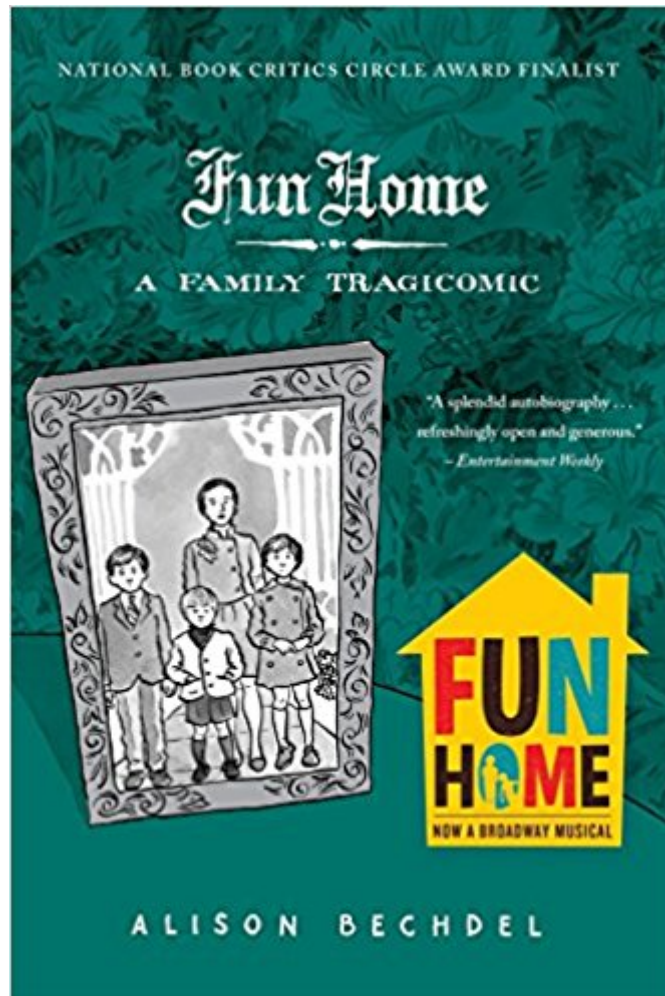




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# Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic



## Synopsis

A fresh and brilliantly told memoir from a cult favorite comic artist, marked by gothic twists, a family funeral home, sexual angst, and great books. This breakout book by Alison Bechdel is a darkly funny family tale, pitch-perfectly illustrated with Bechdel's sweetly gothic drawings. Like Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, it's a story exhilaratingly suited to graphic memoir form. Meet Alison's father, a historic preservation expert and obsessive restorer of the family's Victorian home, a third-generation funeral home director, a high school English teacher, an icily distant parent, and a closeted homosexual who, as it turns out, is involved with his male students and a family babysitter. Through narrative that is alternately heartbreaking and fiercely funny, we are drawn into a daughter's complex yearning for her father. And yet, apart from assigned stints dusting caskets at the family-owned "fun home," as Alison and her brothers call it, the relationship achieves its most intimate expression through the shared code of books. When Alison comes out as homosexual herself in late adolescence, the denouement is swift, graphic -- and redemptive.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. This autobiography by the author of the long-running strip, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, deals with her childhood with a closeted gay father, who was an English teacher and proprietor of the local funeral parlor (the former allowed him access to teen boys). *Fun Home* refers both to the funeral parlor, where he put makeup on the corpses and arranged the flowers, and the family's meticulously restored gothic revival house, filled with gilt and lace, where he liked to imagine himself

a 19th-century aristocrat. The art has greater depth and sophistication than Dykes; Bechdel's talent for intimacy and banter gains gravitas when used to describe a family in which a man's secrets make his wife a tired husk and overshadow his daughter's burgeoning womanhood and homosexuality. His court trial over his dealings with a young boy pushes aside the importance of her early teen years. Her coming out is pushed aside by his death, probably a suicide. The recursively told story, which revisits the sites of tragic desperation again and again, hits notes that resemble Jeanette Winterson at her best. Bechdel presents her childhood as a "still life with children" that her father created, and meditates on how prolonged untruth can become its own reality. She's made a story that's quiet, dignified and not easy to put down. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

That Alison Bechdel kept a childhood journal made *Fun Home* a perhaps more true-to-life project than it would have been if she'd relied on memory alone. A powerful graphic novel-memoir, *Fun Home* documents Bechdel's childhood experiences and coming-of-age as a woman and lesbian. At its center lies her heartbreaking relationship with her distant father, which produces emotionally complex and poignant reflections and clean, bitonal images. While detractors cited confusing chronology and repetition of events, literary buffs enjoyed the challenging references to Albert Camus, James Joyce, and classical mythology. In the end, *Fun Home* "is an engrossing memoir that does the graphic novel format proud" (New York Times). Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc.

