



FAMILY OF
ORIGIN

FAMILY OF
CHOICE

STORIES OF QUEER CHRISTIANS

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION
OR PRIVATE CONSIDERATION

KATIE HAYS + SUSAN A. CHIASSON

FOREWORD

BY PAULA STONE WILLIAMS

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How does Paula’s story lend strength to this book? To learn more about Paula, find her entry in Wikipedia; take a look at her website, paulastonewilliams.com; or read her memoir, *As A Woman: What I Learned About Power, Sex, and Patriarchy After I Transitioned* (Simon & Schuster 2021).

Paula says, “Some of the stories [in this book] do not end as you might hope, but all of them are redemptive” (ix). What does *redemptive* mean to you? How is redemption possible if there’s no “and they lived happily ever after”?

KATIE'S INTRODUCTION

“TELL US THE SHAPE OF YOUR SHALOM”

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Describe your family of origin, and your family of choice. What does one have that the other lacks, and vice versa?

Katie quotes Amanda Drury, saying: “narrating does more than describe; it also constructs...[I]dentity is further developed when one’s narrative is articulated” (11). How does narration construct identity, in your experience?

SUSAN'S INTRODUCTION

“WE'RE LISTENING”

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What are your thoughts about Susan’s qualitative research methodology as described here? (“Qualitative” is in contrast to “quantitative,” where broad populations are surveyed and data are quantified for statistically significant assertions.) How do qualitative research methods add to or subtract from the message of this book?

THE STORIES

(ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS AT THE END OF EACH STORY)



Where did you find points of connection between the narrator's life and your own?

Did you trust that this narrator was telling the truth (or as much of the truth as they could)?

Where in the narrator's story did you find "pivot points" – moments when their story could have gone another way? What were the factors in it going the way it did?

Does this story remind you of any biblical story or character? If so, how?

What surprises or delights you about this story? What saddens or angers you about this story?

Use your imagination to project what might happen next between the narrator and their family of origin.

Choose one sentence, if you can, to represent what you're taking with you from this story. Why that one?

If you were sitting across from the narrator knee to knee, what would you like to say to them, from your heart to theirs ?

Where did you see God in this story?

As you read more of the stories, make notes of similarities and differences between them. How do these signify to you? How do these global thematic ideas change your way of thinking?



SUSAN'S CONCLUSION

"A ROAD MAP WITH A DESTINATION FOR EVERYONE"

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Susan identifies four “challenges” that the stories illuminate: coming to terms with your queer identity (111), deciding to come out (116), coming out to your family of origin (118), and recalibrating family relationships after coming out (127). Whether you’re queer or not, are these challenges familiar to you? Have you, for example, been through a FOO (family of origin) “recalibration” with the birth of a child, say; or the death of a relative?

Susan says these stories point to relative strengths and weaknesses in our families of origin we might not have recognized or evaluated: an ethic of openness vs. bias (121), a record of talking calmly about hard things (122), and a habit of expressing unconditional love (124). What is your own FOO legacy in these areas? What about the family you’re part of now, if you’ve made one of your own? How do you think families get better at these ways of being?

“A mixture of love and hope keeps family members orbiting around each other, and our friends sought balance between protection and connection with [families of origin that were neither affirming nor directly non-affirming]” (131). What resources have you found to help you find the “balance between protection and connection,” especially in relationships that are both important and (emotionally, existentially) dangerous to your wellbeing?

KATIE'S CONCLUSION

"POSSIBILITY IS GOD'S PURVIEW"

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Katie confesses the coauthors’ co-worry about “right discernment of place and privilege” (140). What are the advantages and disadvantages of two straight, cisgender women compiling and reflecting on the stories of queer people and their families?

Katie identifies two strains of “gospel” in the stories: wherever you are, you are not alone; and wherever you are, you won’t be there forever (143 ff.). Who do you know who might need to hear this good news? How can you share it with them?