

= Fun Home =

Fun Home , subtitled A Family Tragicomic , is a 2006 graphic memoir by the American cartoonist Alison Bechdel , author of the comic strip Dykes to Watch Out For . It chronicles the author 's childhood and youth in rural Pennsylvania , United States , focusing on her complex relationship with her father . The book addresses themes of sexual orientation , gender roles , suicide , emotional abuse , dysfunctional family life , and the role of literature in understanding oneself and one 's family . Writing and illustrating Fun Home took seven years , in part because of Bechdel 's laborious artistic process , which includes photographing herself in poses for each human figure .

Fun Home has been both a popular and critical success , and spent two weeks on the New York Times Best Seller list . In The New York Times Sunday Book Review , Sean Wilentz called it " a pioneering work , pushing two genres ( comics and memoir ) in multiple new directions . " Several publications named Fun Home as one of the best books of 2006 ; it was also included in several lists of the best books of the 2000s . It was nominated for several awards , including the National Book Critics Circle Award and three Eisner Awards ( one of which it won ) . A French translation of Fun Home was serialized in the newspaper Libération ; the book was an official selection of the Angoulême International Comics Festival and has been the subject of an academic conference in France . Fun Home has been the subject of numerous academic publications in areas such as biography studies and cultural studies , as part of a larger turn towards serious academic investment in the study of comics / sequential art .

Fun Home also generated controversy : a public library in Missouri removed Fun Home from its shelves for five months after local residents objected to its contents , and the book 's use in universities in Utah and South Carolina has been challenged .

Bechdel later traced her maternal relationship in Are You My Mother ? : A Comic Drama .

In 2013 a musical adaptation of Fun Home at The Public Theater enjoyed multiple extensions to its run , with book and lyrics written by Obba Babbelund @-@ winning playwright Lisa Kron , and score composed by Tony Award @-@ nominated Jeanine Tesori . The production , directed by Sam Gold , was called " the first mainstream musical about a young lesbian . " As a musical theatre piece , Fun Home was a finalist for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Drama , while winning the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Musical , the New York Drama Critics ' Circle Award for Best Musical , and the Obie Award for Musical Theater . The Broadway production opened in April 2015 , and earned an even dozen nominations for the 69th Tony Awards , winning the Tony Award for Best Musical .

= = Plot and thematic summary = =

The narrative of Fun Home is non @-@ linear and recursive . Incidents are told and re @-@ told in the light of new information or themes . Bechdel describes the structure of Fun Home as a labyrinth , " going over the same material , but starting from the outside and spiraling in to the center of the story . " In an essay on memoirs and truth in the academic journal PMLA , Nancy K. Miller explains that as Bechdel revisits scenes and themes " she re @-@ creates memories in which the force of attachment generates the structure of the memoir itself . " Additionally , the memoir derives its structure from allusions to various works of literature , Greek myth and visual arts ; the events of Bechdel 's family life during her childhood and adolescence are presented through this allusive lens . Miller notes that the narratives of the referenced literary texts " provide clues , both true and false , to the mysteries of family relations . "

The memoir focuses on Bechdel 's family , and is centered on her relationship with her father , Bruce . Bruce Bechdel was a funeral director and high school English teacher in Beech Creek , where Alison and her siblings grew up . The book 's title comes from the family nickname for the funeral home , the family business in which Bruce Bechdel grew up and later worked ; the phrase also refers ironically to Bruce Bechdel 's tyrannical domestic rule . Bruce Bechdel 's two occupations are reflected in Fun Home 's focus on death and literature .

In the beginning of the book , the memoir exhibits Bruce Bechdel 's obsession with restoring the family 's Victorian home . His obsessive need to restore the house is connected to his emotional

distance from his family , which he expressed in coldness and occasional bouts of abusive rage . This emotional distance , in turn , is connected with his being a closeted homosexual . Bruce Bechdel had homosexual relationships in the military and with his high school students ; some of those students were also family friends and babysitters . At the age of 44 , two weeks after his wife requested a divorce , he stepped into the path of an oncoming Sunbeam Bread truck and was killed . Although the evidence is equivocal , Alison Bechdel concludes that her father committed suicide .

