

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Elizabeth was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on December 2, 1948, in a hospital that has been torn down. When Elizabeth was three years old, her father reenlisted in the Army, and she spent her growing years moving around a lot—twice, she went to three schools in a single academic year. You can understand Elizabeth’s dilemma when people ask her where she’s from. The usual answer is “Um.....nowhere?”

Elizabeth loved books and reading from the time her mother began reading to her, and she’s loved writing ever since she could hold a pencil. Elizabeth submitted her first poem to *American Girl* magazine when she was nine years old. It was rejected, and it took twenty-five years before she submitted anything again. Then, she entered a contest in a magazine and won. Elizabeth wrote for magazines for ten years, then moved into novels and hasn’t

stopped since. She usually does a book a year. Elizabeth has also won a number of awards.

Before Elizabeth became a writer, she was a registered nurse for ten years, and that was her “school” for writing—taking care of patients taught a lot about human nature, about hope and fear and love and loss and regret and triumph and especially about relationships—all things that she tends to focus on in her work. Elizabeth worked as a waitress, which was also good training for a writer, and sang in a rock band which was not good for anything except the money she made. Elizabeth was a dramatic and dreamy child, given to living more inside her head than outside, something that persists up to today and makes her a terrible dining partner. She has two daughters and four grandchildren. Elizabeth lives outside of Chicago with her dogs Gabigail Starletta Buttons and Austin “Ponyboy” Bumper, and her cat, Lily La Clawster. The animals would like you to know they had nothing to do with choosing their names. She is in a relationship with a wonderful man, who makes a good life better.

Author’s website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group?

2. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
3. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
4. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?
5. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
6. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
7. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
8. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
9. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one?
10. Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well?

11. Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
12. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it? Is anything left unresolved or ambiguous? How do you picture the characters' lives after the end of the story?
13. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
14. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?
15. What changes/decisions would you hope for if the book were turned into a movie? Which sections would you cut? Who would you cast to play the main characters?
If the book is already a movie, are you happy with the representation? Do you prefer the book or the movie?
16. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

This prequel to *The Story of Arthur Truluv* (2017) brings Arthur Moses' young adult years to the forefront. As Arthur nears the end of his life, his solitary thoughts turn to his youth. Mentally stepping back decades in time, he relives the highs and lows of his teens and early adulthood in the late 1940s and early 1950s in the small town of Mason, Missouri, the setting for several of prolific author Berg's previous novels. Arthur remembers meeting the love of his life, losing a family member, and learning to see his parents in a new light. Capturing timeless issues of fickle friendships, unrequited love, and parental expectations, Berg's latest novel will appeal to fans of Catherine Ryan Hyde, Anna Quindlen, and Erica Bauermeister. Her treatment of teenage love is especially poignant, as Arthur weighs the pros and cons of professing his love for the object of his affection, Nola, versus maintaining their deep, stable friendship. Berg's latest novel is a charming and heartwarming glimpse of an elderly man's earliest days.

Publisher's Weekly

Berg revisits the protagonist of her 2017 novel *The Story of Arthur Truluv* with this gentle coming-of-age. In 1947 Missouri, 16-year-old Arthur Moses has a crush on Nola McCollum, but she has her eyes on Arthur's older brother, Frank, a high school senior. Frank, though, has been secretly dating the new, young English teacher Mary Anker. He

also bears the brunt of their father, Eugene's rages, sparked partly by Eugene's frustration over his declining milk delivery business. Taking advice from Frank, Arthur works up the nerve to ask Nola to the movies, only to have their date called off when a tornado rips through town. More complications, including another boy swooping in to take credit for Arthur's gift of flowers, stymie him further. Frank, meanwhile, learns Mary is pregnant, upending his hopes of becoming a writer. The stakes generally feel pretty low--Berg homes in on the family's everyday moments, as Arthur picks up wisdom from older neighbors and Eugene lands a new job--so when a freak accident involving Frank arrives, it feels a bit jarring. Still, Berg does a nice job tending to the slow-burn romance between Arthur and Nola, which readers of the earlier book know will lead to a lifelong marriage. The author's fans ought to be satisfied. Agent: Suzanne Guck, WME. (Mar.)

