



# Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic

*Alison Bechdel*

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## **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic** Alison Bechdel

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## **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic Details**

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# From Reader Review **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic** for online ebook

## Nat says

This graphic memoir has been on my to read list for what feels like ages, so I felt entirely satisfied when I completed reading it.

In this graphic memoir, Alison Bechdel charts her fraught relationship with her late father.

Distant and exacting, Bruce Bechdel was an English teacher and director of the town funeral home, which Alison and her family referred to as the Fun Home. It was not until college that Alison, who had recently come out as a lesbian, discovered that her father was also gay. A few weeks after this revelation, he was dead, leaving a legacy of mystery for his daughter to resolve.

In the end, I was compelled to pick up **Fun Home** completely on a whim. Though I flew through it, a lot of the literary references went shamefully over my head. And considering that it was such a big focus here, I was left out of the loop a lot, which ended up lowering my enjoyment while reading.

Also, I was made entirely uncomfortable with her father and his violent tendencies towards his family, his preying on young boys, and his overall behavior towards the naïve.

I did like how something that Alison Bechdel mentioned in the first half would then get completed in the second half. And I learned quite a lot about funerals, which I was not expecting going into this. Also, Bechdel taking the time to discuss her OCD was crucial and enlightening.

On that note, here are some other parts I enjoyed:

When their grandma told the tale of how Bruce Bechdel got stuck in the mud, I was just as compelled as the kids. I wanted to know more.

I LOVE hearing about dreams.

Ever since I read the above exchange, it's been on my mind constantly.

I'm curious to see what her next graphic novel **Are You My Mother?** entails.

*\*Note: I'm an Amazon Affiliate. If you're interested in buying **Fun Home**, just click on the image below to go through my link. I'll make a small commission!\**

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### **Fabian says**

Works doubly as a hugely terrific autobiography & a megaengaging graphic novel. In FUN HOME, there is a tremendous longing to merge both of these Arts. The intent is always to make print as compelling as the pictorials they are made to convey. Astute, cheeky & enthralling, it brings together disparate themes like "Wind in the Willows" and "The Importance of Being Earnest" and "Catcher in the Rye", as well as A Chorus Line & Joyce's Ulysses: pretty much a choose-your-own-literature type adventure that possibly every single reader of this flawless book could relate to.

Ten dollars to you if the last page/frame of this doesn't make you B.O.L.\*

PS: We are watching the musical this January! Oh blessed New Year!

\*(Bawl Out Loud)

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### **Emily says**

Having never felt much inclination toward the graphic novel genre, I accepted a copy of Fun Home by Alison Bechdel on loan only because a coworker promised that I could finish it in one hour and forty minutes--almost precisely the amount of time it would take to travel from the office to my home in Connecticut, where I had plans to spend the weekend.

One hour and fifty-five minutes later, when my mom pulled in her mini-van, I was close to the end, but not there yet. I'm a slow reader. But Fun Home is also a book that demands patient, meticulous study. I examined every illustration, looking for the visual details that Alison, a cartoonist, has tucked in, here and there. Hidden like easter eggs, there are amusing details meant to be discovered on particularly grim pages. Alison can also make the most simplistic details - Road Runner on the TV; period cars; recurring

appearances of the Sun Beam Bread logo - realistic, melancholy, and heartrending all at once.

And the story itself, the misery and the humor of the characters, the events, and the time period, must be thoughtfully digested. The book is divided into seven chapters, each based on a different theme in the author's childhood and young adult life. Each one on its own could be a personal essay about overcoming an unusual hardship, but the episodes are tied together by recurring moments - the scene in which Alison learns her father's deepest darkest secret over the phone; the stack of literature on homosexuality that grows and grows on her nightstand in college; her father writing letters to her mother from his bunk during the war - and references to classic literature that are carefully, artfully implemented and never daunting.

