile their feelings and work to keep the family from ripping apart.

This is a well-written story that covers many important subjects, including some people's belief that being gay is a choice, teen suicide, and discrimination. Some of the things that happen in the book are not a surprise. You can see the build-up to what's going to happen throughout the book. But, it didn't interfere with my enjoyment of the book. My rating: 4.5 Stars.

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### **Elisa Rolle says**

I remember Kathryn Shay from the time I was reading het romances, I think I probably read one or two too, so when I saw this novel by her, it picked my interest. I was curious to see how someone who is used to write

straight relationship would face the task to move to gay relationship. In a way she didn't, *The Perfect Family*, as the same title suggests, is a family story more than a love story, and if we want to search for a romance, the one who is fully developed is that between Maggie, the mother, and Mike, the father; Jamie, the teenager who comes out to his family, has a "high school" relationship with Luke... maybe it's love, maybe it's something that will shade away in time, but in this moment it's the main reason why all the balances in this perfect family is apparently not working.

There are very nice and complex characters; Mike, for example, is a very conservative catholic man, who struggles to accept the idea his own son is gay, but for a simple reason: he does believe homosexuality is a sexual orientation and not a lifestyle choice (his own wife is a psychologist and she is very ready to correct him if he had any different idea), but his church is telling him that, if one is gay, and he is not able to "fight" it, then he should be chaste; Mike, that is sexually active, more, he sometime needs sex as escape (of course always with his wife), cannot accept Jamie will be able to be celibate, and so, the obvious conclusion is he will be a sinner and though condemned to hell. I struggle to accept that a wise and good man like Mike could have such archaic ideas. On the other hand, Mike is probably one of the best husband, and father, I have read about, and so I wanted for him to find a way to do the right thing.

Then there is Maggie; as a psychologist she is probably more ready than other mothers to hear the confession of her teenager son, but that doesn't mean it's easier for her. Maggie is almost in the middle, her mother role "pushes" her to be worried, and to be scared, for her son's future; her psychologist role is trying to convince the mother that everything is fine, that there is nothing wrong with her son, that she should concentrate on him and her husband, trying to not destroy their family with her fears.

In a way I also liked the contraposition between Maggie and Mike, and yes, I also think Maggie failed in dealing with Mike, but in her failing I found a more realistic, and likeable, character. Mike was wrong in a lot of things, but Maggie should have tried to be more open with him, to share more of her worries, and above all the actions she was undertaking to help their son.

The Catholic Church is not a winner but neither a loser in this novel, above all since we have the chance to see different sides of it; there is the conservative wing of Father Pete and Mike's church; there is the more understanding attitude of the catholic lobby of Dignity, also represented by Mike's parents; there is the very liberal Unitarian Church that is attending Maggie. All in all, all sides involved will have goods and bads, and in a way, the common understanding is that anyone needs to believe, the God is always the same, only the churches worshipping are different.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/160282181X/...>

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