



The Way Back to Happiness

Elizabeth Bass

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No one could blame Bev Putterman for becoming estranged from her sister. No one but Bev, anyway. Growing up, Diana was difficult and selfish yet always their mother's favorite. And then came the betrayal that took away the future Bev dreamed of.

Yet if Diana caused problems while alive, her death leaves Bev in a maelstrom of remorse. She longs to provide a stable home for Diana's fourteen-year-old daughter, Alabama. But between her commitment-phobic boyfriend and her precarious teaching position, Bev's life is already in upheaval without an unruly teenager around.

All Alabama knows about Aunt Bev is what her mother told her--and none of it was good. They clash about money, clothes, boys, and especially about Diana. In desperation, Alabama sets out to find her late father's family. Instead she learns of the complicated history between her mother and aunt, how guilt can shut down a life--and most important, how love and forgiveness can open a door and make us whole again. . .

The Way Back to Happiness Details

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From Reader Review *The Way Back to Happiness* for online ebook

Joyce says

I have read & enjoyed every one of Elizabeth Bass' books. She writes her characters with such depth that you feel you know them. *The Way Back to Happiness* has a teenage protagonist, which I do not usually enjoy reading about, but the storyline was such that it grabbed me right away & I could not put the book down. Her writing reminds me a bit of Kristan Hannah or Eileen Goudge.

I look forward to her next book with eager anticipation.

Aditi says

Dr. Steve Maraboli, who is a life-changing Speaker, bestselling Author, and Behavioral Science Academic in the US, has quoted remarkably, about how people should let go of certain grudges in their life, as;

“The truth is, unless you let go, unless you forgive yourself, unless you forgive the situation, unless you realize that the situation is over, you cannot move forward.”

Elizabeth Bass, an American author, has marvelously crafted a profound tale about love, loss, and *forgiveness*, in her book called, *The Way Back to Happiness*. Although it is a fiction, but still the story sounded quite realistic to me, and tells me do we ever follow the noble words of what Dr. Steve Maraboli has said about forgiveness? Do we ever let go of our past? And most important, we find it hard to forgive ourselves in the first place, because we are masters in feeling ourselves guilty for our whole lifetime. Elizabeth Bass, the author, has skillfully explained the road to forgiveness, which is happened to be so less traveled by us.

I can't thank the author, Elizabeth Bass, enough for sending me over a copy of her book, in return for an honest review.

Alabama is a fourteen year old girl, who in her so short life-time has already experienced so many dreadful things, starting off with her mother's death in an accident, leaving her almost orphaned. Her granny, Gladdie, who is as old as the hills, living in *The Villa*- an old-age home, takes her in for a few days, against the wishes of the *The Villa's* manager. But Alabama's blissful days come to an end, when she gets adopted by her only aunt, Bev, whom her mother used to hate all her life, but she had no idea behind the reason of her mother's hate, along with her mother, Alabama, too hated her to death. But soon Alabama is seen living in a small town in Texas, called New Sparta, and is getting admitted to the local school, where her aunt happen to be a teacher. Eventually Alabama starts to look for her late father's side's family, in hope of finding a benefactress. Bev is terrified that Alabama is starting to bring back all those haunting and resentful and painful traumas of the past one more time. Will Alabama be successful in getting away from her aunt? Will Bev learn to forgive herself as well as her sister? Read it to find Alabama and Bev's struggle to find a piece of happiness in their not-so-perfect life.

First of all, the book's name should have been something else, because there was only one page about happiness, rest of the pages reflect way too much pain, that in the beginning I started to hate Alabama with all my heart, since she used to be so rude to Bev, then I started loving her. I cried for Bev then for Alabama

and lastly for Diana, the mother of Alabama. The characters are so very convincing and are easy to relate to, who doesn't face such characters in their everyday life, and I will actually say that Bev, Alabama and Diana are very similar to our characters; they happen to represent our pain, grief and loss. I loved how the author has narrated her tale with so vividness and eloquence, and then at some moments you'll lose yourself completely in the emotions of these characters. It is quite evident that Elizabeth Bass is one true talented writer starting from her style of writing to representing the dialogues to unfolding the characters slowly and layer-by-layer. I must tell you like Alabama, you too are left in the dark about Bev and Dian's past incident, and the anticipation held me like a noose around my neck. The author is smart enough to keep her secrets under wrap for a very long time and also she didn't leave any clues for the readers. There is also bit of chemistry among so many characters that you'll find very striking, staring off between Alabama and her best friend, Stuart, who is a very smart and talented young boy, who used to see through the things and was a victim of bullying in his school, then there is, Bev and her co-teacher, Glen.