As a memoir, *Fun Home* is beautifully arranged and as honest and unapologetic as they come. Alison writes and draws as if she is still putting together the pieces as she does so, and closes the book with the impression that the story is not over. Which of course, it is not, since the author, her two brothers, and their mother, all survive the father they never had and then lost. *Fun Home* illustrates the fact that we never truly escape the legacies of our parents and never completely outgrow our childhood experiences. Alison wrote a note in the Advance Readers Edition, which I read, in which she notes: "the actual documentary truth [as recorded in diaries, letters, clippings and photographs from her childhood] was almost always richer and more surprising than the way [she] had remembered a particular event." In *Fun Home*, Alison does not just explore the far reaches of her memory. She revisits it as if seeing it all happen again, literally, graphically, for the first time.

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## **Meg Powers says**

Reading *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* put me in the same irritated and impatient mood experienced when reading Toni Morrison's *The Song of Solomon* in high school: both books feel like major wank-offs to the writers' cumulative reading endeavors. To put it in less crude terms, both books overflow with self-conscious references to classic literature (both use *The Odyssey* in a major way). However, this is not a review of *The Song of Solomon*, so I suppose I will set aside that grudge for now.

This is how I feel: any person, no matter how mediocre his/her life might be perceived, can be made into a great story. The key to this is good writing, and although Bechdel's writing is ORNAMENTAL, it's not engaging. She doesn't make me care about her, and I care only a little bit about her dad, whom the book focuses on. The constant literary references (Joyce, Camus, Proust, Wilde, etc) do not impress me and they do not enrich the story she is telling. Bechdel continuously draws parallels to anything and everything literary. Comparing the map in *The Wind in the Willows* to a map of her local terrain is one thing; comparing her first act of performing cunnilingus to entering Homer's cave of Polyphemus made me groan out loud. Bechdel also uses dictionary definitions as an ongoing motif, a cliché that ALWAYS annoys me ("orgasm: or-gaz-um- "what is an orgasm? what does it mean in the context of my own life? Let's examine this word and blah blah blah blah" <---bitchy paraphrasing).

I will say I have never been a fan of *Dykes to Watch Out For* or Alison Bechdel's drawing style in general (and my enjoyment of a comic, as is typical, is largely derived from the visual component), so it is unfair to complain about that here; it's a matter of taste. However, if the facial expressions were rendered differently, and if Bechdel shook out the masturbatory references and word definitions, she might have sold me.

But no.

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## Patrick says

I've known about Bechdel for some time, but I've never gotten around to reading any of her work.

Odds are, you know about her too, even if you're not aware of it. She's the one that invented the appropriately-named Bechdel Test for movies.

If you don't know about the test, it bears talking about. It's almost like a checklist:

1. Does the movie have two female characters in it?
2. Do the two female characters have at least one conversation?
3. Does at least one of their conversations concentrate on something other than a man?

If the answer to any of these is "no" you fail the test.

To me, the truly interesting thing about this test isn't how many movies utterly fail it. It's that when you're first exposed to the test, you're forced to confront how fucked up the gender bias in almost all media is.

Anyway, I picked up the comic because I was curious what her writing was like. And because it's odd to see a graphic novel that's won so much literary attention. (This book has a \*ton\* of awards and accolades.)

Did I like it? Yes.

It's cleverly written. Very earnest and heartfelt. It's fascinating.

Did I \*lurve\* it? No.

I admire the craft in the book. It was emotionally engaging without being maudlin. It was artfully constructed. It shared an experience with me that I never would have gained anywhere else. I'd happily recommend it to a lot of my friends.

But for me, that's where it stops. Enjoyment and admiration of the craft. This book is a wonderful example of: "Great books that are not perfectly targeted for me."

Now don't get me wrong. It was fascinating. Books I whole-heartedly enjoy and admire are still in the top 5%. But what really rings the bell that hangs in your heart is mostly a matter of flavor, and this one wasn't quite suited to me.

Is it worth your time? Yes.

That said, you're more likely to enjoy it if you're a recovering English major. Or if you're a fan of queer culture, autobiographical fiction, or non-superhero graphic novels.

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## F says

So dark & so honest. I loved it.

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## Diane says

Here's something I don't get to say very often: I liked the Broadway musical better than the comic.

