MARY BETH LATHAM HAS BUILT HER LIFE AROUND HER FAMILY, AROUND CARING FOR HER THREE TEENAGE CHILDREN AND PRESERVING THE RITUALS OF THEIR DAILY LIFE. WHEN ONE OF HER SONS BECOMES DEPRESSED, MARY BETH FOCUSES ON HIM, ONLY TO BE BLINDSIDED BY A SHOCKING ACT OF VIOLENCE. WHAT HAPPENS AFTERWARD IS A TESTAMENT TO THE POWER OF A WOMAN’S LOVE AND DETERMINATION, AND TO THE INVISIBLE LINES OF HOPE AND HEALING THAT CONNECT ONE HUMAN BEING TO ANOTHER. ULTIMATELY, AS RENDERED IN ANNA QUINDLEN’S MESMERIZING PROSE, EVERY LAST ONE IS A NOVEL ABOUT FACING EVERY LAST ONE OF THE THINGS WE FEAR THE MOST, ABOUT FINDING WAYS TO NAVIGATE A ROAD WE NEVER INTENDED TO TRAVEL.

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Amazon.com Review

An Interview with Author Anna Quindlen
Q: *Every Last One* is arguably your darkest novel since *Black and Blue* in 1998. What made you want to write about tragedy striking an ordinary family? Or was it a theme that first intrigued you?

A: For a long time I’ve been thinking about illusions of security and control, especially in terms of motherhood. We think that if we do the right things, provide the right kind of care and oversight, we can keep our children safe from any perils. I suspect that’s at the heart of the epidemic of so-called helicopter parenting we see today. But it’s completely illusory. Sure, you can teach your teenager to drive carefully, but what difference does that make when a drunk driver roars through a stop sign? That sense of randomness, of the contrast between the care that parenthood requires and the dangers lurking in the world, sometimes right under our noses, is what I chose to explore here. I also wanted to illuminate the ways in which small events in our lives can combine to create unexpected results. I tried to make that clear through a combination of the details that make up the bedrock of a happy family life, and the occasional suggestion that the bedrock had cracks within it. It required a kind of subtlety and control that I haven’t needed quite so much in my other novels.

Q: What is it like to write about the devastating events like those encountered by the characters in *Every Last One*? Was your day to day experience of writing this novel different from your last novel, *Rise and Shine*? What was the biggest challenge for you, in writing *Every Last One*?

A: I think everyone assumes I was in a funk during the creation of this novel, but it just wasn’t so. The explanation for that lies, I think, in the narrator, Mary Beth Latham. My experience as a novelist—this is my sixth—is that once you’ve nailed your protagonist, those around her come to life. And at some level she becomes your reason for being. I resonated with Mary Beth right away, felt that I knew her, which of course was critical since the book is written in the first person and is really her story. Most of the challenges were about how to make her real. It’s hard to write a novel about motherhood without creating either a plaster saint or a punching bag. I’m sick and tired of both those ways of looking at the very difficult, joyful and complicated task on which I’ve personally been laboring for the last quarter-century. Mary Beth is an ordinary woman, involved and distracted and smart and unaware, all of those things that simultaneously make up human behavior. That’s what I was after. And it’s what made me able to live in the world of this book, because I was living on her shoulder.

Q: Motherhood is a central theme of many of your books. Why do you think the subject has held your interest, over the years?

A: I once wrote that reading makes us feel less alone. It’s why I love it so. But writing, if we touch a chord in others, can make both the writer and readers feel less alone, feel connected to others like themselves. My life experience, and thus my work, is often a reflection of being female in America. And while we’ve expanded expectations and opportunities enormously over my lifetime, there is still a kind of unique loneliness to childrearing for women. We so often do it in isolation. Add to that the fact that in our competitive, perfectionist culture, in which the price women are required to pay for freedom still seems to be martyrdom, almost everyone lies about motherhood. Part of that lying is loyalty—I can’t let on that my kid is the only one on the playground who can’t read or play the piano—and part of it is self-protection, since we’ve made hyper motherhood a measure of female success. The preferred answer to the question “How are you?” is always “Fine”, and the answer to the question “How are the kids?” is supposed to be “Great!” That’s true even if the accurate answers would be “terrible” and “a mess.” I think that produces its own kind of desperation, especially for women, who yearn to be emotionally open. Thank God for good girlfriends. That’s a theme in this book as well.

