

Book Review: Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone
By Benjamin Stevenson

Imagine hanging with a close friend, chatting over a couple of cold brews, and your friend starts telling you about a recent experience he had.

And the moment he launches into his narrative, you're hooked. Because it's a really good story, and your friend is a really good storyteller. So much so that you have ignored your previously cold mug of beer to the point where it is now lukewarm.

That's the feeling you get when you start reading Benjamin Stevenson's murder mystery "Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone." It starts with a listing of the 10 Commandments of Detective Fiction, the membership oath of a 1930s secret society of mystery writers that included none other than Agatha Christie, and works seamlessly through murders and plot twists to reach a Sherlock Holmes-type climax.

But the best part of the book is the writing. Stevenson, an award-winning stand-up comedian, clearly understands pacing, sarcasm, and tongue-in-cheek humor. The story is written first person, with the main character and very unlikely protagonist, Ernest Cunningham, as narrator and author. Because he's not only telling us the story, he's writing it at the same time. There are even frequent asides and parenthetical comments where Ernest pauses to speak directly to the reader. It's very informal, and very effective.

Essentially, Ernest is invited to attend a family reunion. But this is no ordinary reunion. Ernest's family is more than casually connected to several murders. And at this reunion, conveniently taking place at a remote, snow-scape mountain resort, Ernest's older brother Michael will be returning to the clan following a three-year prison stay for killing a man.

Complicating matters, and straining relationships, is Ernest, who not only witnessed the murder, he helped put Michael behind bars. There is much relationship drama, and stories within the overall story, starting with a murder that occurs just before Michael's arrival. Gradually, like peeling back the layers of an onion, Stevenson reveals the incidents and life experiences that have brought each family member to this remote location.

Methodically, Ernest – the narrator and Stevenson's alter ego – works through the labyrinth of lies and deceit to uncover the truth, liberally referencing the 10 Commandments of Detective Fiction as he does. That's no small surprise, since Ernest earns a living as a writer of books on how to write books, and the entire story might be subtitled *How to Write Murder Mysteries for Dummies*.

In fact, in the prologue, Stevenson reveals the page numbers in the book where a murder (or two) occurs. I did not fast-forward to check out the highlights, though you could certainly do so. But knowing in advance that a murder (or two) was imminent made it harder to put the book down as I approached each milestone. It literally heightened my anticipation.

"Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone" is a very uniquely written murder mystery. And I think that's what helps it stand out. Because every murder mystery will include a series of murders, followed by clues interspersed through the story, until the protagonist puts together all the pieces to the puzzle. But Stevenson's writing style elevates the book to a higher standard.

I give "Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone" 5 out of 5 stars. You don't have to be a murder mystery aficionado to appreciate it. Anyone who values well-written

fiction with interesting plot twists and captivating characters will enjoy the read. And watch for the sequel, “Everyone on This Train is a Suspect,” scheduled for publication in two weeks (January 30, 2024). I’ll be reviewing that in the near future.