I decided to reread this after seeing the excellent show, and I had a sharper critique of the book this second time around. I first read *Fun Home* about six years ago after seeing it on some banned book lists, and, reading rebel that I am, I requested it from the library to see what all the fuss was about. It's a "tragicomic" memoir of Bechdel's childhood and her attempt to better understand her father, a closeted gay man who purportedly committed suicide when Bechdel was in college. Coincidentally, Bechdel had told her parents she was a lesbian a few months before her father was hit by a truck and killed.

With my father's death following so hard on the heels of this doleful coming-out party, I could not help but assume a cause-and-effect relationship.

If I had not felt compelled to share my little sexual discovery, perhaps the semi would have passed without incident four months later.

Why had I told them? I hadn't even had sex with anyone yet. Conversely, my father had been having sex with men for years and not telling anyone.

In a way, you could say that my father's end was my beginning. Or more precisely, that the end of his life coincided with the beginning of my truth.

This is a sad tale, and I can understand why Bechdel tried so hard to make sense of her childhood. I appreciated her frankness and her stories are memorable, but my criticism is with the writing, which sometimes comes across as stilted. For example, one of the few times she discussed homosexuality with her father before he died, she gave it this awkward caption:

I would see my father one more time after this. But we would never discuss our shared predilection again.

In another scene, she's discussing her father's passion for home renovation and decorating:

He was an alchemist of appearance, a savant of surface, a daedalus of decor.

Sometimes it seemed as if Bechdel was trying to score an A on a vocabulary test rather than write in a natural voice. Additionally, parts of the book felt like a term paper in Lit class. Bechdel's father was an English teacher and the two shared a love of reading. She includes a lot of literary references in *Fun Home*, and she went through his books and looked at sentences he had underlined. Writers mentioned include F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, Henry James and William Shakespeare, with Bechdel analyzing the plots and characters of their various works and comparing them to her parents. It became a bit self-indulgent and occasionally dragged down the memoir.

I liked most of the artwork, but there were some confusing panels, mostly related to the letters and diary entries included in the book. Bechdel went through an obsessive-compulsive phase as a child, and her behavior included marking up her journal with symbols and writing in code. The book has recreations of those scribbles, in addition to letters in her father's cursive handwriting that are also difficult to read.

Those are my criticisms, but overall I did like this book. You can tell Bechdel is really smart and introspective, and I appreciated her attempt at analyzing the family dynamics. Regarding the controversy over censorship, there are a few drawings of naked women and sexual acts, but I don't find that offensive. It irritates me when forthright books about sexuality get banned, and yet our society seems OK by all the extreme violence in our media and entertainment. (Another heartfelt comic that ended up on banned book lists because of a few sexual drawings was Craig Thompson's *Blankets*.)

In the end, this is an intelligent book about a dysfunctional family and a woman's coming of age. While I didn't love the author's writing style, it's still a story worth telling.

And if you get the chance, go see the musical "Fun Home." It's fantastic and a really clever adaptation of the book.

### **Meaningful Quotes**

"Sometimes, when things were going well, I think my father actually enjoyed having a family. Or at least, the air of authenticity we lent to his exhibit. A sort of still life with children."

"This embarrassment on my part was a tiny scale model of my father's more fully developed self-loathing. His shame inhabited our house as pervasively and invisibly as the aromatic musk of aging mahogany."

"His bursts of kindness were as incandescent as his tantrums were dark."

"Although I'm good at enumerating my father's flaws, it's hard for me to sustain much anger at him. I expect this is partly because he's dead, and partly because the bar is lower for fathers than for mothers."

"In my earliest memories, dad is a lowering, malevolent presence. His arrival home from work cast a cold pall on the peaceable kingdom where Mom, Christian and I spent our days."

"Dad's death was not a new catastrophe but an old one that had been unfolding very slowly for a long time."

"It was a vicious circle. The more gratification we found in our own geniuses, the more isolated we grew. Our home was like an artists' colony. We ate together, but otherwise were absorbed in our separate pursuits. And in this isolation, our creativity took on an aspect of compulsion."

