

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Laurie Frankel is the *New York Times* bestselling, award-winning author of four novels. Her writing has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *People Magazine*, *Lit Hub*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and other publications. She is the recipient of the Washington State Book Award and the Endeavor Award. Her novels have been translated into more than twenty-five languages and been optioned for film and TV. A former college professor, she now writes full-time in Seattle, Washington where she lives with her family and makes good soup.

- [Author's website](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do the epigraphs help prepare the reader for the many crossroads the Walsh-Adams family will have to face? What about the first word of the novel, “but”?
2. When Rosie and Penn first go to see Mr. Tongo about Claude, he asks them to divide behaviors into “boy” and “girl” columns. Do you think their conclusions are accurate? Are they fair? Discuss what you think it means to be a man, a woman, or “something else.”
3. In what ways does the book tackle typical definitions of boys and girls, men and women? Did it change your view of gender and identity as you read?
4. When Rosie first takes Poppy on playdates with other girls, the moms begin telling her how brave she is. “Rosie appreciated the support but wasn’t sure parenting ever really qualified as brave—or maybe it always did—because it’s not like you had a choice.” How are each of the characters brave? Discuss how (or if) parenting requires acts of bravery.

5. When Claude begins to voice his love of dresses, Rosie tells us, “Didn’t you know then, the doctors said later? Weren’t you listening?” Do you think our expectations of people, such as Rosie and Penn’s expectations of Claude, get in the way of us actually listening to them? Knowing them?
6. After Jane Doe’s trauma, Rosie thinks, “Head colds should be tolerated. Children should be celebrated.” What is the difference between tolerance and acceptance? Acceptance and celebration? Discuss how language, down to the pronouns we use, affects the way we interact with people different from ourselves.
7. When Rosie feels guilt for forcing Roo to move, Carmelo tells her, “Parents choose one kid over another all the time.” Do you agree with this statement? How about Rosie’s earlier conclusion that “of course you could uproot a whole family of seven for the needs of just one of them because that’s what family means”?
8. “They never planned to keep Claude a secret. It was an accident. It was an accident plus opportunity plus special circumstances.” Do you think Penn and Rosie are hypocrites for keeping Poppy’s secret, and expecting the rest of the family to do the same? Are they truly to blame, or was the secret forced on all of them?
9. After Poppy’s secret is revealed, Rosie and Penn have an argument about how to move forward. Penn says, “As parents, we make a thousand decisions a year with life altering impact whose implications our kids couldn’t possibly get their heads around. That’s our job. That’s what parenting is.” Rosie counters with, “She’s got to be lost for a bit, and she can’t be lost if we’re leading her out of the woods.” Where do you fall in this argument?
10. When Rosie and Penn discuss what course Poppy should take before puberty, Rosie says: “When a little girl wants to wear jeans and play soccer, her parents are thrilled, but when a little boy wants to wear a dress and play dolls, his parents send him to therapy and enroll him in a study.” Are young boys more constrained by gender stereotypes than young girls? Does the weight of gendered expectations shift from one gender to another as we grow up? If so, when? Consider what Rosie says just a few pages later: “You think Poppy would be the only woman to hate the way she looks? All women hate the way they look.”
11. When Rosie speaks to Mr. Tongo after Poppy is outed, he tells her: “For you, Poppy with a penis isn’t any more or less variant than any of your other kids’ wonderful quirks, and you love them all no matter what, and you just wake every day and raise them up. But that doesn’t help Poppy live anywhere in the world besides your house. No wonder she won’t leave her bedroom.” Did Rosie and Penn contribute to Poppy’s identity crisis by sheltering her from judgment?
12. In what ways are we as a society trapped in gender stereotypes? Do we make children less free by assigning them a label, and things to go with that label, so early in life? Discuss the differences in freedom experienced by Americans and Thai people as shown in the novel.
13. Discuss the ways in which Rosie and Claude discover both their immense privilege and their forced conformity when they get to know Thai culture and people.
14. In the penultimate, fairy tale chapter, the witch tells Grumwald that he must share his story, that “story is the best magic there is.” What is the importance of sharing stories? Do secrets have their place as well, or do you agree that “secrets make everyone alone”?

15. Think about the standard fairy tale structure—in what ways is this novel a fairy tale? Is it the tale of Penn and Rosie, or Poppy? Their family? Or do you consider it another kind of story altogether?
16. When Penn decides to box up the family photos after their move, he does so because “Poppy’s childhood did matter, and so did Claude’s, but Penn bubble wrapped them all back up anyway until he could find a way to tell this story.” With the publication of *The Adventures of Grumwald and Princess Stephanie*, does he succeed in telling their family story? What do you think of his choice to make their story public?
17. When comforting Poppy, Ben says, “Fitting in and being normal doesn’t exist.” How does the novel continuously challenge the idea of “normal”?