I've been a fan of Alison for a very long time, ever since *Dykes to Watch Out For* was a syndicated comic in a local gay paper in Denver, CO. This more personal story moves like a stream of consciousness, smoothly flowing through not only a period of history but a series of questions and postulations. Tough questions are posed, but as in so many cases where we interrogate our own pasts, particularly when some of the players are no longer living, the only conclusions we can reach are personal. Loops can be closed, but they are internal. It's a treat to follow those loops as Alison attempts to close them to her own satisfaction, and it's a treat to be let in on the inner workings of such an erudite mind. The art adds a dimension to the memoir that I wish more could tap into, and the level of detail and attention to the art is a testament to how powerfully this story was felt by the artist. Thank you!

Have not finished it yet. This is a graphic 'autobiography' that breathes on many levels. It is a great

read. At first I didn't realize that *Fun Home* had been a book. So my first experience of the story was listening to the recording from the musical. Then, just this week my husband and I saw the musical in SF this week as well. I loved it. Decided it was time to read the source. The graphic novel adds a lot of additional information to her story. Well worth the read.

Bechdel spends the pages of this book examining all aspects of family through the lens of sexuality and her father's suicide. The subtitle, calling it a "tragicomic," truly is the best way to describe this work of art. As we move through Allison's childhood and adult life, all the while knowing that all her stories end with the father's death, there is a sense of melancholic nostalgia. It is a wonderful representation of the messy, heartbreaking truth of families, brought together with beautiful images and gripping storytelling. A fantastic read that will leave you breathless for more.

I got this as a gift for my wife, but I couldn't help but check it out when she was done. I read it one day. I would read a chunk of it, put it down to do something else, but the next thing I knew I'd have it in my hands again. I'd first heard of Alison Bechdel because of the "Bechdel Test," in which (to briefly define) you would take note of a television show or movie in which two women talk to each other about something other than a man. It's an intriguing notion that has stuck with me ever since I first heard it and means even more now that I have a daughter, which has heightened my distaste for sexism. This story is of course autobiographical, focusing on Bechdel and her father. I won't say more about the plot, just in case you want to avoid any hint of a spoiler. I rate this five stars because the story was very compelling and interesting, but in truth I'd knock it down half a star if I could. There were times when Bechdel chooses to use a fancy word when a simple one would suffice, which isn't to say someone shouldn't have a good vocabulary, only that sometimes it pulled me out of the story. If the narration feels like a distraction, I feel like it's an unsuccessful sentence or paragraph. I also felt that the story fell apart a bit toward the end, relying too heavily on James Joyce's *Ulysses* and losing some of the sharp focus that the early and middle chapters had. However, these are small criticisms within a much larger picture, one that deserves plenty of praise from readers and critics. The only book I could compare it with is *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman. Both are tremendous, using the form of the graphic novel to support the tale and present it in the most effective manner. Even if you wouldn't normally think to read a book in this format, I highly recommend this.

*Fun Home* is a memoir by Alison Bechdel in which Alison writes about her childhood, her family, and

her journey of identity and self. This graphic novel has so much depth. With literary and cross-discipline references, it can be a daunting read. But I promise you those references truly open up the book. Upon my first read, I made notes as I went, of places where I wanted to go back. And now that I'm going through again, I am in awe of Bechdel's writing. There's hidden details in the references, in the details about her father, the vocabulary, and things I did not put together the first time. The parallels, the crosses, the convergence and divergence. When people joke that "graphic novels aren't literature," I want to point them at this book. The single-volume memoir's frames are engaging, and lend much to the story. Without them I don't think the prose could stand alone nearly as well. And I think that's what makes *Fun Home* work so well in this form. Bechdel planned this graphic novel with such precision that the larger picture of woven memories, family details, and conclusions, wrapped in literary and philosophical references creates an impressive work that lends a voice to the deceased, Bruce Bechdel. All of these details allow for the reader to draw their own conclusions while also growing with Alison, and feeling her emotions grip you right through the page. I would recommend *Fun Home* to anyone that wants to experience another memoir in such a unique format. Don't be afraid to highlight or mark spots where you might not understand. I promise it's worth it.

I've never read any of Bechdel's DTWOF series, although it was her status as a lesbian author that landed her on my Book Recommendations list. I admit I was drawn in (no pun intended) solely by the Six Feet Under-ish premise of the book, but I remain astonished by its depth of feeling and literary style. Chockfull of allusions to classical mythology, landscape architecture, and modern psychology, Bechdel's drawings belie the seriousness of her narrative. It is a triumph of solipsistic ennui. And if you don't know what that means, you might want to pick up another book.

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