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## Sara says

I went out and bought this book immediately after hearing a paper on it at a recent conference. The paper had to do with narrative strategies that children use for uncovering and witnessing their parents' trauma -- in this book, the narrator Allison tries to piece together her father's life into a narrative she wants to read as that of a closeted gay man. In the narrator's logic, her coming out of the closet prompted her father's suicide four months later. After a life of secret affairs and seduction of teenage boys, her father -- according to her narrative -- couldn't face having missed out on -- or chasing after -- the freedom that was now available to her as a post-Stonewall gay woman.

But it's not clear how much credit we are to give to this narration, and how much the point of the narrative is to expose its own tenuousness. Her father's death was ruled an accident -- he stumbled into oncoming traffic while clearing a lot. Even if the death was willed, the narrator herself provides plenty of evidence for other constructions of what could have caused the suicide. A man whose rage for order verged on Mommy Dearest, the father clearly suffered from a mood disorder, narcissism, and even a tendency to kleptomania -- none of which are endemic to homosexuality, even of the closeted sort. The man was unpleasant, clearly disturbed and distraught by his wife's recent request for a divorce.

Thus the the narrator's attempt to integrate his death into the story of her coming out is as much a story about how badly she wants to be connected to him, as it is about any objective explanation of his life and death. Every episode she recounts is layered to the point of being overburdened with symbolism -- the summer her father gets into trouble with the law for seducing a teenage boy is also the summer her mother has the lead in an Oscar Wilde play -- and also the summer Allison gets her period. And also the summer that the Watergate scandal is exposed. This surplus of symbolic baggage is further compromised by the narrator's accounts her own childhood attempts to keep a diary -- which she marked up with the annotations "I think" "I think" "I think" to ward off the dangers of claiming as objective what was only her point of view. As much as she tells us about her father, the narrator tells us even more about why we should be sceptical of what she's telling us.

And maybe what's most fascinating about her attempts to identify her homosexuality to her father's sexual life is all of the possible identifications she has to shut down to get there. Identifying with her father means she doesn't have to identify with the teenage boys he exploited, placing his desires before their autonomy. Naming her coming out of the closet as the catalyst for her father's death removes blame from her mother, whose request for divorce might otherwise provide a suicide motive. At the same time it erases the possibility that coming out of the closet prompted her mother to ask for the divorce, moved to escape a sham marriage by her own daughter's unwillingness to play along with convention. The narrator's musings that if her father had chosen in the early 80s not suicide but life as a gay man, he probably would have ended up dead of AIDS anyway acts a safety valve, a way of keeping her identification with her father from becoming too all-consuming. The father who controlled the decor of her bedroom, the clothes she wore, the books she read could just as easily have moved in and decided to inhabit and use even her homosexuality as an extension of himself if he hadn't died first. Her dependence in the last few chapters of the novel on Proust, Joyce and Collette to explain her relationship with her father seem a distancing move, so that she might understand her identification with her father as an identification with any character in a book -- intense, but not impinging in one's daily life.

The potential destruction the father could have worked on the daughter by living might be read in the baroque level of detail this graphic novel has, despite being authored and illustrated by a self-professed modern minimalist. Instead of spare lines and empty spaces Allison Bechdel fills her book with the gingerbread latticing, velvet flocked wall-paper and intricately carved bannisters of her father's pretentious

Victorian tastes.

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## Oriana says

Book #4 for Jugs & Capes, my all-girl graphic-novel book club!

You can also read this review (slightly tweaked) on CCLaP.

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I've been wanting to read this book for *years*. Isn't it crazy that I had to start an entire graphic novel book club to somehow give myself permission to read it?

Perhaps. But who cares about the machinations I forced myself through to get to it? I am *so* glad I did. This book is simply spectacular. It is dense, fraught with meaning, stuffed with prose and complimented by simple illustrations. And in addition to being incredibly smart, incredibly illuminating, and incredibly inventive, it's also incredibly sexy. There's a scene where Alison and her girlfriend are in bed together making out, while *reading the dictionary*. Sexy nerdery! Incredible!

In case anyone doesn't know, *Fun Home* is a memoir about Alison Bechdel's childhood and early adulthood. She has two younger brothers, an actress mother, and a father who teaches high-school English and runs a funeral home. Yeah. Oh, and dad's a deeply closeted gay.