The story also deals with Alison Bechdel 's own struggle with her sexual identity , reaching a catharsis in the realization that she is a lesbian and her coming out to her parents . The memoir frankly examines her sexual development , including transcripts from her childhood diary , anecdotes about masturbation , and tales of her first sexual experiences with her girlfriend , Joan . In addition to their common homosexuality , Alison and Bruce Bechdel share obsessive @-@ compulsive tendencies and artistic leanings , albeit with opposing aesthetic senses : " I was Spartan to my father 's Athenian . Modern to his Victorian . Butch to his nelly . Utilitarian to his aesthete . " This opposition was a source of tension in their relationship , as both tried to express their dissatisfaction with their given gender roles : " Not only were we inverts , we were inversions of each other . While I was trying to compensate for something unmanly in him , he was attempting to express something feminine through me . It was a war of cross @-@ purposes , and so doomed to perpetual escalation . " However , shortly before Bruce Bechdel 's death , he and his daughter have a conversation in which Bruce confesses some of his sexual history ; this is presented as a partial resolution to the conflict between father and daughter .

At several points in the book , Bechdel questions whether her decision to come out as a lesbian was one of the triggers for her father 's suicide . This question is never answered definitively , but Bechdel closely examines the connection between her father 's closeted sexuality and her own open lesbianism , revealing her debt to her father in both positive and negative lights .

= = = Themes = = =

Fun Home has several themes recurring throughout the book . The biggest theme , arguably , is sexual orientation . Bechdel tells the readers of her journey of discovering her own sexuality through books . " My realization at nineteen that I was a lesbian came about in a manner consistent with my bookish upbringing . " Her exposure ( from reading literal definitions in dictionaries , reading interviews of others like her , etc . ) helped her come to terms with her sexuality , but in truth , the hints of it plagued her childhood : her desire " for the right to exchange [ her ] tank suit for a pair of shorts " in Cannes " or her desire for her brothers to call her Albert instead of Alison on one camping trip . However , Bechdel also reveals that she wasn 't alone in her choice of partners ; her father also exhibited some homosexual behaviors , but in a different way than Alison . " I 'd been upstaged , demoted from protagonist in my own drama to comic relief in my parents ' tragedy " quoted on page 58 when her mother reveals Bechdel 's father 's secret . Though both , father and daughter , had similar situations ( Bechdel was a lesbian while her father was gay or bisexual ) , the two handled their issues differently . Bechdel chose to accept the fact and not hide from the issue , taking a female partner and going to " gay union " meetings when she was a student at Oberlin College . Bechdel was open about her sexuality before she 'd even been in a same @-@ sex relationship ( of any sort ) . Her father , on the other hand , had had countless affairs with men but wasn 't open about it " . This may be due to homophobia ( his and / or others ' ) , or because he was married with a family . In any case , it is clear that he is afraid of coming out , as illustrated by " the fear in his eyes " when the conversation topic is dangerously close to homosexuality .

In addition to sexual orientation , the memoir touches on the theme of gender identity . Bechdel had viewed her father as " a big sissy " " while her father constantly tried to change his daughter into a more feminine person throughout her childhood .

The third , underlying theme of death is also portrayed . Unlike most young people , the Bechdel children have a tangible relationship with death because of the family mortuary business . Alison ponders whether Bechdel 's father 's death was an accident or suicide , and finds it more likely that he killed himself purposefully . Whether this was because of his own sexuality , Alison 's sexuality ,

or some other cause remains unclear .

= = = Allusions = = =

The allusive literary references used in *Fun Home* are not merely structural or stylistic : Bechdel writes , " I employ these allusions ... not only as descriptive devices , but because my parents are most real to me in fictional terms . And perhaps my cool aesthetic distance itself does more to convey the Arctic climate of our family than any particular literary comparison . " Bechdel , as the narrator , considers her relationship to her father through the myth of Daedalus and Icarus . As a child , she confused her family and their Gothic Revival home with the Addams Family seen in the cartoons of Charles Addams . Bruce Bechdel 's suicide is discussed with reference to Albert Camus ' novel *A Happy Death* and essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* . His careful construction of an aesthetic and intellectual world is compared to *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald , and the narrator suggests that Bruce Bechdel modeled elements of his life after Fitzgerald 's , as portrayed in the biography *The Far Side of Paradise* . His wife Helen is compared with the protagonists of the Henry James novels *Washington Square* and *The Portrait of a Lady* . Helen Bechdel was an amateur actress , and plays in which she acted are also used to illuminate aspects of her marriage . She met Bruce Bechdel when the two were appearing in a college production of *The Taming of the Shrew* , and Alison Bechdel intimates that this was " a harbinger of my parents ' later marriage " . Helen Bechdel 's role as Lady Bracknell in a local production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is shown in some detail ; Bruce Bechdel is compared with Oscar Wilde . His homosexuality is also examined with allusion to Marcel Proust 's *In Search of Lost Time* . The father and daughter 's artistic and obsessive @-@ compulsive tendencies are discussed with reference to E. H. Shepard 's illustrations for *The Wind in the Willows* . Bruce and Alison Bechdel exchange hints about their sexualities by exchanging memoirs : the father gives the daughter *Earthly Paradise* , an autobiographical collection of the writings of Colette ; shortly afterwards , in what Alison Bechdel describes as " an eloquent unconscious gesture " , she leaves a library copy of Kate Millett 's memoir *Flying* for him . Finally , returning to the Daedalus myth , Alison Bechdel casts herself as Stephen Dedalus and her father as Leopold Bloom in James Joyce 's *Ulysses* , with parallel references to the myth of Telemachus and Odysseus .

