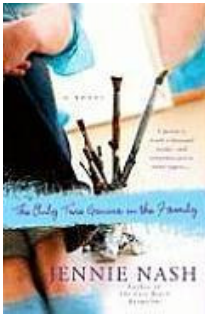


# Maw Books Blog

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## [The Only True Genius in the Family by Jennie Nash](#) [\(And a Giveaway!\)](#)



I loved this book. I really, really did. [The Only True Genius in the Family by Jennie Nash](#) was the perfect read for me. I liked Jennie's [The Last Beach Bungalow](#) ([my book review](#)) but *The Only True Genius in the Family* far surpassed it. I read this book in just two or three sittings. I couldn't put it down. I felt that I related to this book on a very personal level. I understood so much of what the main character Claire felt. But first let's clue you in on what this book is about.

Claire is a commercial food photographer. She is living out her dreams, doing spreads for Oprah and about to begin work on a Martha Stewart cookbook. She has become successful enough to be comfortable with her work and the direction her career is heading. But all that changes with the first line of the book which states, "My dad died at an incredibly inconvenient time and I have no doubt that he planned it that way on purpose."

Her father, Paul, was a legendary landscape photographer. He thrived off of shooting the landscape, so much so that he left his family to resettle out west. Upon his death, there is to be a large retrospective of his work and he's charged his granddaughter, Bailey, Claire's daughter, to be in charge of it.

Bailey, is a natural born artist. A painter. She's just finishing up her MFA with a gallery showing of her own and is about to make huge ripples in the art world. Paul and Bailey were very close because of their artistic talents. Much to Claire's chagrin, Paul always stated that in their family, genius skipped a generation. It was that feeling of inadequacy that Claire fought against her whole life.

Now at her father's death and her daughter's success, Claire loses faith in her own work and begins to feel jealous of her daughter. So much so, that their relationship is threatened. When she's in the studio behind the camera, she can no longer "see." She feels as though she's faking it. Her confidence is gone and her career is in jeopardy. It is when she's going through her father's photographs that she realizes that he wasn't as perfect as he presented himself to be. What she discovers changes the way she feels about him, her daughter, and herself.

I loved this passage of the book as Claire is observing her daughter's confidence:

She was reckless, she was brilliant. I felt, on one hand, that I shouldn't watch, that what she was doing was private, intimate. But on the other hand, I couldn't tear myself away.

The air in the room was charged with something animal and alive. Bailey behaved as if she knew she couldn't make a wrong move. She couldn't pick the wrong color, couldn't put her brush in the wrong spot - and I wanted to be near that kind of faith, that kind of genius, if for no other reason than I might figure out how it was done.

The characters in *The Only True Genius in the Family* were real to me and the sense of place was powerful. It asks the question: what is true genius? Is it natural? It is fought for? Is talent in the genes? And it dives deep into the relationships of fathers, mothers, and daughters.

What was it that I felt so drawn to about this book? Well, for one, it takes place partially in Driggs, Idaho. Although, a town I have never visited, it is my maiden name and indeed a town prominent in our family history as it was founded by early family members. So that was fun.

Second, I'm a photographer. I understood what it's like to get underneath a black cloth of a large format camera, slide in the 4x5 negatives, measure the light, focus, and carefully take your photo. This isn't your snap and go type of photography. It's very methodical and contemplative. Reading this book made me want to dust that camera off, compose some photographs, get in the darkroom, and study the results. Having taken studio photography classes and doing my final project in the studio (with that large format camera) I also understood what it was like for Claire to set up her still life (of food), adjust the lights and compose commercial photographs.

But perhaps, what I related to the most was Claire's sense of inadequacy. [I've talked about this before](#), but sometimes I feel like photography didn't come naturally to me. I fought hard for it. I fought against the equipment, the math, the numbers, the light meter. I always felt like I was the one in the class faking it while everybody else was a natural. Now, I won't lie. I do think I have talent. I have created some wonderful photographs. But to see this fictional character in this book doubt herself while faced with the talent of her daughter was comforting to say the least.

Even if you don't have these feelings, I'm pretty sure you'll love *The Only True Genius in the Family*. The questions that it raises about our doubts, our talents, our potentials, and our relationships is worth the read. And it doesn't hurt that it's beautifully written either. Jennie Nash has talent.

Jennie has agreed to giveaway a signed copy of *The Only True Genius in the Family*. To enter leave a comment on this post that's more than just a "enter me." Respond to the review, the book, the author, or answer the question: what do you think true genius is? Open to U.S. mailing addresses (sorry, I forgot to ask Jennie where she could mail, so playing it safe here). I'll announce the winner in the comments on this post on February 17th.

Stop by tomorrow for an amazing interview with Jennie! I must shamelessly admit that I love the questions I asked and I loved the answers Jennie gave! In the meantime, check

out [my review for \*The Last Beach Bungalow\*](#) as well as [a guest post that Jennie wrote for the Maw Books Blog](#) this past October about how surviving breast cancer has affected her writing.

Jennie Nash [website](#), [blog](#), and [follow on Twitter](#).

*Natasha*