Do read this story in your gloomy little afternoon with a box of tissues and with a mug of hot tea and feel the Texas flair in the author's words!!

Kessa says

E. Bass has created a unique, uplifting story-line and characters so real that you'd like to give them a hug. Bass is spectacular at leading you, ever so slightly, to one conclusion and then surprising you with another. Alabama and her Aunt Bev have years of catching up to do and are in a struggle with family loyalty versus old wounds of the past.

I highly recommend this book. Perfect summer reading.

Fiona says

No one could blame Bev Putterman for becoming estranged from her sister. No one but Bev, anyway. Growing up, Diana was difficult and selfish yet always their mother's favorite. And then came the betrayal that took away the future Bev dreamed of.

Yet if Diana caused problems while alive, her death leaves Bev in a maelstrom of remorse. She longs to provide a stable home for Diana's fourteen-year-old daughter, Alabama. But between her commitment-phobic boyfriend and her precarious teaching position, Bev's life is already in upheaval without an unruly teenager around.

All Alabama knows about Aunt Bev is what her mother told her--and none of it was good. They clash about money, clothes, boys, and especially about Diana. In desperation, Alabama sets out to find her late father's family. Instead she learns of the complicated history between her mother and aunt, how guilt can shut down a life--and most important, how love and forgiveness can open a door and make us whole again.

Diane says

I won this as a First Reads book and thoroughly enjoyed this book. Two estranged sisters and too late to fix but there's a chance for Bev to help her niece, Alabama, after the death of her mother. But, Alabama was

raised not hearing anything good about her aunt. A coming of age story for the teenager and also for her aunt. A very good story about a small town and family trying to do the best they can with the circumstances they've been dealt.

Liz Fichera says

Touching, genuine and heart-warming. I was drawn into the story from the first pages. The Putterman family was perfectly imperfect.

Amy says

The book was just ok. If I asked myself if I would read it again, the answer would probably be no. I really didn't become invested (or like) any of the characters. Even though the author tried to have Bev grow a spine by the end of the book, it never rang true. I didn't care for Diana, the selfish, alcoholic sister. Her "love" with Tom didn't seem real. Alabama's friendship with Stuart was the only redeeming quality of the book. The reference to 80's songs seemed overdone to set the stage for 1985. It was a nice flashback to think of Home Ec class though.

Kathy says

Wish there was a 3 1/2 star because this was an enjoyable book but not a "I can't put it down" kind of book. *The Way Back to Happiness* is an easy, delightful read about sassy, street-smart, orphaned Alabama, who is forced to live with her somewhat nerdy, Aunt Bev. Throughout the book, Alabama tries to piece together the missing pieces of her life with the help of her friend, Stuart, and adapt to a new way of life. A sequel to this book would be great and I will definitely look for other books written by Elizabeth Bass.

I received a free copy of *The Way Back to Happiness* through Goodreads Firstreads.

Mary Ripley says

Love betrayal by the sister creates old maid but death of sister allows full life to return to the betrayed sister. Adolescent novel with interesting twists

Kerri says

I received this as an ebook from Net Galley in return for an honest review.

Summary

Fourteen year old Alabama Puttman has been raised all alone, haphazardly and lovingly, by her mother

Diana. When she returns from her one and only ever week at sleep away camp, Diana has been killed crossing the street, and Alabama finds herself in the care of her Aunt Bev, who hasn't spoken to Diana since Alabama was born. Alabama and Bev have a difficult time relating to each other. Over the course of the book, these two characters are going to have to find a way to live together, and just maybe be happy doing it.

My Review

I really enjoyed this book. I thought the author got the tone exactly right in the character of Alabama. Her angst, slightly warped sense of priorities, and rash actions, so show the mindset of a typical (not all) 14 year old girls. I felt the rocky relationship between Bev and Alabama was well established. Poor Bev, despite years teaching them, has absolutely no idea how to relate day in and day out to a teenager, though I am not sure anyone really does. I loved how Alabama grew up and mature as the story progressed. Also, those of us old enough to remember, will love all the references to the 80's! I would recommend this book, and look forward to reading more from this author. This was the first time I have EVER read an ebook-I borrowed my daughter's kindle.