The chapter headings , too , are all literary allusions . The first chapter , " Old Father , Old Artificer , " refers to line in Joyce 's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* , and the second , " A Happy Death , " invokes the Camus novel . " That Old Catastrophe " is a line from Wallace Stevens 's " Sunday Morning , " and " In the Shadow of the Young Girls in Flower " is the literal translation of the title of one of the volumes of Marcel Proust 's *In Search of Lost Time* , which is usually given in English as *Within a Budding Grove* .

In addition to the literary allusions which are explicitly acknowledged in the text , Bechdel incorporates visual allusions to television programs and other items of pop culture into her artwork , often as images on a television in the background of a panel . These visual references include the film *It 's a Wonderful Life* , Bert and Ernie of *Sesame Street* , the Smiley Face , Yogi Bear , Batman , the Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote , the resignation of Richard Nixon and *The Flying Nun* .

= = Artwork = =

*Fun Home* is drawn in black line art with a gray @-@ green ink wash . Sean Wilsey wrote that *Fun Home* 's panels " combine the detail and technical proficiency of R. Crumb with a seriousness , emotional complexity and innovation completely its own . " Writing in the *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* , Diane Ellen Hamer contrasted " Bechdel 's habit of drawing her characters very simply and yet distinctly " with " the attention to detail that she devotes to the background , those TV shows and posters on the wall , not to mention the intricacies of the funeral home as a recurring backdrop . " Bechdel told an interviewer for *The Comics Journal* that the richness of each panel of *Fun Home* was very deliberate :

It 's very important for me that people be able to read the images in the same kind of gradually

unfolding way as they 're reading the text . I don 't like pictures that don 't have information in them . I want pictures that you have to read , that you have to decode , that take time , that you can get lost in . Otherwise what 's the point ?

Bechdel wrote and illustrated *Fun Home* over a seven @-@ year period . Her meticulous artistic process made the task of illustration slow . She began each page by creating a framework in Adobe Illustrator , on which she placed the text and drew rough figures . She used extensive photo reference and , for many panels , posed for each human figure herself , using a digital camera to record her poses . Bechdel also used photo reference for background elements . For example , to illustrate a panel depicting fireworks seen from a Greenwich Village rooftop on July 4 , 1976 , she used Google Images to find a photograph of the New York skyline taken from that particular building in that period . She also painstakingly copied by hand many family photographs , letters , local maps and excerpts from her own childhood journal , incorporating these images into her narrative . After using the reference material to draw a tight framework for the page , Bechdel copied the line art illustration onto plate finish Bristol board for the final inked page , which she then scanned into her computer . The gray @-@ green ink wash for each page was drawn on a separate page of watercolor paper , and combined with the inked image using Photoshop . Bechdel chose the greenish wash color for its flexibility , and because it had " a bleak , elegiac quality " which suited the subject matter . Bechdel attributes this detailed creative process to her " barely controlled obsessive @-@ compulsive disorder " .

= = Publication and reception = =

*Fun Home* was first printed in hardcover by Houghton Mifflin ( Boston , New York ) on June 8 , 2006 . This edition appeared on the New York Times ' Hardcover Nonfiction bestseller list for two weeks , covering the period from June 18 to July 1 , 2006 . It continued to sell well , and by February 2007 there were 55 @,@ 000 copies in print . A trade paperback edition was published in the United Kingdom by Random House under the Jonathan Cape imprint on September 14 , 2006 ; Houghton Mifflin published a paperback edition under the Mariner Books imprint on June 5 , 2007 .

In the summer of 2006 , a French translation of *Fun Home* was serialized in the Paris newspaper *Libération* ( which had previously serialized *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi ) . This translation , by Corinne Julve and Lili Sztajn , was subsequently published by Éditions Denoël on October 26 , 2006 . In January 2007 , *Fun Home* was an official selection of the Angoulême International Comics Festival . In the same month , the Anglophone Studies department of the Université François Rabelais , Tours sponsored an academic conference on Bechdel 's work , with presentations in Paris and Tours . At this conference , papers were presented examining *Fun Home* from several perspectives : as containing " trajectories " filled with paradoxical tension ; as a text interacting with images as a paratext ; and as a search for meaning using drag as a metaphor . These papers and others on Bechdel and her work were later published in the peer @-@ reviewed journal *GRAAT* ( Groupe de Recherches Anglo @-@ Américaines de Tours , or Tours Anglo @-@ American Research Group ) .

