



Penny from Heaven

Jennifer L. Holm

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It's 1953 and 11-year-old Penny dreams of a summer of butter pecan ice cream, swimming, and baseball. But nothing's that easy in Penny's family. For starters, she can't go swimming because her mother's afraid she'll catch polio at the pool. To make matters worse, her favorite uncle is living in a car. Her Nonny cries every time her father's name is mentioned. And the two sides of her family aren't speaking to each other!

Inspired by Newbery Honor winner Jennifer Holm's own Italian American family, *Penny from Heaven* is a shining story about the everyday and the extraordinary, about a time in America's history, not all that long ago, when being Italian meant that you were the enemy. But most of all, it's a story about families—about the things that tear them apart and bring them together. And Holm tells it with all the richness and the layers, the love and the laughter of a Sunday dinner at Nonny's. So pull up a chair and enjoy the feast! Buon appetito!

Penny from Heaven Details

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Author : Jennifer L. Holm

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From Reader Review Penny from Heaven for online ebook

Peter Panic says

For some ungodly reason I keep reading Newberry books. At one point I wanted to be the Newberry specialist, but instead I became hooked on them since I figured out the formula. I'm especially surprised that this was nominated though. While it contained one of the three elements that secretly qualified it for what is ALWAYS in a Newberry book (war) it wasn't that interesting and frankly the 50-isms would go over kids heads. Heck most of that crap was just foreign to me, if I didn't recall my mother complaining about her crinoline dresses and patent leather shoes, I'd be lost in the pages and would have to rely on back to the future as my guide to 1950. However I did learn that the Brooklyn Dodgers were referred to as "Dem Bums" and only in the last few pages did I learn about the racism and internment camps the italians had to endure during Roosevelt's presidency. I almost want to wiki the information, almost. ANYway while it was enjoyable enough for me to read, I pretty much wished that I never bought the proof.

Wendy says

Fairly interesting, with plenty of funny bits, but I have no clue why this got attention from the Newbery committee. It was like watching a so-so episode of the (excellent) TV series Brooklyn Bridge. It's all sweet and nostalgic, but where's the plot? I haven't gotten a chance to read the author's note (I listened to the audio book, which was really well done), but I say again, as with Roller Skates, that if you're going to turn memoir into fiction, you ought to tighten and plot; otherwise, just write a memoir and be done with it.

Quigmiss says

I really really really liked this book!! i read it for a historical fiction book report, and history isn't my absolute fave, but it was not bad because penny falucci, a girl living in the fifties, has the same worries, thoughts and view points of life as most 11 and 12 year old girls. her dad died when she was really young so her many spontaneous, aunts and uncles always are trying to cheer her up whenever they're with her, which is most of the time.

my favorite falucci family member is aunt gina. i even think her fights with nonny are funny. but even though penny likes baseball she has a girly side and looks up to aunt gina as a role model. and i like how she gives her a makeover and makes her feel pretty. i also think ellie's parents are funny with their little quirks: burping, bad jokes and terrible cooking. but they still were funny and sweet i think.

this book is funny and touching, i got a little emotional towards the end... but that's how you know it's a good book. ;) read this book and i guarantee you'll love it.

Colby Sharp says

When I started reading this book I was thinking 4 stars. Why you ask? If I give all of Jenni Holm's novels 5 stars people are going to start thinking I have an author crush on her.

Penny from Heaven was way too good for four stars. It is 23 chapters of amazing. I felt like chapters 19 and 20 were as good as anything I have read this year. I listened to them on my way to school today, and I cried a

solid 30 minutes.