I'd like, as I always do with well-done memoirs, to invoke one of the blurbs on my favorite-ever memoir, *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*: Finally, someone with a life worth writing about has got the skill to write about it. Oh, Alison, what skill! What a life! What a uniquely wonderful way of telling it!

The book has seven chapters, each of which is structured around a book. And I'm not talking about lowbrow or predictably canonized books, either; we've got Icarus and Dedalus, Camus's *A Happy Death*, *The Great Gatsby*, Proust, *The Wind in the Willows*, Henry James, and *Ulysses*. Holy moly, Alison is one smart cookie. She shrewdly and exhaustively catalogues and examines the parallels between these disparate works and the structure and choices and emotional makeup of her family, enhancing an already fascinating story with layers of intertextual readings and adept analysis. She says: "I employ these allusions to James and Fitzgerald not only as descriptive devices, but because my parents are most real to me in fictional terms. And perhaps my cool aesthetic distance itself does more to convey the arctic climate of our family than any particular literary comparison." That makes me shiver.

Her language made me shiver a lot, actually, which is not something I expect from a graphic novel. (But let me reiterate that I've read probably less than a dozen graphic novels in my adult life, so excuse me if that's a stupid assumption.) Her prose is complex, lyrical, intelligent, and apt. She describes a summer afternoon in Greenwich Village by saying, "the city was reduced, like a long-simmering demiglace, to a fragrance of stunning richness and complexity." In a section which covers her own puberty as it coincides with a cicada summer, she says, "Next the locusts settled down to an orgy in our tall maple trees, cloaking us from dawn to dusk in the ambient noise of their conjugal exertions." In the chapter about her own journey of coming out as a lesbian (which is also the *Ulysses* chapter), she says, "I was adrift on the high seas, but my course was becoming clear. It lay between the scylla of my peers and the swirling, sucking charybdis of my family." *Beautiful.*

And I haven't even gotten to the art yet. I'm still working out how I relate to graphic novels, and it turns out I'm both too harsh a judge and also too easy. It takes little to impress me artistically—much less than it takes to impress me literarily, for sure—and so I find almost any art to be good. On the other hand, though, when I read graphic novels, I can't stop wondering why the author chose this format to tell his or her story, which is certainly not something I ever stop to consider with straight prose. Due to this, I actually find myself a little bit distracted, over-examining many of the frames in order to try to parse just *why* this story needed illustrating. I did that a lot in this book too, and while I didn't come to a clear answer, I did find many frames that were not just augmented, but wholly *changed*, for the better of course, by the compliment of the illustration.

For example, there's a half-page frame at the end of a chapter that shows Alison visiting her father's grave. With a short phrase of text that only harkens back to an anecdote related earlier in the chapter, the reader is free to attach all the end-of-chapter meaning to this large image, which is the graveyard, at twilight (probably; the shadows are long), empty but for Alison lying on her back in front of her father's monument, her bike on its side next to her. This is such a beautiful, aching image! And she didn't have to bother spelling out her loneliness, her puzzlement, the hours she spent in silent communion with her dead father. It's all there, exquisitely bare. Or in another image, full page, she compares a picture of her father at twenty-two to a picture of herself at twenty-one. In this one she does use words to enumerate certain similarities—pained grin, flexible wrists, angle of shadow on faces—but still the illustrations augment these bare-bones descriptions brilliantly. One last example: as she discusses the artifice in her childhood diary (she has written, "We might have to move! How horrid!"), the text reads, "*How horrid* has a slightly facetious tone that strikes me a Wildean. It appears to embrace the actual horror—puberty, public disgrace—then at the last second nimbly sidesteps it, laughing." The illustration here? Alison and her father watching, on TV, the Roadrunner eat the "free birdseed" and then speed away just before the anvil comes crashing down on his head. So there's the wry literary analysis of herself as an over-dramatic teen, the sharply augmenting pop-culture parallel, and then also the overlay of she and her father laughing together, in a rare moment of closeness. What a terrific, multi-layered whole!