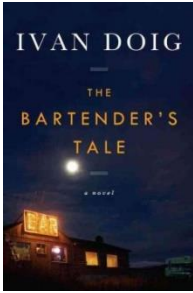
Library Journal

Berg calls back to her 2017 novel *The Story of Arthur Truluv* in this sweet and sad story that stands on its own. It explores the early life of Arthur (who is an octogenarian in the 2017 novel) and what turned him into the kind and sensitive man who so many readers fell in love with. This new novel is set in 1947, with Arthur as a 16-year-old growing up in small-town Missouri. Awkward and sweet, with a deep love of trees and the natural world, his other deep love is Nola--one of the prettiest girls in school, and way out of his league. Arthur relies on his handsome, charismatic older brother Frank to guide him in his patient effort to conquer Nola's heart. Frank has his own issues, including his and Arthur's overbearing and sometimes scary father. Frank has also fallen in love with his gorgeous young English teacher and impresses her with his vibrant writing, to the point that they're secretly planning to start a new life together once Frank graduates. Then a terrible tragedy hits the Truluv family, changing Arthur forever. VERDICT Berg continues to channel her own version of Fannie Flagg with her small-town Southern tale that goes back in time to fill in the details of a memorable character's life.--Beth Liebman Gibbs

Kirkus Reviews

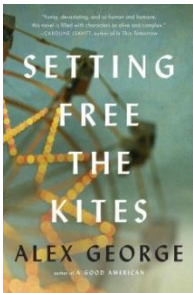
A coming-of-age story about two brothers supporting each other through life's twists and turns in Mason, Missouri. It is the spring of 1947, and 16-year-old Arthur Moses is in love. Not the fleeting puppy love of his peers, but a deep, all-consuming love that he's certain is real. The only problem is that Nola McCollum doesn't look his way, and when she finally does, it's to ask Arthur to pass her number on to his older brother, Frank. Arthur says he will but instead hides the note in his desk and asks Frank for his advice on how to win Nola over. Frank needs advice for his own troubles, and Berg's narration of the two young men whispering to each other at night in their shared bedroom lends a profound sweetness to the novel even as the boys deal with the harsh realities of their lives such as an abusive father. Despite his lack of success wooing Nola, Arthur, who loves trees and his hometown and treats everyone he meets with gentle kindness, soldiers on with calm resolve, certain that someday his brother's advice will lead Nola to him. But when a gut-wrenching tragedy hits the Moses household, Arthur is not sure he can or should ever try to be happy again. While the relationship between the brothers is the novel's crowning jewel, Berg's ability to create characters--even some we meet for only a few scenes--with rich inner lives cannot be overpraised: "But he knew that now he would be seeing her in an altogether different way. There she would be, standing fierce on her stoop, but behind her would be a lot of other hers, younger hers, wearing a polka-dotted dress or a red wool suit, or the cotton-print robe she'd had to cut extra-careful to keep whole the wings of the big white birds." A poignant tale of love, grief, and the resiliency of the human spirit. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

READALIKES



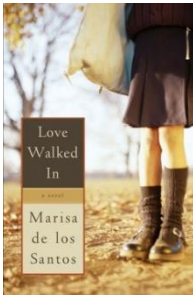
***The Bartender's Tale* by Ivan Doig**

Running a venerable bar in 1960 Montana while raising his 12-year-old son, single father Tom Harry finds his world upended by the arrival of a woman from his past and her beatnik daughter, who claims Tom as her father and upends the town with her passionate and pretentious modern views.



***Setting Free the Kites* by Alex George**

Eighth grade is hard enough, but for Robert Carter it's made doubly worse by the constant threat of bullying. So when newcomer Nathan Tilly arrives in depressed Haverford, Maine, and saves him from a particularly wrenching confrontation with the local terror, Hollis Calhoun, Robert is forever indebted to his fearless classmate. The two become fast friends through school and over summer jobs working at the schlocky amusement park owned by Robert's dad. Tragedy further unites them as first Nathan and then Robert copes with devastating losses.



***Love Walked In* by Marisa De Los Santos**

Eleven-year-old Clare is a child of divorce whose mother, a successful party planner, is quickly going to pieces. In alternating chapters of Cornelia's first person and Clare's free and direct third, poet de los Santos, making her novel debut, tells the story of their finding each other. That Cornelia, early on, immediately falls for Cary Grant doppelgänger Martin Grace is no surprise; his relation to Clare, revealed a third of the way in, isn't really either. As she discovers maternal instincts she wasn't sure she had, Cornelia works up the courage to face her own feelings for Clare with honesty.