Here is my list of authors that I think are better than Jenni Holm:

Mary says

From Booklist

Gr. 5-8. Penny lives with her "plain old American" mother and grandparents, but she has an open invitation to visit her deceased father's Italian family, where the delicious aromas are as inviting as the boisterous relatives who welcome her. Against the backdrop of these contrasting 1950s households, the author of Newbery Honor Book *Our Only May Amelia* (1999) charts the summer of Penny's twelfth birthday, marked by hapless episodes as well as serious tensions arising from the estranged families' refusal to discuss her father's death. Penny is a low-key character, often taking a backseat role in escapades with high-spirited cousin Frankie. However, Holm impressively wraps pathos with comedy in this coming-of-age story, populated by a cast of vivid characters (a burping, farting grandpa; an eccentric uncle who lives in his car-- "not exactly normal for people in New Jersey"). Concluding with a photo-illustrated endnote explaining Holm's inspirations in family history, this languidly paced novel will appeal most to readers who appreciate gentle, episodic tales with a nostalgic flavor. Hand selling may be necessary to overcome the staid jacket illustration. Jennifer Mattson

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I really enjoyed this book for a number of reasons. The characters were strong and well-defined. I really associated with Penny through her struggles with her family and the differences between the two. The relationship between Penny and her cousin, Frankie, was awesome. What I really enjoyed about this book, and the whole genre of historical fiction, is the ability to teach about history through fiction. If I wasn't in this class, I would probably enjoy reading this story simply for the story of Penny and her family. The storyline and characters are strong enough to support a story. However, what I will walk away with, after reading this book, is the knowledge about how Italians were treated at this time in history! I had no idea! Curfews, internment camps! This was a great story, but an even better history lesson.

Pamela says

I love this book!! Warm – Endearing - Amusing – Honest: “Penny From Heaven.” Set in 1953 New York, it’s historically insightful and feel-good nostalgic. Jennifer Holm, inspired by her own American/Italian family, wrote this for a middle school audience. However, young and old alike will find this coming-of-age story a delight to read. And following the story in the author's notes, Holm includes the connections to her family, as well as many eye-opening facts about the era and Italian/American culture.

“School is out, and for the first time in months. I don’t have to worry about Veronica Goodman being mean to me. I used to like school, until this year. I probably wouldn't have survived if Mrs. Ellenburg, the librarian

hadn't let me hide out in the library. Lucky for me, Veronica Goodman doesn't like to read.”

Eleven-year-old Penny is a hoot! Her humor and philosophical musings had me in stitches. She loves the New York "Bum" Dodgers (yes, the Dodgers were in Brooklyn before LA), and listens to all their games on the radio with her grumpy/deaf grandfather or with her favorite uncle who lives in his car. She loves butter pecan ice cream and Scarlett O'Hara the aging family dog. And she's fond of both sides of her family, but she gets quite annoyed with their inability to come together. Why can't everybody just get along? And why can't anyone give her a straight answer about her father? When you're eleven, there always seems to be more questions than adults are willing to answer. Where's the honesty in that? Then when a near tragic event occurs, honesty finally spills forth like pennies from heaven. But is it too little, too late?

Five – Bright Shiny Copper Stars

Ch_hayley Medsker says

Penny From Heaven by Jennifer Holm is a story of a young Italian American girl growing up in New Jersey in 1953. Penny is orphaned by her father from the time she was a baby. Throughout the novel, 11 year-old Penny struggles with many questions about her father, whom no one will speak about. Thus, this leaves her questioning her own identity as well. While Penny lives with her mother and her “boring old American” grandparents, Me-me and Pop-pop, her life is consistently filled with her enormous, loud, and “typical” Italian family. She visits them often, as they live nearby, and they treat her like a princess. Penny also spends her days with her mischievous and trouble-making cousin Frankie. Yet, throughout the novel, several important events occur in the protagonist's life. While still dealing with the unspeakable and tragic death of her husband, Penny's hard-working mother attempts to normalize her life, by going out with the girls and dating men, specifically, Mr. Mulligan, the neighborhood milkman. This predictably bothers Penny to no end. Additionally, she develops a crush on a boy and is left-out by many of the girls at school. However, her relationship with her family seems to be the priority in Penny's life. A tragic event uncovers family secrets, and in the end brings them all together again. Holm did a fantastic job at portraying what life was like for a pre-teen girl during this time period. Her realistic and authentic manner in which she depicts life for this young girl and many Italians is remarkable. Small insertions, like the family's fear to speak Italian in public, the love of the baseball team the Dodgers, or the fear of contracting Polio make this a very believable work of historical fiction. Yet, the manner in which the family communicates with each other and raw emotion all appeal to the novel's literary and narrative elements. The book was inspired on her family's own story and based on her mother's real life experiences. This book is geared toward middle school aged students. The prior knowledge that a reader brings to the novel is essential in truly grasping the concepts and events that occur in Penny From Heaven.