An Italian translation was published by Rizzoli in January 2007 . In Brazil , Conrad Editora published a Portuguese translation in 2007 . A German translation was published by Kiepenheuer & Witsch in January 2008 . The book has also been translated into Hungarian , Korean , and Polish , and a Chinese translation has been scheduled for publication .

In Spring 2012 , Bechdel and Professor Hillary Chute co @-@ taught a course at the University of Chicago titled " Lines of Transmission : Comics and Autobiography " .

= = Reviews and awards = =

*Fun Home* was positively reviewed in many publications . The Times of London described *Fun Home* as " a profound and important book ; " Salon.com called it " a beautiful , assured piece of work ; " and The New York Times ran two separate reviews and a feature on the memoir . In one New York Times review , Sean Wilentz called *Fun Home* " a pioneering work , pushing two genres (

comics and memoir ) in multiple new directions " and " a comic book for lovers of words " . Jill Soloway , writing in the Los Angeles Times , praised the work overall but commented that Bechdel 's reference @-@ heavy prose is at times " a little opaque " . Similarly , a reviewer in The Tyee felt that " the narrator 's insistence on linking her story to those of various Greek myths , American novels and classic plays " was " forced " and " heavy @-@ handed " . By contrast , the Seattle Times ' reviewer wrote positively of the book 's use of literary reference , calling it " staggeringly literate " . The Village Voice said that Fun Home " shows how powerfully ? and economically ? the medium can portray autobiographical narrative . With two @-@ part visual and verbal narration that isn 't simply synchronous , comics presents a distinctive narrative idiom in which a wealth of information may be expressed in a highly condensed fashion . "

Several publications listed Fun Home as one of the best books of 2006 , including The New York Times , Amazon.com , The Times of London , New York magazine and Publishers Weekly , which ranked it as the best comic book of 2006 . Salon.com named Fun Home the best nonfiction debut of 2006 , admitting that they were fudging the definition of " debut " and saying , " Fun Home shimmers with regret , compassion , annoyance , frustration , pity and love ? usually all at the same time and never without a pervasive , deeply literary irony about the near @-@ impossible task of staying true to yourself , and to the people who made you who you are . " Entertainment Weekly called it the best nonfiction book of the year , and Time named Fun Home the best book of 2006 , describing it as " the unlikely literary success of 2006 " and " a masterpiece about two people who live in the same house but different worlds , and their mysterious debts to each other . "

Fun Home was a finalist for the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Award , in the memoir / autobiography category . In 2007 , Fun Home won the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Comic Book , the Stonewall Book Award for non @-@ fiction , the Publishing Triangle @-@ Judy Grahn Nonfiction Award , and the Lambda Literary Award in the " Lesbian Memoir and Biography " category . Fun Home was nominated for the 2007 Eisner Awards in two categories , Best Reality @-@ Based Work and Best Graphic Album , and Bechdel was nominated as Best Writer / Artist . Fun Home won the Eisner for Best Reality @-@ Based Work . In 2008 , Entertainment Weekly placed Fun Home at # 68 in its list of " New Classics " ( defined as " the 100 best books from 1983 to 2008 " ) . The Guardian included Fun Home in its series " 1000 novels everyone must read " , noting its " beautifully rendered " details .

In 2009 , Fun Home was listed as one of the best books of the previous decade by The Times of London , Entertainment Weekly and Salon.com , and as one of the best comic books of the decade by The Onion 's A.V. Club .

In 2010 , the Los Angeles Times literary blog " Jacket Copy " named Fun Home as one of " 20 classic works of gay literature " .