Q: *Every Last One* raises many questions about parenting—when to micromanage, when to punish, and when to let go. In your opinion, is Mary Beth a good mother?
A: I think Mary Beth is a wonderful mother, sensitive, attentive and loving. But the whole point of this book is that sometimes that’s not enough. There are a million moving parts to raising kids, and you can’t always anticipate them all, especially when the outside world, other people, play such a huge role in their lives as they grow older. With independence there is one kind of pitfall; with overprotection, there is another. And sometimes you do everything right and something bad just happens. It’s as simple, and as scary, as that.

Of course, when things go wrong, it’s still the mother who gets blamed. Where was she? What was she thinking? I wanted to look at that phenomenon in this novel, too. I’ve been distressed at how many people immediately concluded that Mary Beth was at fault in the events of the book. But I wasn’t surprised. Despite the increased role of fathers in our society, there’s still a sense that motherhood is the big fail if anything goes wrong. Yet it’s independence that is the ultimate success for your kids. If your goal is to build strong people from the ground up, the only way to do that is to give them enough rope to sometimes make their own mistakes. That’s a big theme in the novel, balancing oversight and independence.

I do think this sort of oversight is more frequently the purview of women. I used to say that my editorial direction on “Life in the 30s” was to write about what my friends and I were discussing on the phone. And then I would add, “If my husband had to write a column based on his phone calls…” I never got to finish that sentence. Every woman in the audience would bust up. It was assumed that women were in the business of emotional deconstruction, and men weren’t. Sometimes it means that we’re more engaged in certain aspects of our children’s lives. Sometimes it means, as Glen says of Mary Beth in Every Last One, that we’re way over involved.

**Amazon Exclusive: An Essay by Anna Quindlen**

The best preparation I could have had for a life as a novelist was life as a newspaper reporter. At a time when more impressionistic renderings of events were beginning to creep into the news pages, I learned to look always for the telling detail: the neon sign in the club window, the striped towel on the deserted beach. I learned to distinguish between those details that simply existed and those that revealed. Those telling details are the essence of fiction that feels real. The command of those details explains why Charles Dickens, a onetime reporter, has a byline for the ages.

I learned, from decades of writing down their words verbatim in notebooks, how real people talk. I learned that syntax and rhythm were almost as individual as a fingerprint, and that one quotation, precisely transcribed and intentionally untidied, could delineate a character in a way that pages of exposition never could. And I learned to make every word count. All those years of being given 1,200 words, of having the 1,200 pared to 900 at 3 o’clock: it teaches you to make the distinction between what is necessary and what is simply you in love with the sound of your own voice. The most important thing I ever do from an editing perspective is cut. I learned how to do that in newsrooms, where cutting is commonplace, swift, and draconian.

That’s where I learned about writer’s block, too. People have writer’s block not because they can’t write, but because they despair of writing eloquently. That’s not the way it works, and one of the best places to learn that is a newspaper, which in its instant obsolescence is infinitely forgiving. Jacques Barzun once wrote: “Convince yourself that you are working in clay, not marble, on paper, not eternal bronze: let that first sentence be as stupid as it wishes. No one will rush out and print it as it stands.” Journalism is the professional embodiment of that soothing sentiment.

Of course, it is also the professional embodiment of fact-finding, and that, more than anything else, is why the notion of a journalist who is also a novelist perplexes readers. “I could never make it up,” one of the very best reporters I’ve ever known said to me. But that notion of untrammeled invention becomes illusory after a while. If you manage to build characters from the ground up carefully, make them really real, your ability to invent decreases as their verisimilitude grows. Certain people will only behave in certain ways; certain behaviors will only lead to certain other behaviors. The entire range of possible events decreases as characters choose one road, not another. Plot...
is like a perspective drawing, its possible permutations growing narrower and narrower, until it reaches a fixed point in the distance. That point is the ending. Life is like that. Fiction is like life, at least if it is good. And I know life. I learned it as a newspaper reporter, and now I reflect that education as a novelist. --Anna Quindlen

Product Description

BONUS: This edition contains an Every Last Onediscussion guide and an excerpt from Anna Quindlen's Blessings.

Mary Beth Latham has built her life around her family, around caring for her three teenage children and preserving the rituals of their daily life. When one of her sons becomes depressed, Mary Beth focuses on him, only to be blindsided by a shocking act of violence. What happens afterward is a testament to the power of a woman’s love and determination, and to the invisible lines of hope and healing that connect one human being to another. Ultimately, as rendered in Anna Quindlen’s mesmerizing prose, Every Last One is a novel about facing every last one of the things we fear the most, about finding ways to navigate a road we never intended to travel.

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