



The Family Outing: A Memoir by Jessi Hempel
Comstock Township Library, Friday 9/20 at 4 PM

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you finish reading the book? What was your opinion of the book?
2. A big part of the book is the idea of truth - what we remember, what others remember, being true to our stories and ourselves. Did any of this discussion on truth strike a chord with you?
3. While interesting, do you think including the mother's story was a true "coming out" tale or do you think it was included because of the theme of secrets in the book and to make this story about the entire family – not just those with queer identities?
4. Did you find any of the family member's stories relatable?
5. "Respecting it is denying my own history.' In my history, I had a little sister. This feels like truth to me...If the youngest of these three girls was not who I believed her to be, was a boy, then who was I?" (p. 58) What was your reaction to the author's initial struggle to respect her brother's identity in the writing of this book?
6. What did you think about how the dad is outed? Would you have reacted the same as Kat if you were in her shoes?
7. There is a theme of secrets throughout – the things we intentionally hide and those we "forget" to share. Consider when the mother is hospitalized and Jessi only hears about it a few weeks later (p. 149). What are your takeaways from this family dynamic, is it familiar or strange?
8. What did you think about the "ugliest person in the room" exercise? (p. 190) Were you surprised by the variety of reasons people gave about why they perceived Jessi to be "ugly"?
9. What did you think about Jessi's choice to forgive her mom (p. 191) and the evolution of their relationship afterward?
10. The childhood neglect Jessi and her siblings felt creates a distance with their dad and it spurs him to try to repair those relationships. What do you think about his plan/actions to rebuild his relationships with his kids?
11. What did you think about the statistics given in chapter 21 (p. 203) [as of the publication of the Williams Institute study, there are more than 11.3 million LGBT people in the United States including 1.4 million people who identify as trans]? What are your thoughts on the "gay gene theory" (p. 203)?

12. In chapter 21, Abbie Goldberg says: “Many kids don’t want to show the difficult parts of their families to the world.” (p. 204) Are we a society that teaches children from a young age to hide parts of their family life? How does this idea of hiding your family fit within the context of a book entirely focused on sharing all the parts (good and bad) of a family?
13. In chapter 22, we see that Jessi’s dad chose not to come out to his own father. (p. 220) How does this compare to the reasons Evan thinks he doesn’t have to come out to his parents: “He doesn’t feel the need to share a lot of things about himself. It doesn’t even occur to him to come out to our parents, because he hardly ever talks to them.”? (p. 223)
14. When discussing her parent’s divorce with her mother, Jessi posits, “...people exist on a continuum of truth and self-discovery over the course of their lives.” (p. 289) How does this idea connect with you?
15. In the conclusion chapter, Jessi discusses the idea of coming out in terms of self-actualization and that the act of coming out allows us to be seen: “Had we not come out, we would have been lost to one another.” (p. 300) While keeping secrets is one way we become closeted, Evan argues that the things younger generations keep secret are not the same as with previous generations because “they are not secrets from ourselves.” (p. 303) What are your thoughts on these ideas?



If you’re interested, there is more online about the author and the book:

To read:

- ★ **Next Big Idea Club - 5 Key Insights from The Family Outing by Jessi Hempel:**
<https://nextbigideacub.com/magazine/family-outing-memoir-bookbite/39685/>
- ★ **Time Magazine - “My Brother’s Pregnancy and the Making of a New American Family” by Jessi Hempel:** <https://time.com/4475634/trans-man-pregnancy-evan/>
- ★ **Time Magazine - “What Happened When My Entire Family Came Out” by Jessi Hempel:**
<https://time.com/6217552/coming-out-family-truth-jessi-hempel/>

To Listen:

- ★ **Next Big Idea Podcast - Interview with Jessi Hempel on her book (43 min.):**
<https://wonderly.com/shows/the-next-big-idea/episode/6265-the-family-outing-secrets-memory-and-living-authentically/>

To Watch:

- ★ **Today Show TV Spot (5 min.):** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=082ZHiM4h50>
- ★ **South Orange Public Library Interview with Author (55 min.):**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyZU_IyEcVI
- ★ **Commonwealth Club World Affairs California Interview with Author (64 min.):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aTGdf4vcHw>
- ★ **Reed’s Jessi Hempel Interview (20 Min.):** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e7u1_I680Q