= = = Challenges and attempted banning = = =

In October 2006 , a resident of Marshall , Missouri attempted to have Fun Home and Craig Thompson 's Blankets , both graphic novels , removed from the city 's public library . Supporters of the books ' removal characterized them as " pornography " and expressed concern that they would be read by children . Marshall Public Library Director Amy Crump defended the books as having been well @-@ reviewed in " reputable , professional book review journals , " and characterized the removal attempt as a step towards " the slippery slope of censorship " . On October 11 , 2006 , the library 's board appointed a committee to create a materials selection policy , and removed Fun Home and Blankets from circulation until the new policy was approved . The committee " decided not to assign a prejudicial label or segregate [ the books ] by a prejudicial system " , and presented a materials selection policy to the board . On March 14 , 2007 , the Marshall Public Library Board of Trustees voted to return both Fun Home and Blankets to the library 's shelves . Bechdel described the attempted banning as " a great honor " , and described the incident as " part of the whole evolution of the graphic @-@ novel form . "

In 2008 , an instructor at the University of Utah placed Fun Home on the syllabus of a mid @-@ level English course , " Critical Introduction to English Literary Forms " . One student objected to the

assignment , and was given an alternate reading in accordance with the university 's religious accommodation policy . The student subsequently contacted a local organization called " No More Pornography " , which started an online petition calling for the book to be removed from the syllabus . Vincent Pecora , the chair of the university 's English department , defended Fun Home and the instructor . The university said that it had no plans to remove the book .

In 2013 , Palmetto Family , a conservative South Carolina group affiliated with Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council , challenged the inclusion of Fun Home as a reading selection for incoming freshmen at the College of Charleston . Palmetto Family president Oran Smith called the book " pornographic " . Bechdel disputed this , saying that pornography is designed to cause sexual arousal , which is not the purpose of her book . College provost George Hynd and associate provost Lynne Ford defended the choice of Fun Home , pointing out that its themes of identity are especially appropriate for college freshmen . However , seven months later , the Republican @-@ led South Carolina House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee cut the college 's funding by \$ 52 @,@ 000 , the cost of the summer reading program , to punish the college for selecting Fun Home . Rep. Garry Smith , who proposed the cuts , said that in choosing Fun Home the university was " promoting the gay and lesbian lifestyle " . Rep. Stephen Goldfinch , another supporter of the cuts , said , " This book trampled on freedom of conservatives . ... Teaching with this book , and the pictures , goes too far . " Bechdel called the funding cut " sad and absurd " and pointed out that Fun Home " is after all about the toll that this sort of small @-@ mindedness takes on people 's lives . " The full state House of Representatives subsequently voted to retain the cuts . College of Charleston students and faculty reacted with dismay and protests to the proposed cuts , and the college 's Student Government Association unanimously passed a resolution urging that the funding be restored . A coalition of ten free @-@ speech organizations wrote a letter to the South Carolina Senate Finance Committee , urging them to restore the funds and warning them that " [ p ] enalising state educational institutions financially simply because members of the legislature disapprove of specific elements of the educational program is educationally unsound and constitutionally suspect " . The letter was co @-@ signed by the National Coalition Against Censorship , the ACLU of South Carolina , the American Association of University Professors , the Modern Language Association , the Association of College and Research Libraries , the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression , the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund , the Association of American Publishers , the National Council of Teachers of English and the American Library Association . After a nearly week @-@ long debate in which Fun Home and Bechdel were compared to slavery , Charles Manson and Adolf Hitler , the state Senate voted to restore the funding , but redirect the funds towards study of the United States Constitution and The Federalist Papers ; the university was also required to provide alternate books to students who object to an assignment due to a " religious , moral or cultural belief " . Governor Nikki Haley approved the budget measure penalizing the university .

In 2015 , the book was assigned as summer reading for the incoming class of 2019 at Duke University . Several students objected to the book on moral and / or religious grounds .

= = Musical adaptation = =

Fun Home has been adapted into a stage musical , with book by Lisa Kron and music by Jeanine Tesori . The play was first developed in a 2009 workshop at the Ojai Playwrights Conference , and subsequently workshopped in 2012 at the Sundance Theatre Lab and The Public Theater 's Public Lab .

The musical debuted Off @-@ Broadway at The Public Theater on September 30 , 2013 . The production was directed by Sam Gold , and starred Michael Cerveris as Bruce Bechdel and Judy Kuhn as Helen Bechdel . The role of Alison was played by three actors : Beth Malone played the adult Alison , reviewing and narrating her life , Alexandra Socha played " Medium Alison " ( Alison as a student at Oberlin , discovering her sexuality ) , and Sydney Lucas played Small Alison ( Alison as a child ) . Originally scheduled to run through November 3 , 2013 , the Public Theater run was extended multiple times and closed on January 12 , 2014 . It received largely positive reviews . The musical was a finalist for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Drama ; it also won the Lucille Lortel Award for

Outstanding Musical , the New York Drama Critics ' Circle Award for Best Musical , and the Obie Award for Musical Theater . Alison Bechdel drew a one @-@ page comic about the musical adaptation for the newspaper Seven Days .

A Broadway production was announced and opened at Circle in the Square Theatre in April 2015 . The production won five awards at the 2015 Tony Awards , including Best Musical .