Lydia says

This book nearly made me cry which is quite a feat! I admit to tearing up at least three times. I loved getting to learn about an Italian family during and after WWII and all of the struggles they went through. A fascinating way to learn some history! The only con I can think of is a little bit of superstition which was mostly treated with doubt and humor. I would recommend this book to anyone. Oh, and I want Uncle Dominic please! :)

Josie says

Penny From Heaven
By Jennifer L. Holm
Published by Random House
2006
Historical Fiction

Jennifer Holm has taken her personal family history and crafted an excellent work of historical fiction in Penny From Heaven. Holm's book is funny, moving, and a joy to read. Incoming sixth graders, girls especially, will have a hard time putting it down. The writing is quick and smart and the characters are round and very dynamic. This, in addition to the vignette style chapters that comprise Penny's summer make for a page turner of substance.

The book follows Penny and her family throughout the summer of 1953. She lives with her mother, grandmother and grandfather, since her father died when she was young. She still remains close to her father's large Italian family and is always being encouraged to eat more by them. Penny is an 11 year old like many others; she likes baseball, ice cream, a special boy, her dog, family and getting into trouble. She dislikes: mean girls from school, not being allowed to go to the swimming pool, her grandmother's cooking and her mother's new boyfriend. Penny has a lot of fun working in her Uncle's store and playing with her cousin over the summer, but this all comes to an abrupt end after a serious injury. Throughout the novel, Penny learns more about her family, the past and eventually looks towards a new future.

This book has laugh out loud moments balanced expertly with real emotion and sadness as well. Holm grabs her readers with detailed and thoughtful writing and runs them through the gamut of feelings one experiences as an 11 year old and a 22 year old as well (from my own experience). Every time Penny mentioned how awful her Me-me's cooking (and it was often) was I laughed. Writing in the first person, one really gets to know Penny and how smart, funny and thoughtful she is. A great scene is when Mr. Mulligan the milkman, her mother's new beau comes to dinner. Penny makes sure to make him squirm, giving him a large helping of Me-me's infamous peas and onions, "Mr. Mulligan, would you care for some peas and onions?" I ask in a sweet voice" (134). While there are funny moments, there are also extremely touching moments, especially while Penny is in the hospital. She learns the truth of her father's death and grapples with serious issues like death, prejudice, forgiveness and her mother falling in love again. Penny from Heaven is a book that has such a wide range of events and feelings, but never seems crowded or over done. I think this will allow for every reader to grab on to at least one theme, character or event that they can relate to. For me, I found myself relating a lot to Penny's loss of a pet and her first crush. Though set in a different time period, the themes and emotions certainly transcend time.

Carol says

I already had this book at home from the library before I realized I checked out a Newberry Honor Book. Hot Dog, I just love them and always have. I was a teenager when I first found Newberry's and realized how very good they are. This is no exception.