Rating

4 out of 5

A fun, quick read!

This review was also posted on - <http://turnthepagereviews.com>

Linda says

I was fortunate to have won *The Way Back to Happiness* by Elizabeth Bass through a Goodreads Giveaway. This review consists of my unbiased, honest thoughts and opinions.

I enjoyed *The Way Back to Happiness*. It was engaging and there was a quirky charm to the story, sometimes a little too quirky. It was an easy and quick read, making this a good choice to bring along to the beach or while relaxing by the pool.

The novel was about the relationship, dysfunctional at best, between two sisters, Bev and Diana. Bev was the older, more reliable, steady sibling that could be counted on. She was a worrier and presented herself, at least at the beginning of the story, as an older, stodgier character than her actual age. Diana was the free-spirited, selfish and self-centered sister. However, Diana's love for her daughter, Alabama, was undeniable.

When the story began, Bev and Diana were estranged from one another. Diana, who had been down on her luck for some time had borrowed money from her mother to send Alabama for a week of summer camp. Before the week ends, Diana will be dead, and Alabama will be sent to live with the Aunt that her mother appeared to have despised.

There were several characters in the book that I loved. Stuart, Alabama's kind and only friend, being one of them, a boy who came from an ideal family, according to Alabama, and possessed confidence and cared little about what others thought of him. Gladdy, Bev's mom and Alabama's grandmother, was fiery and outspoken, and although I found her insensitive to Bev, I grew to like her, as well as unconventional Wink.

Bev was a very misunderstood character. Her intentions were always good, but very often they backfired. She tried to see all sides of a situation, and tried to do right by Alabama. Bev even stood up for those who couldn't or wouldn't stand up for themselves, despite jeopardizing her own job security and safety. Bev wanted to find a real romantic love. She didn't want to settle. As a result, she chose the wrong man and subsequently was left very lonely. As much as I came to respect Bev, it took a very long time to feel that way. Bev appeared old fashioned and outdated. She tried her hardest but it often missed the mark. But, I did come to like Bev, very much in fact. I only wish that she would have had more support from family and friends from the beginning. Bev picked herself up, time and time, again, but it was not easy for her, and often she was isolated and ridiculed. She deserved neither.

I would have rated this book with 3 1/2 stars if given the option.

Chelsey Wolford says

Bev Putterman never reconciled with her estranged sister before her death, and now Diana has left Alabama, her fourteen-year-old daughter in Bev's hands. Bev has enough on her plate already while trying to maintain her love life and hold down a teacher career, she feels that she has no place for an unruly teenager. However, Alabama goes to live with her Aunt Bev and only knows what she has heard her mother say. Alabama doesn't have a nice opinion of her Aunt Bev conjured up in her head, but Alabama soon learns what tore them apart and what could have made them whole again.

I wish this book would have had a bit more happiness, seeing as how it is part of the title. The tone was very dreary and although I understand why, I just wish I would have gained more of a positive reaction after reading it. I felt that Bass, the author, captured the emotions of a fourteen-year-old very well. Alabama displayed a lot of mixed emotions, angst, and of course some good pent up teenage attitude. I loved seeing Alabama mature and learn to make decisions and form opinions of her own, not based on what she knew from her mother.

I loved Bev's character. At first I was wondering which sister I wasn't going to care for, and I learned quickly that the sister I didn't care for was Diana. Her character was very destructive and only caused problems wherever she went. I did love watching their story develop in front of my eyes and Alabama's. Readers will be taken on a personal journey through Bev's and Diana's life as sisters. The theme of this book, in my opinion, was forgiveness. I felt a tear roll down my face at one point, and I really wish that I would have had more positive feelings towards the end of the book.

A copy of this book was provided to me by the publishers at Kensington in exchange for my honest review

Samantha March says

I received a copy of *The Way Back to Happiness* by Elizabeth Bass in exchange for an honest review.

