

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Kristin Hannah is an award-winning and bestselling author of more than 20 novels including the international blockbuster, *The Nightingale*, *Winter Garden*, *Night Road*, and *Firefly Lane*.

Her novel, *The Nightingale*, has been published in 43 languages and is currently in movie production at TriStar Pictures, which also optioned her novel, *The Great Alone*. Her novel, *Home Front* has been optioned for film by 1492 Films (produced the Oscar-nominated *The Help*) with Chris Columbus attached to direct.

Kristin is a former-lawyer-turned writer who lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband. Her novel, *Firefly Lane*, became a runaway bestseller in 2009, a touchstone novel that brought women together, and *The Nightingale*, in 2015 was voted a best book of the year by Amazon, BuzzFeed, iTunes, *Library Journal*, *Paste*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Week*. Additionally, the novel won the coveted Goodreads and People's Choice Awards. The audiobook of *The Nightingale* won the Audiobook of the Year Award in the fiction category. - Author's website

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before reading the book, what was your perception of life in Alaska? What surprised you?
2. The wild, spectacular beauty of Alaska. It was otherworldly somehow, magical in its vast expanse, an incomparable landscape of soaring glacier-filled white mountains that ran the length of the horizon, knife-tip points pressed high into a cloudless, cornflower blue sky." (22) The author describes the Alaskan landscape with such electric language—what passages did you find the most moving? Did they help you visualize the place or inspire you? Did you find the landscape to be in contrast to the violence of the story? Or do you think it complemented the breathtaking feeling of young love?
3. What aspects of the lifestyle would you find the most challenging in the wild? How would you handle the isolation, the interdependence among neighbors, the climate? Would you have what it takes to survive?

4. "Up here, there's no one to tell you what to do or how to do it. We each survive our own way. If you're tough enough, it's heaven on earth." (39) What drives the settlers in *The Great Alone* to Alaska? They're not all desperate people in desperate need of a fresh start like the Allbrights, but what could be attractive about this unique way of life for some? What brings Large Marge there? The Walker family? Do you think most are hunting for something—or hiding?
5. In *The Great Alone*, we're transported by the author back to America in the early seventies with plot elements such as the gas shortage, shocking news headlines, counter-cultural ideas, and of course, the wardrobe choices. If you were present for these years, what was it like to see snapshots of it in the story? Did it match up with your memories, or color the story for you? What would you add?
6. Did you find Cora's actions and liberated" mind-set to be in conflict? When we first meet Cora she's venting about discriminatory credit practices at the bank while sipping from a feminist-messaged coffee cup, but we soon discover she's at a tense crossroads in her personal life. What do you think holds her back?
7. Leni sees the complexity of her parents' relationship when in such close quarters with them in the cabin—the rawness of their lives together. Did you think it was going to be the weather or the violence that killed them first?
8. Discuss the forms of love within this book—crazy and romantic love, neighborly love and compassion, love for the natural world, and a mother's love. What else would you add?
9. A girl was like a kite; without her mother's strong, steady hold on the string, she might just float away, be lost somewhere among the clouds." (118) If you have faced the loss of a loved one, did you find this quote to have special resonance for you? What did the author get right about this sentiment? How else would you describe a mother's influence? Does Cora serve such a role for Leni—why and why not? Did your ideas change throughout the book?
10. Leni and Matthew compare their friendship with Sam and Frodo's from *The Lord of the Rings*, but what other couples from literature do you think they'd fit neatly into the roles of ?
11. This is dangerous, she thought, but she couldn't make herself care. All she could think about now was Matthew, and how it had felt when he kissed her, and how much she wanted to kiss him again." (233) Do you recall your own days of young love and that rush of feeling? Do you think the experience is universal?
12. How did the building of Ernt's wall affect you as a reader? Did you find that the construction heightened the suspense—or was it suffocating?
13. Did you see Cora's explosive act of protection coming? What did it feel like to read that scene? As a parent, do you think you'd be capable of the same act, or be able to write such a confessional letter?
14. Did you hold Leni responsible in your mind for any of Matthew's misfortune? Why or why not? How does Leni show her devotion in the end? Did you anticipate the kind of future that is set in motion for them at the close of the book?

15. At the end of the story, Leni ends up back in Alaska—do you think there’s an ultimate place where people belong? How would you know if you got there?

- LitLovers.com

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Hannah takes readers on a journey to Alaska in the 1970s with the Allbright family: damaged Vietnam vet Ernt; his devoted wife, Cora; and their 13-year-old daughter, Leni, the novel’s protagonist. Initially unhappy to leave her Seattle home, Leni soon falls in love with the wilds of remote Kaneq. Leni adjusts to the lack of electricity, running water, and indoor plumbing, but her father’s increasingly erratic and violent behavior is much harder to endure. Leni finds an escape in her books and her one-room school, where she meets Matthew, the only other kid her age in the area. Matthew becomes Leni’s best friend and eventually her first love. But Leni’s father’s irrational hatred of Matthew’s family threatens to keep them apart, and Leni fears her father’s uncontrollable rage could be the death of her and her fragile mother. Though smaller in scope than her previous blockbuster, in this tightly focused drama, Hannah vividly evokes the natural beauty and danger of Alaska and paints a compelling portrait of a family in crisis and a community on the brink of change. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: In addition to the draw of Hannah’s massive popularity, this dark family adventure will be rolled out with an enormous first print run, extensive media coverage, and a major author tour. — Kristine Huntley