Eleven year old Penny dreams of a summer of her favorite butter pecan Ice Cream, swimming, and baseball. But nothing is that easy in Penny's family. For starters, she can't go swimming because her mother's afraid she will catch polio at the pool. To make matters worse, her favorite uncle is living in his car. Her Nonny cries every time her father's name is mentioned. And the two sides of her family aren't speaking to each other! Inspired by Newberry Honor winner Jennifer Holm's own Italian American Family, Penny from Heaven is a shining story about the everyday and the extraordinary, about a time in America's history, not all that long ago, when being Italian meant that you were the enemy. But most of all, it's a story about families--

about the things that tear them apart. And Holm tells it with all the richness and the layers, the love and the laughter of a Sunday dinner at Nonny's. So pull up a chair and enjoy the feast!!! Buon appetito.

This book has some elements that I would call spoilers. They play a very large part of the plot. Highly recommend and wishes for Happy Reading and more importantly Happy Thanksgiving!!!

Betsy Ross says

A very enjoyable and fun read peppered with enough adventure, humorous mishaps, and tender coming of age moments to send you on an emotional journey along with Penny. Set in 1953, the book gives you a chance to experience Penny's life, her triumphs, and downfalls, all through her eyes. Living with her grandparents on her mother's side- Me-me and Pop-pop, and spending time her crazy Italian side of her family, Penny has plenty of opportunity for thrills and lots of trouble. With her main partner in crime, her cousin Frankie (who collects prayer cards from funerals), an Italian Nonny who bursts into tears every time Penny's dead father is mentioned, doting uncles, and an impending romance between her mother and the milkman, Penny's days resemble a roller coaster with all the ups and downs imaginable. This particular time in her life forces big changes and new understandings to her perspective. Through laughter, tears, and all the in-betweens, Penny learns, changes, and grows. By the time you're finished reading, you can't help but feel as though you have as well. Chop-packed with humor, adventure, romance, and tragedy, this tender story following an 11-year coming to terms with her father's death, along with her personal discovery of who she is and her place between cultures and in the world will touch you to the core.

Saira Shah says

A Penny From Heaven is an outstanding book! Penny from Heaven is the story of 12-year-old Penny Falucci, an Italian-American girl growing up in the 1950s. Her father died when Penny was very little. She and her mother live with her grandparents. Her grandmother, Me-Me, is a horrible cook, and Pop-Pop, the grandfather, is constantly working on the plumbing and causing leaks. Penny's mother works very hard and is struggling to make a life for herself. This summer begins like any other with Penny and her favorite cousin Frankie playing baseball, delivering meat from their uncle's butcher shop, and hanging out, but things start to take a turn when Penny starts to spend more time with her dad's side of the family and when her mom starts dating Mr. Mulligan, the milkman. Penny and Frankie encounter many exciting adventures throughout the book. I highly recommend reading this book to all kinds of readers!

Rebecca McNutt says

Penny from Heaven is about a girl with a dysfunctional family, and her dream is to have a great summer without them spilling over into it. Taking place in the 1950's, this book evokes all the freedom and emotion of the season and has a great message for readers.

L-Crystal Wlodek says

Penny From Heaven is a Newbery Honor book and is intended for students in grades 6-8. This book is based

on the author's own Italian American family. It depicts the 1953 time period when being Italian meant you were the enemy. The book also is rich in its description of families, more specifically about the things that separate them and being them together. Penny's life is not easy, having a father that is deceased, an uncle living in a car, and the two sides of her family not speaking to each other. Overall the book has many layers and themes including history, love, laughter, and the importance of family.

This is both a heartwarming and sad story, as many coming of age events occur for Penny. With her father being deceased, Penny is torn between her maternal side of the family and her father's large Italian family, who is still extremely important to her. In addition, not having much money, having an uncle who lives in a car, as well as having a tragic accident happen to her forces her to grow up much faster and have maturity beyond her years. Overall, this book is very enjoyable because while it contains historical information, it pulls the reader in by being emotionally appealing. Any reader will be able to relate to this book because of the importance that is placed upon love and family, despite the difference in the time period and experiences. The author's note at the end also greatly adds to the book.

Abby says

I loved this book :) I think it is okay for 9 and up, but I liked it. It's been a while since I read it