There's so much left that I didn't talk about yet, but I suppose it won't do any good to say much more. This book is an absolutely astonishing delight, and if I haven't convinced you of that yet, I'm not going to bother trying anymore.

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## Darth J says

Hmmm...

Well, I wanted to read this for some time, mostly because Alison Bechdel is probably one of the more prominent names that both authors and readers are aware of these days due to her test. Anyway, I wanted to like this more than I did. You see, I'm not really a fan of graphic novels, but it worked here to illustrate her points. However, this whole book felt more like a project of self-analysis than a commercial product. It was extremely personal, yet cold and detached--like Alison's parents, which I think is the entire point.

3 stars overall because there was *something* there, but *that* just wasn't entertainment.

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## **Elyse says**

Many Thanks to Margaret who recommended this book to me!

WOW! ....I knew NOTHING about this book -TERRIFIC/ SPECTACULAR-until it was in my hands today.....(other than it was a highly recognized-graphic memoir - chosen best book of the year by at least 10 major publications in 2006).

80, 4333 people rated this book -- so where was I? Hidden away with blindfolds and earplugs?

There's a lot going on in this --'memoir'.... so much so, there could be several individual books written on any 'one' theme.

---For 18 years Allison grew up in a house of daily renovation. If anybody has lived through having their bathroom or kitchen remodeled--you know personally what the disruption feels like. Can you imagine your entire childhood around hammers and nails..... strips of loose molding? Remodeling is very stressful. I would think that many years of focus of renovation would drive every family member into a corner. That much daily physical chaos creates disconnected communications.

---I could understand that when Allison was little, her house, the walls, the wallpaper, the furniture, the curtains, all felt like another child in the house.

She, on the other hand, often felt like the furniture.

Allison offers elegant prose - pleasure - intelligence- and compassion-- through literary references....reflecting on classics read that both she and her dad enjoyed ( shared loved for books) .

They- she and her dad- never did come 'out' to each other. Both are gay. To get the 'full' story: READ THIS GRAPHIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY!!!

Suggestion: If you have not read this book, know 'nothing' about it.....(having not read 'any' reviews- no blurbs- 'nothing'- have been living under a rock like I have ), if you are willing to 'trust'..... go in blind... DON'T read anything about this book until you have finished the last page ..... I HIGHLY RECOMMENDED reading it this way.

It's Soooooo worth reading!!!!!!!

Another TOP- TOP - TOP graphic memoir!!!!!!

A few great quotes inspired by "Ulysses", by James Joyce.

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## **Ted says**

### **Updated**

This is a terrific book.

The graphic memoir format added an extraordinary dimension to the story. (I can't recall ever having read a graphic novel before, so in that sense the entire experience of this book was new to me.)

The book was published when Bechdel was in her mid-40s, and tells the story of her own life, up to just before her twentieth birthday, and her father's life, up to the same point in time, when he was run over by a truck - possibly accidentally, possibly as a suicide.

Some of the things I will remember about the book, in no particular order:

1. You-couldn't make this up. In the last few months of her father's life, Alison had revealed to her parents (after going away to college) that she was a lesbian; soon after that she learned that her father was gay, and had been in trouble with the law in the small community in which they lived in Western Pennsylvania for an incident which had been swept under the table by the legal system in return for his agreement to accept counseling. Alison had been under the impression that he had been in trouble for buying beer for a minor, which was the charge that had been actually brought against him. Alison also learned that her mother had been aware of her dad's tendencies for several years, and two weeks before her father's demise had filed for divorce from him.

2. Non-linear, recursive structure. The way in which Bechdel retells, in each chapter of the book, with continually increasing detail, shifting themes, and changing perspectives, the story of her relationship with her father, and the way in which she learned more about the events preceding his death.

3. Great use of graphics. The book contains probably a thousand illustrations, many of them extremely detailed. Various bits of the story are told by the captions, by separate text boxes (such as quotations from some of her dad's favorite books, with significant words and phrases highlighted), by the dialog balloons, and by special little notes within illustrations pointing out visual details significant to Alison's perception of her surroundings. Here's an example, showing Allison in a lit. course at college.

(click to expand)

which ties in with ...