I have also reviewed *Wherever Grace is Needed* from Elizabeth Bass and absolutely adored the book, so it was no surprise that it took me just about a day to get *The Way Back to Happiness* read. The characters she creates easily transports readers to their world, and won't let you back out until well after you've turned the last page. The relationships felt very realistic, especially the one between Bev and Alabama. There are a lot of tough situations in this story and I shed a few tears, but it was a wonderful read and one I recommend. I hope to read more from this author.

Artemiz says

The Way Back to Happiness by Elizabeth Bass is a family drama, and nostalgic look back into year 1985. It's a drama that involves three generations of women.

The story starts with Diana sending her daughter Alabama to a camp for a week, knowing full well that she will not see her again, because she has a plan. Her life has not been the easiest lately - she lost her job and no new prospect on a line - so she has decided, that the only possibility to offer Alabama the best life possible, is to remove herself from the picture. But it's not easy. At first she has to write a letter to the only person she should have written or called a long time ago, and apologies for the things that had driven them apart, no matter how angry she was, since at the end she was the one who was responsible for the things that had happened, so she writes to her sister Bev. Takes the letter to the mail. Tries to open the tablet bottle - when that does not happen, she starts to think, that maybe there is still chance, but she mailed the letter already, maybe she can still get it back ...

When Bev comes to take Alabama home from the camp, she know something is really wrong, since mom would never let aunt Bev take her anywhere, they hated each other and hadn't talked for years. She can not believe that her mom is gone. She should have listened her instinct and stopped the bus when mom sent her to camp, then her mom would still be alive and not dead in car accident. And now she had to go to live with her aunt in some small town? No way!

Bev is in shock. Her sister, who has been the pain of her existence, with her bad behavior, whit their mom always excusing her, whit Diana always getting her way, is dead and her daughter has to go to live with her, not that her life hasn't been already problematic lately, but it's not Alabama's fault. But then Alabama calls to her grandmother and of course she is invited to live with her in The Villa. Bev cant fight with them, so she lets them do what they want.

But The Villa does not allow guests to stay very long and school year is starting and grandmother is taken to a hospital, and Alabama has to go with her aunt. At first they act like two angry cats, both go to their corner and hiss, but then Alabama meets a local boy, who is her age and starts to get somewhat comfortable in her new school, but still, it's not easy to be a teachers niece.

When Bev introduced her boyfriend and Alabama, she was hoping they will become one big happy family, but her boyfriend is not interested about family with a teenager so they split. Her once boyfriend/co worker has not given up hope on Bev, even though the school principal's sister/school's assistant wants him for herself.

Alabama tries to find out, why her mom and her aunt had their problems, what was that One Big Thing that made them hate each other, especially when she find a bride dress in attic, and she know her aunt has not

been married, and why does her aunt has pictures of her father in her album or maybe it's her mom's album and Bev just has it, and why does her father's mother says all those nasty things about her mother?

All this reaches it's boiling point when Alabama goes to the school on Halloween wearing the wedding dress, Bev kills accidentally the school's mascot rabbit and the whole school gets covered with mean posters about Bev and the rabbit. So when the worst has happened, there is nowhere else to go, but down. When Alabama receives an invitation from her other grandmother to join them on Thanksgiving dinner, she has now idea, that this will be the moment, when all that has been kept secret will reveal itself.

This was an interesting story, bit depressing at the beginning but it gets better and better with every chapter.

Susan says

The Way Back to Happiness could have used a little more actual happiness. This story of a 14 year old orphaned teenager Alabama, and her spinster aunt Bev who takes her in after the sudden death of her mother, has its moments. Bass, who has written two other women's fiction novels (as well as several romance novels as Liz Ireland), obviously has a soft spot for the relationships between sisters and among women in general. She does a good job at capturing these complex dynamics, but her plotting is a little bit off. There is too much angst and conflict between Alabama and Bev, and a last-minute sudden resolution in the final pages that is less than satisfying (and the decision to tell but not show a key climactic scene is puzzling). The book's problems are partly mitigated thanks to the authentic 1980s setting (complete with Sony Walkmen and Culture Club references), Alabama's unabashed gay best friend (a proto-Kurt Hummel from Glee), and the lively elderly gentleman who courts Alabama's grandmother. Recommended for those who enjoy the novels of Marisa de los Santos, Juliette Fay, Karen White and Cathy Lamb.
