

# Picking up the pieces

## A daughter's search for her homeless father

By Hana Medina

AUTHOR AMY HATVANY woke with a start after dreaming she had found her late father emaciated and bedraggled under a tarp on Seattle's Alki Beach. "I had this feeling like I had been searching for him. I woke up with that emotional hangover where you feel like it really happened," she tells *The Connection*. "It was very clear that this was a great idea for a story."

Even though she worked 50 hours a week at a job while also caring for her husband and three kids, it took her only two months to write the first draft of her fourth novel, *Outside the Lines*. "I didn't get a lot of sleep," she laughs.

Since writing her first story at age 7, Hatvany, now 40, has authored five published books and counting. But her often-celebrated knack for capturing emotion almost thwarted her career before it ever began. In college, her first creative-writing professor left her believing that her writing was too emotional, and she nearly threw in the towel. She ultimately graduated with a sociology degree, and it wasn't until a friend encouraged her story idea that she began penning *The Kind of Love That Saves You* (Bantam, 2001).

"I did send that professor my first two [published] novels," laughs Hatvany, a Costco member. "But I didn't do it from a malicious place. I did it from a place of gratitude. There's a quote that says [something like], 'Pay attention to the first criticisms of your work. They're the only thing that's unique



SHERIE STOCKLAND

Amy Hatvany

about what you do, and you need to cultivate it. And that was a really powerful statement for me."

Hatvany doesn't waste time tapping into emotions in *Outside the Lines*. She immediately jolts readers into a panic as her main character, Eden, receives a feared call from a Seattle morgue asking her to identify a body that could be her father.

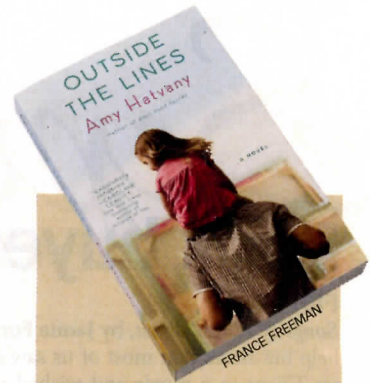
The story is told from the perspectives of both Eden and her artistic, mentally ill father, David, and Hatvany gives a first-person account of battling mental illness while demonstrating how quickly a person can fall to the outskirts of society. David's mental condition ultimately shatters his family and leaves Eden reeling for closure as an adolescent and into adulthood. It isn't until later in life that Eden begins the daunting journey of locating her father, who is rumored to be bouncing between the streets and various mental institutions.

*Outside the Lines* depicts hope, love and the conflict of accepting family members for who they are and who they want (or need) each other to be.

Before the words poured from her fingertips, Hatvany took a few months to volunteer at a program for the homeless and to connect with others struggling with various mental-health issues to understand and sensitively capture these experiences.

Hatvany's background in sociology inspires many of her books, yet *Outside the Lines* holds a personal meaning for her. She says the book is a subconscious letter to her own father. "Writing this was a really cathartic process for me. My father wasn't mentally ill—he wasn't David in any sense of the word—but we had a contentious relationship. He had already passed when I had written the book ... but if he could read it, I think he would feel like, 'My daughter understands me.'"

While pieces of Hatvany's stories are drawn from her personal experiences, all of her books are focused on family conflict. She says the topic helps her achieve her ultimate goal as an author: to relate to her readers. "Family relations are the roots of what shapes us. Everyone has a family—it's a universal experience, and even if you don't have a father who is mentally ill ... we all know what it is to feel desperate, what it is to fear, or grieve, or be happy, or hopeful or let down. Emotions are what connect us. They cross boundaries, they cross continents, they cross all experiences and nationalities. The reason I write is to connect." ☞



LATELY I'VE GIVEN some thought to the books I like and why. I realize that I'm drawn to family dramas. I didn't grow up in a troubled family, but most of us know—or can imagine—what it's like to have family members who can range from quirky to downright challenging. One author who successfully pulls readers into the family situations she creates is Amy Hatvany, author of *Outside the Lines*, this month's Book Buyer's Pick.

After a failed suicide attempt, Eden's father leaves his family and communicates with his daughter only occasionally. When Eden decides to find him, her search leads her to wonder whether he wants to be found at all.

This novel expresses beautifully what anyone who belongs to a family knows: There is a freedom and strength in making peace with the past.

**For more book picks, see page 46.**



FRANCE FREEMAN

Pennie Clark Ianniciello, Costco book buyer

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