4. Literary references. Bechdel weaves her dad's favorite books and authors (F. Scott Fitzgerald, Proust, Joyce) into the story, and uses her own explications of this literature to make key points about his personality and his outlook on life.

5. Honesty. Bechdel doesn't hold anything back in telling this story, and thus makes a special point of thanking her two brothers and her mother "for not trying to stop me from writing this book."

**and how did I overlook, when I first wrote this ...**

6. Emotion. There is some powerful emotion packed into Bechdel's story. As I flipped through the book looking for a good panel to illustrate the review, I perused the last few pages. When I finished, I was sobbing. So ...

I'm looking forward to reading Bechdel's newest graphic book, *Are You My Mother*, the story of her relationship with her mother. **Though I still haven't read it. It sits there waiting for me.**

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## Samadrita says

3.5/5

*Fun Home's* biggest flaw is its self-conscious, droll narrative voice that diminishes its raw earnestness at times. Alison Bechdel imposes her obsessive-compulsive desire for extracting meaning from even the most commonplace of occurrences on to a narrative of coming to terms with personal loss. And this whole exercise of drawing parallels between fictional and real life tragedies and pivotal emotional beats becomes too trite all too soon. Maybe she should have known when to put the kibosh on this thing.

But it's okay. Since I understand wherefrom this monomaniacal urge originates. It's hard to make sense of a father's death especially at an age when you were only just learning how to peel off layers of pretensions obfuscating the unadulterated reality that lay at the core of his personhood. It's not so much a crushing sadness that hits you but an overwhelming disbelief and a sense of *'it's not fair'* which becomes so large and potent a force that it pushes out all concomitant emotions of bereavement from your mind leaving a kind of vacuum.

Before my to psychobabble gets the better of my good sense, let me come clean about my personal reasons for rating this work as high as 3.5 stars. Greater than the sum of my annoyance at Bechdel's rather shabby artwork (at times I couldn't tell the difference between Bruce Bechdel and Alison's brothers) and her tendency to forge correlations between Proust, Joyce, Fitzgerald, Colette, Henry James, Wilde's fictional characters and snippets of memorable moments from her dysfunctional childhood spent in a rural Pennsylvania homestead, was my genuine appreciation for this heartfelt tribute to such a delightfully ambiguous father. Having lost a father at 14, I know how it feels trying to grasp at straws, trying to analyze one seemingly inconsequential incident or subjecting one precious shared moment to intense and concentrated scrutiny from all possible angles. Stray notes tucked in between the last page and the backcover of a magazine recovered years later, journals, hand-written letters, favorite paperbacks, the only bit of literary criticism he published, heaps of carefully organized notes that he prepared for his classes, tapes containing his voice recordings cooing at your tiny baby form and anecdotes recounted by the ones who knew him better and longer than you did become coded roadsigns to some secret location promising complete de-mystification. But you know it's just delusional thinking anyway. You will never know him the way you could have.

Unlike Bruce Bechdel who grappled with the stark contradiction between his public reality and private urges all his life, my father didn't particularly have any skeletons in his closet. And even if he did I have no way of unraveling that mystery now. But what I do have in common with Bechdel's perspective on her father, is this perplexity, subliminal resentment and an amused incredulity about his life and his deeds. How can he be just a person existing in the past tense now? At least she must have achieved some kind of closure through the creation of this part graphic memoir part literary essay on remembering a loved one. I certainly hope she did.

My rating and review are thus reprehensibly subjective. Do not expect more from a reviewer who has massive daddy issues and will continue to deal with them till the day she breathes her last. I solemnly confess to being more moved by the parts focusing on her family rather than the Künstlerroman-ish bits about her 'coming out' in college and identifying as a butch woman. But what stopped me from rating this any higher is the painfully overwrought sentence construction Bechdel employs which aside from being cringe-worthy at times creates an unwanted dissonance between the import of an emotional moment and its

actual graphical representation and execution.

I would see my father one more time after this. But we would never discuss our shared predilection again.

I'm sorry Ms Bechdel but if this is your attempt at cracking a joke on the likelihood of your gay self having a conversation with your gay dad about well being gay, it's kind of pathetic.

