

Reviews for Fathom Lines

Like the contour lines on topographic maps which join elevations of similar heights, fathom lines connect unseen regions of similar depth on nautical charts. The title of this complex and absorbing novel of family ties, especially amongst women, hints at hitherto unknown similarities, connections and drama underneath the surface which connect the central family: great grandparents, grandparents, mother and daughter. The novel is full of imagined insight into this complex web of relationships where deep secrets and family trauma are covered up and unspoken until they storm against emotional anchors. Vee, the mother of the young protagonist Lise speaks of her own complicated relationship with her mother, the grandparent of Lise;

...I felt adrift, like she'd pushed me offshore and kept the paddle for herself. How unfair, because what use did she have for a paddle anyway?

Each generation of women in this family seems caught in some kind of emotional web incapable of achieving a satisfactory relationship with one another and besieged by personal crises which seem to roil like stormy water.

This is Erin Bedford's first published novel. Her writing skill has long been recognized from her early school days to her experience at the Humber School for Writers where she won a Certificate of Distinction for her manuscript. She has an incredible mastery of language and character reminiscent of some of Margaret Atwood's style. When Vee comes face-to-face with her long absent and estranged father, she is incapable of understanding the reasons behind his apparent abandonment of his young family. She rails at him as he returns much later in life with an offer of help during a family crisis:

I fling words out in hopes they might catch him under the skin like a barbed hook, in hopes that part of him will tear away to reveal the raw....

Residing in downtown Toronto, Bedford captures the flavour of the city's neighbourhoods as her various characters walk along streets familiar to many residents and visitors, places such as Bloor Street, Allen Gardens, College Street and Bathurst. Her experience of many summers spent in Northern Ontario inform her descriptions of life in Wamish, the fictional northern town which lies at the root of the novel's family's history.

On finishing the novel, which weaves in and out of present and past, the reader will continue thoughtful reflections about family relationships and the fragility of the human condition. There's an almost existential element in the realization that we may never really "know" another person, even those in our own family circle. Looking through old family albums, pictures, and digital images which provide only a limited visual image of our past, we may wonder what these people were really like and perhaps feel like Vee who mourns over old photos of her beloved Claude:

I don't want to remember him as he is in the photographs so static and disconnected. In twenty years when the pictures are brought out, his hair and unfashionable clothes cannot be laughed at. He will not have the chance to outgrow these fickle trends.

This is a highly recommended novel, the first of many, one hopes, for this talented writer.

—Ken Ellis

“Fathom Lines” is the beautifully written story of three generations of women: Didiane, called Didi, married to a man who loves her so much that he leaves her to try and make her happy; Didi’s daughter Verene, who never got over the death of her husband, Claude, and seems to be sinking into dementia; and Verene’s daughter Lise, engaged to a man she doesn’t love. Told from Verene’s and Lise’s points of view, in both past and present, the novel tells the story of mothers and daughters and their search for understanding of themselves and each other.

Fathom lines are sinuous line on a nautical chart joining all points having the same depth of water and thereby indicating the contour of the ocean floor. This novel makes good use of things that are buried: Vee’s box of mementos, Lise’s study of old Toronto, hidden under the new mega-city, and the sorrows of each woman’s life. The author drills down beneath the obvious to the bedrock of the character’s soul. In many ways, “Fathom Lines” reminded me of Margaret Atwood’s “The Robber Bride” in its unflinching exploration of women’s lives.

As noted, the writing is exquisite. The book is well edited and typo free. My only quibble is that I was confused by so many characters all having names that started with V. ...Still, I rate this book five stars and highly recommend it to readers looking for character-driven women’s fiction that goes beyond the ordinary.

—Awesome Indies

I thoroughly enjoyed the story line. I particularly liked that much of the story was Toronto and Ontario based. I could relate to the mother, daughter and sister relationships. Being that I grew up in Toronto, in a family of six girls, I felt compelled to read more. My only criticism is that some of the family names were too similar and I found myself going back in the book. But, overall, I thought it was very well written and made for an enjoyable and easy read.

—Sue

This story of three generations of women really moved me. Their individual lives, the decisions they make and the effects of their decisions on their own lives and others makes very interesting reading. The book is beautifully written and the descriptions of place are so real that I felt like I was there. I first read this book on Kindle and then bought a paper copy to read again and savour.

—Louise Ellis

Such a beautifully written story, I found myself pausing to reread some passages rather than racing on to the end. For me, that's the sign of something truly wonderful. I look forward to Erin Bedford's next book.

—Corrie Adams

I "picked up" this book thinking it to be something of a mystery. It wasn't. It turns out to be a multi generational story. It has wonderful characters and is a wonderful story. I loved the book.

—Ambrose Miles

Fathom - definition- measure used in taking depth soundings / grasp or comprehend...in this book you'll find a use for both meanings of the word. It's an in-depth generational look at mothers, daughters and the line that connects them and the choices and roads taken, that have long lasting effects. Primarily between Lise and Vee, but you'll get glimpses of a lot more.

This is NOT a fluff, page turning, quick read. It's a book that you absorb. Do you know what i mean if i say it's a mmm mmm good, kinda read?

Two quotes struck me with this one: 1- Vee looks in the mirror and says "I am disoriented by my own appearance....I am disoriented by the woman I've become.....
and 2- " Mother to daughter is not a straight line or a perfect circle. We are more. But we are less."

FATHOM LINES will touch your heart and live in your soul.

—Linda Eells

I finished reading Erin Bedford's novel *Fathom Lines* recently and I thought it was excellently written. Other people who have reviewed Erin's novel have compared her to Margaret Atwood, which is certainly high praise, but as *Fathom Lines* is set very firmly in Canada, mainly in Ontario and briefly in Quebec, and chiefly concerns a family and that family's secrets I felt that her writing was more reminiscent of Mordecai Richler.

The key difference between MR's and EB's writing style is the choice of subject. Richler focuses almost exclusively on male relationships in his novels while Bedford's first novel equally focuses on female relationships. This kind of strong focus on believable female characters with unique voices is a welcome addition to the digital shelves, you can find *Fathom Lines* on amazon.ca.

Fathom Lines tells the image-rich story of a family, focusing on the relationship between Lise and her mother Vee. The novel reveals its characters gradually, creating an atmosphere of mystery right from the start. EB's focus on Lise's relationship with Vee and Vee's relationship with her own mother create a back-looking narrative that informs the novel's present.

I don't read much contemporary literature so I don't have a good realm of experience from which to compare EB to her contemporaries. I think, though, that *Fathom Lines* is a great first step in a promising literary career for Erin and an excellent novel in its own right.

—Michael