Publisher’s Weekly

Hannah’s vivid depiction of a struggling family begins as a young father and POW returns from Vietnam, suffering from PTSD. The Allbright family, barely making ends meet in 1974, moves from Seattle to the untamed wilderness of Kaneq, Alaska, to claim a parcel of land left to Ernt by a slain Army buddy. Together with his wife, Cora, who spurned her middle-class parents to marry him, and their 13-year-old daughter, Leni, who barely remembers the adoring dad who’s become so restless, Ernt is totally unprepared for the rigors of the family’s new home. Soon, his fragile mental health and his relentless abuse of Cora worsen during the long nights of the family’s first winter up north, even as the quirky and steely homesteaders around the Allbrights rally to help them. They intervene by forcing Ernt to leave in the winter to work on the newly started oil pipeline, but the added income and absences from Kaneq fail to fix his intractable paranoia and anger. Meanwhile, Leni finds friendship and love in a neighbor boy, Matthew, who is also a troubled survivor of a shattered family. Hannah skillfully situates the emotional family saga in the events and culture of the late ’70s—gas shortages, Watergate, Ted Bundy, Patty Hearst, and so on. But it’s her tautly drawn characters—Large Marge, Genny, Mad Earl, Tica, Tom—who contribute not only to Leni’s improbable survival but to her salvation amid her family’s tragedy. (Feb.)

School Library Journal

Set in 1974 Alaska, this sweeping tale follows a girl coping with the dangers of domestic violence. Though ill-prepared for the extreme and harsh conditions, 13-year-old Leni and her parents, Ernt and Cora, have to learn how to survive in the unforgiving wild of their new home on the Kenai Peninsula. With the help of the small-knit community of endearing fellow homesteaders, the Allbrights manage to just barely stay afloat. But Ernt, who has never recovered

from the trauma of fighting in the Vietnam War, struggles with the isolation and the interminably dark days of winter. Leni grows up witnessing her father (who is increasingly unable to control his paranoia and jealousy) abuse her beloved mother. Leni's greatest comfort and escape is her schoolmate and neighbor Matthew. Over the years, their friendship evolves into a forbidden romance. Hannah highlights, with vivid description, the natural dangers of Alaska juxtaposed against incongruous violence. VERDICT Give to teens who loved the author's *The Nightingale* and to fans of Jodi Picoult.—Tara Kehoe, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, NC --Tara Kehoe (Reviewed 03/01/2018) (School Library Journal, vol 64, issue 3, p128)

Kirkus Reviews

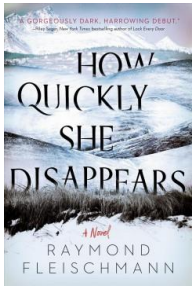
/ Starred Review */* In 1974, a troubled Vietnam vet inherits a house from a fallen comrade and moves his family to Alaska. After years as a prisoner of war, Ernt Allbright returned home to his wife, Cora, and daughter, Leni, a violent, difficult, restless man. The family moved so frequently that 13-year-old Leni went to five schools in four years. But when they move to Alaska, still very wild and sparsely populated, Ernt finds a landscape as raw as he is. As Leni soon realizes, "Everyone up here had two stories: the life before and the life now. If you wanted to pray to a weirdo god or live in a school bus or marry a goose, no one in Alaska was going to say crap to you." There are many great things about this book—one of them is its constant stream of memorably formulated insights about Alaska. Another key example is delivered by Large Marge, a former prosecutor in Washington, D.C., who now runs the general store for the community of around 30 brave souls who live in Kaneq year-round. As she cautions the Allbrights, "Alaska herself can be Sleeping Beauty one minute and a bitch with a sawed-off shotgun the next. There's a saying: Up here you can make one mistake. The second one will kill you." Hannah's (*The Nightingale*, 2015, etc.) follow-up to her series of blockbuster bestsellers will thrill her fans with its combination of Greek tragedy, Romeo and Juliet-like coming-of-age story, and domestic potboiler. She re-creates in magical detail the lives of Alaska's homesteaders in both of the state's seasons (they really only have two) and is just as specific and authentic in her depiction of the spiritual wounds of post-Vietnam America. A tour de force. (Kirkus Reviews, November 15, 2017)

READALIKES



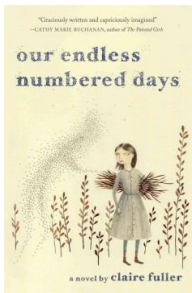
***The Unpassing* by Chia-Chia Lin**

A rural Alaskan family is shattered by an outbreak of meningitis that ends the life of a child, leading a grieving father to commit a devastating fatal error that culminates in a profound revelation.



***How Quickly She Disappears* by Raymond Fleischmann**

A woman whose twin disappeared 30 years earlier is approached in her small Alaskan town by a dangerous man claiming to know what happened to her sister, but requesting from her three specific gifts in exchange for the information.



***Our Endless Numbered Days* by Claire Fuller**

Peggy is eight when her survivalist father tells her that the world has been destroyed and takes her to live in a remote cabin, but years later, her search for the owner of a pair of found boots unwittingly leads her back to civilization.