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## **Larry H says**

Family dysfunction, bow down to the Bechdel family.

Alison Bechdel's father Bruce was an enigma to her while she was growing up—an English teacher and director of the family-owned funeral home (aka the "Fun Home") who had an exacting eye for fashion, decor, and gardening. He wasn't a bad father, but he always seemed to keep her and her brothers at arm's length, not to mention her mother.

While Alison remembered some special, tender times, she remembered more moments of being forced to wear an outfit she didn't want, scolded into meeting his tough cleaning standards, and feeling bewildered at his obsession with making sure all of the flowers around their house always looked perfect.

When Alison was in college, she came out to her parents as a lesbian. Shortly thereafter, she found out that her father was gay. While perhaps not entirely surprising if she added up all of the signs and clues she might have noted subconsciously, the discovery still throws her for a loop. And while they had one half-conversation about this, a few weeks after his revelation, her father died, leaving a legacy of mystery and confusion in his wake.

"Perhaps my eagerness to claim him as 'gay' in the way I am 'gay,' as opposed to bisexual or some other category, is just a way of keeping him to myself—a sort of inverted oedipal complex."

*Fun Home* is both a daughter's efforts to make sense of her father's life and death as it is an account of growing up uncomfortable in your own skin, of knowing you are different but being afraid of acknowledging it for fear everything might change, even though it should. It's a story of coming to terms with who you are, while remembering a man who really never had that luxury.

I'm *really* late to the party in reading this, and while I've heard some of the music from the musical version of *Fun Home*, I never saw the show either. I've never read a graphic novel/memoir before (although I read lots of Archie, Betty, and Veronica comics growing up, and was addicted to the Silver Surfer), and this was both a refreshing and challenging format for me.

This book practically pulsates with emotion, anger, and confusion, as well as the uncertainty that comes with self-discovery. When it dealt with Alison's own life or her father's struggles to find himself, the book is strongest, but it spends a lot of time holding up their story against a backdrop of classic literature (which her father so loved), and after a while I didn't enjoy those portions as much. However, as someone who wishes his father was still alive so we could have conversations about life there never seemed to be time for then, I found *Fun Home* beautifully moving.

If you mostly read books via Kindle or another e-reader, do yourself a favor and borrow or buy the printed version of this one. I was so glad I made the investment to enjoy the power of how Bechdel's illustrations told as much of the story as her words. While this wasn't perhaps as good as I had expected it to be, it still is powerful, and I'll remember it for some time to come.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo...>

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## Paul Bryant says

THIS JUST IN : P BRYANT FAILS HIP GRAPHIC NOVEL TEST

Fun Home, a cripplingly hip graphic novel, is....

Yes?

It's....

YES??

Well, let's see, it's, you know, all right, good, yes, nods head, hummphs into beard, pulls earlobe, raises eyebrows, waves hands in a vague direction, shifts about in seat. You know. Don't get me wrong. It was good. Yes. Cool, clever, really hip, I mean, really, as far as I can tell, my hipometer needs a new battery I think; it was not the least bit funny, but that's not such a bad thing, and...

Stares at ceiling.

Has sudden thought.

Hey, you don't think Alison Bechdel will read this do you, she's not one of those Goodreads authors who suddenly jump up like a damned jack in a box and scare the Jesus out of you and tell you they devoted *five years* of *hard graft* to this work you've just more or less sneered at and damned with the faintest possible praise, I really hope not, that's not happened to me yet but I know it's happened to a few of you and it's not pretty, some of you were mildly traumatised, I saw it with my own eyes, you had to be led away to a quiet good place with a small cat to stroke.

So... Fun Room. It was all sweetly sad and worthy, painfully so, all about Alison's father who was this closet gay or bi living the whole of his life in a small Pennsylvanian town. So his temperament ran towards the dour and repressed and the sublimating-everything-into-his-house-restoration and then lo! shazam! Alison figures this out and also - *double shazam!* that she herself is gay, and then they become a lot closer and then stuff happens but *not that much stuff*. I wanted more stuff. I'm unreasonable.

I read books for stuff, you know.

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