# Family Family

by Laurie Frankel

## About the Book

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

India Allwood grew up wanting to be an actor. Armed with a stack of index cards (for research/line memorization/make-shift confetti), she goes from awkward 16-year-old to Broadway ingenue to TV superhero.

Her new movie is a prestige picture about adoption, but its spin is the same old tired story of tragedy. India is an adoptive mom in real life, though. She wants everyone to know there?s more to her family than pain and regret. So she does something you should never do --- she tells a journalist the truth: it?s a bad movie.

Soon she?s at the center of a media storm, battling accusations from the press and the paparazzi, from protesters on the right and advocates on the left. Her twin 10-year-olds know they need help --- and who better to call than family? But that?s where it gets really messy because India is not just an adoptive mother.

The one thing she knows for sure is what makes a family isn?t blood. And it isn?t love. No matter how they?re formed, the truth about family is this: it's complicated.

## Discussion Guide

**Please note: In order to provide book clubs with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal aspects of the story, as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading FAMILY FAMILY, you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.**

**1.** What books/movies/TV shows come to mind when you think about adoption? Or what have you read or watched recently that maybe wasn?t about adoption but featured it as a plot point or character device? What sorts of messages

about adoption do they convey? What sorts of messages surrounding adoption do you get from the news, social media, friends and family? How does FAMILY FAMILY fit in with or challenge these messages?

**2.** Fig and Jack make lists of scary things so they can rename them and make them their own --- thus the term ?dwebs? (dweebs on the web). Why does their therapist recommend this approach to processing the trauma of their past and the challenges of their present? How does language bestow power? Do you have words or terms that are unique to your family or close relationships?

**3.** Robbie and India have a supportive, loving relationship, even though they?re so young. What effect does this relationship have on India going forward, even after they break up? What about on Robbie?

**4.** FAMILY FAMILY is told across two different timelines. How does seeing India?s past unfold contribute to your understanding of her decisions as an adult? How does her childhood and adolescence compare to that of any of her children?

**5.** What role do index cards play in India?s life? How much of her success is raw talent, and how much is grit or determination or hard work, and how much is shrewd compromise?

**6.** How does India?s relationship with Davis differ from her relationship with Robbie? When faced with unexpected pregnancies, how do Davis and Robbie respond differently, both immediately and years later?

**7.** On page 203, India observes that a dream job is still a job. How are India?s lifelong dreams realized, and how are they not? When she gets what she wants, is it different than she imagined? What does she give up along the way, and why? What are your own dream jobs? How do you find or imagine them to be dreamy and how job-like?

**8.** What double standards and biases does India face as a woman trying to make art? How does this change (and not) throughout her life?

**9.** Over the course of this story, India manages to anger adoptees, adoption advocates, abortion advocates, anti-abortion advocates, social media users, the press, her fans and her own bosses. Whose ire seems reasonable and whose decidedly not? What effect do all these voices have on her life, family and career? What effect do similar voices have on your life (or is it different when you don?t play a superhero Viking on TV)?

**10.** Fig and Jack have very different responses to their trauma. How does each deal --- and deal differently --- with what happened to them and with the world they grow up in? How does each change over the course of the story as their family expands again?

**11.** Did the existence of Lewis surprise you? Why or why not?

**12.** The kids all have very different experiences with and ideas about being adopted. They have different feelings about their relationships with their birth families as well. How do they compare and contrast, and to what do you attribute their different takes? How do other issues of identity besides adoption --- for instance, race, sexuality, trauma --- affect their different experiences? If you have adoption in your own family, how do your experiences, feelings and ideas compare and contrast with the ones in this book?

**13.** Were you surprised that India decided to become an adoptive parent herself? Did you assume Fig and Jack were adopted from the beginning, or did the revelation come later? How is the adoption she undertakes to become a parent different from the ones she undertook in high school and college? What does she have in common with and how does she differ from Jack and Fig?s birth mother?

**14.** On page 262, India?s mother tells her: ?This is what parenting is, India. Solving impossible-to-solve problems while also experiencing deep crises of faith while also being kind of annoyed while also never getting enough rest. These problems only ever go away by changing into different equally impossible problems. This is how it always is for all parents, no matter how you came by your children.? How is India?s experience of motherhood the same and different from her mother?s? From Camille?s? How do her experiences with adoption, both placing children for adoption and becoming an adoptive parent herself, influence her relationship to motherhood?

**15.** Fig, Jack, Bex and Lewis don?t grow up together (or sometimes even know about one another). Personality-wise and circumstantially, they?re very different. In what ways do they behave like siblings anyway? How do the adults --- India, Robbie, Davis, Camille and the Andrews --- behave like family as well?

**16.** On page 356, Bex realizes: ?India and Robbie were her parents, not in every way, but in some ways. But in some ways, she was also theirs. They had given her life, but she had given them lives, these lives, and not only them but a lot of other people too.? How has Bex shaped India?s and Robbie?s lives even though they haven?t seen her in 16 years? How do children shape their parents? lives as much as the other way around?

**17.** On page 359, India considers: ??It?s good to know love, and it?s good to know love is not enough. It?s good to know love, and it?s good to know love is not an obligation.? She remembered when Jack and Fig first came home, her mother?s point that it was never so simple as ?Love makes a family,? that it was only that easy on throw pillows and greeting cards. Love was a laudable goal, and you wouldn?t want a family without it, though plenty of people had one, bio, adopted, or otherwise. But love did not preclude strife. It did not erase sorrows. It did not detangle complication. In the case of families, uncomplicated wasn?t really the goal anyway.? If what makes a family isn?t biology and isn?t love, what is it? Given that family is so diverse and so complicated and that familial relationships are so often fraught, how might we expand the definition of family to be more accurate, inclusive and encompassing?

**18.** At the end, are you rooting for India to end up with Davis or Robbie, or neither?

**19.** What do you hope for the future of this family and these characters? How do you think their coming together will change their lives moving forward?

**20.** Flip back to the beginning and consider the epigraph. What does it mean, and why does the book begin this way? Who learns and grows, and how, over the course of this novel?

**21.** Are there people in your life who *are* family even though they?re not technically related? Are there people in your life to whom you are technically related but with whom you are not close? What are your experiences with ?family? that don?t fall into the traditional family box?

## Author Bio

Laurie Frankel is the *New York Times* bestselling, award-winning author of the novels ENORMOUS WINGS, FAMILY FAMILY, ONE TWO THREE, GOODBYE FOR NOW, THE ATLAS OF LOVE and the Reese?s Book Club Pick THIS IS HOW IT ALWAYS IS. Frankel lives in Seattle with her husband, daughter and border collie.

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