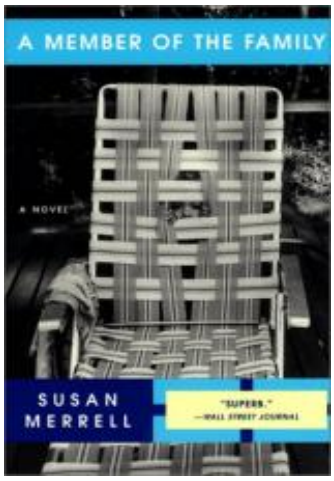
A Member of the Family

by Susan Merrell



About the Book

Chris and Deborah Latham seem to have a perfect life: a happy marriage; a picturesque Long Island home; a beautiful young daughter; and Michael, the Romanian orphan they adopted when he was eighteen months old. But Michael, now five, becomes more violent and emotionally disturbed each day, and his behavior not only isolates other children and parents but it soon threatens to tear apart the Latham family. Chris and Deborah must ponder the unthinkable: giving Michael back. In a stunning literary work that examines the issues of adoption, abuse, and unconditional love, Susan Merrell has given us a provocative novel to ponder long after the last page is turned.

Discussion Guide

1. When Chris and Deborah Latham adopt Michael, they try numerous methods to help acclimate Michael to their family. Do they do everything they possibly can to help Michael? Do you think they were truly committed to helping Michael since they never follow through on the expert's recommendations?

2. While Chris Latham grows up, Sag Harbor changes from a small fishing community to a booming resort town. Is acceptance of adoption less likely to occur in a small town or a bustling city? What role does the outside community play in the acceptance of Michael into the Latham family?

3. Chris Latham, Des Dunn, and Michael Latham are all orphans taken in by other families. What personality traits in each character led to their success or lack of success as a member of society?

4. Martin and Alice Dunn's adoption of Des ultimately leads to extraordinary tragedy. How does this parallel story line of adoption compare to the Lathams and Michael?

5. Chris carries a terrible secret within him that he has never told his wife. How does that secret ultimately affect their

marriage? How does the revelation of the truth behind the secret affect their decision about Michael?

6. Viorica, the Latham's adoption coordinator and their beloved babysitter's sister, never accepts that Michael is a difficult child. Any problems with him are because of the Lathams' American assumption that everything in life is easy. Is she right about Chris and Deborah? What role does Viorica play in the Lathams' decisions about Michael?

Author Bio

Susan Merrell has written for Self, New Woman, Parenting, and Parents. She is the author of The Accidental Bond: How Sibling Connections Influence Adult Relationships. She lives in Sag Harbor, New York with her husband Jim, an architect, and her children Maggie and Jake. A Member of the Family is her first work of fiction.

Critical Praise

"A heartbreaking story about an adoption gone very wrong. A Member of the Family is a nuanced exploration of what it means to be just that. "

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Publication Date: December 17, 2012
Paperback: 256 pages
Publisher: Harper Collins
ISBN-10: 0060930098
ISBN-13: 9780060930097