- <http://images.macmillan.com/folio-assets/rgg-guides/9781250088550RGG.pdf>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Rosie and Penn Walsh-Adams and their five sons live in a sprawling farmhouse full of chaos, love, and fairy tales. One summer, youngest son Claude begins to wear dresses and bikinis around the house. Rosie and Penn encourage Claude to be himself, and he decides he would be more comfortable as Poppy. While Poppy's brothers and parents accept her, they also all worry about the world she faces. The family deals with fallout from friends and teachers who struggle to understand a nonbinary child. Though their city is generally accepting, Rosie wants to move the family to somewhere they can all feel safe. The family moves to Seattle and soon confronts new challenges. They acknowledge that Poppy is their daughter's true identity, so is there any need to tell her new friends that she used to be Claude? The novel follows family members individually as they struggle with their own secrets and histories. Inspired by her own daughter's transition, Frankel tells Poppy's story with compassion and humor.--Chanoux, Laura Copyright 2016 Booklist

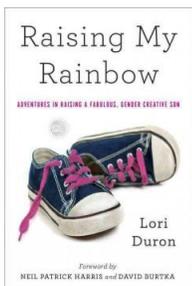
Publisher’s Weekly

Frankel's third novel is about the large, rambunctious Walsh-Adams family. While Penn writes his "DN" (damn novel) and spins fractured fairy tales from the family's ramshackle farmhouse in Madison, Wis., Rosie works as an emergency physician. Four sons have made the happily married couple exhausted and wanting a daughter; alas, their fifth is another boy. Extraordinarily verbal little Claude is quirky and clever, traits that run in the family, and at age three says, "I want to be a girl." Claude is the focus, but Frankel captures the older brothers' boyish grossness. She also fleshes out his two eldest brothers, who worry about Claude's safety when Rosie and Penn agree that Claude can be Poppy at school. But coming out further isolates this unique child. Encouragement from a therapist and an accepting grandma can go just so far; Poppy only blossoms after the Walsh-Adamses move to progressive Seattle and keep her trans status private, although what is good for Poppy is increasingly difficult on her brothers. The story takes a darker turn when she is outed; Rosie and her youngest must find their footing while Penn stays at home with the other kids. Frankel's (The Atlas of Love) slightly askew voice, exemplified by Rosie and Penn's nontraditional gender roles, keeps the narrative sharp and surprising. This is a wonderfully contradictory story—heartwarming and generous, yet written with a wry sensibility. Agent: Molly Friedrich, Friedrich Literary Agency. (Jan.) © Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

Library Journal

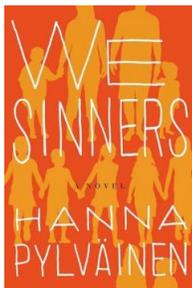
Rosie is a busy ER doctor; her husband, Penn, is a writer and stay-at-home father to their four sons. They welcome a fifth son to their boisterous family, and when Claude is three, he starts to wear dresses and says he wants to be a girl. Although his parents and older brothers unconditionally love and support the little one, now called Poppy, troubles arise in the wider world, even in their famously liberal hometown of Madison, WI, and later in Seattle, where they move when Poppy is ten. Then Rosie takes the unhappy and troubled child with her when she volunteers for a stint at a desperately poor clinic in the jungles of Thailand, which turns out to be a life-changing experience for them. In a letter to her readers, Frankel (*The Atlas of Love*; *Goodbye for Now*) explains that her own second-grader, born male, now identifies as a girl, so she writes her fictional story with some personal experience. VERDICT This novel offers a timely and thoughtful look at the life of a transgender child. It is also a touching and sympathetic account that is brimming with life and hard to put down.-Leslie -Patterson, Rehoboth, MA © Copyright 2017. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.

READALIKES



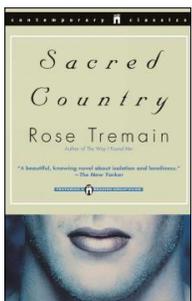
***Raising My Rainbow* by Lori Duron**

Discusses the author's experiences raising an effeminate son who may be gay.



***We Sinners* by Hanna Pylvainen**

Describes a large family in modern-day Michigan who belong to a church that doesn't permit drinking, dancing, or television and discusses their individual reactions when two siblings leave the faith for the temptations of modern culture.



***Sacred Country* by Rose Tremain**

Certain that she is really a male trapped in a female's body, Mary Ward pursues this elusive identity, much to the consternation of her mother, her brother, and a neighbor's son.