

A Face in Every Window Short Guide

A Face in Every Window by Han Nolan

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Contents

A Face in Every Window Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	3
About the Author.....	4
Setting.....	6
Social Sensitivity.....	8
Literary Qualities.....	10
Themes and Characters.....	12
Topics for Discussion.....	16
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	17
For Further Reference.....	18
Related Titles/Adaptations.....	19
Copyright Information.....	20

Overview

James Patrick "JP" O'Brien copes with his parents' weaknesses after his Grandma Mary dies and the O'Briens move from the city to a rural farmhouse. JP feels that his life is out of control. He resents people who his mother befriends and welcomes into the family's new home. JP thinks that she is trying to replace him and his mentally handicapped father. He questions his purpose and his relationships with others. His experiences transform him into a more loving and tolerant person who realizes that he cannot control life but can accept his reactions to change.

About the Author

Family is an important component of Han Nolan's life. Although she was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on August 25, 1956, Helen "Han" Walker Nolan has lived the majority of her life in northern states.

Nolan's parents, attorney James Walker and Eileen Walker, moved their five children from Alabama to the New York City area.

They often visited cousins in Dothan, Alabama, who enchanted Nolan with their extended southern storytelling sessions characterized by humor and drama. Her experiences in contrasting regions shaped her literary depictions of people and places.

Because one of her sisters could not pronounce the name Helen, Nolan was called Han by her family. The Walkers frequently moved, helping Nolan learn to adjust and befriend people. Her parents encouraged their children to embrace artistic endeavors, especially reading literature. Among Nolan's childhood favorites, Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* inspired her to write in a journal and fantasize about becoming a spy. That children's book set Nolan on the path to becoming an author. Journaling became a lifelong pursuit which Nolan credits for advancing her writing skills. Other books which profoundly affected her discussed the Holocaust, which she later wrote about when she was an adult.

As a child, Nolan told her family tales then recorded her stories on paper when she mastered handwriting techniques. Ironically, despite her vigorous imagination, Nolan found elementary school frustrating because she was held back a year because of difficulties paying attention in class. As a result, she thought she was stupid. At that time, no one realized that food allergies were the cause of her hyperactivity—only as an adult was Nolan accurately diagnosed. In junior high school, Nolan discovered her passion for dancing. The discipline necessary to excel at that art improved Nolan's attention span and helped her become happier as a teenager.

After high school graduation, Nolan decided to major in dance education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

She attended classes in science, education, and English in addition to her physical education curriculum. Nolan received a bachelor's of science degree in 1979. Next, she enrolled in graduate studies at the Ohio State University where she met doctoral student Brian Nolan, whom she married in 1981, the same year she completed a master's degree in ballet and modern dance.

She then taught dance until 1984. The couple later adopted two daughters who influenced Nolan's fiction.

The Nolans moved to Bucks County, Pennsylvania, then Connecticut. Deciding to stay home to raise her children, Nolan considered writing fiction for young adults to earn



money. She had taken courses in creative writing and realized few writers achieved financial success. Nolan confided her dream to her husband who purchased a guide to fiction markets. Consulting writer's texts to master techniques, she began submitting her work, but publishers expressed no interest. Nolan frequently drove a twohour round trip to meet with her writer's group.

Her first book, *If I Die Before I Wake*, came about when a character in a mystery manuscript insisted on becoming the protagonist of a Holocaust-themed novel. Her second novel, *Send Me Down a Miracle*, was less controversial and based on memories of Nolan's summer trips to Alabama. About this time, the Nolans moved to Hoover, a Birmingham suburb, which reinforced her sense of southern culture and characterization. In 1996, *Send Me down a Miracle* was nominated for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature. Nolan's adopted daughters influenced her third novel, *Dancing on the Edge*. She was concerned about the issue of children and identity. Nolan realized that many teenagers, whether adopted or natural, question how they fit into their families.

Nolan's books have received numerous honors, including citations from the American Library Association and New York Public Library. Nolan made literary history by becoming the first author nominated in two consecutive years for the National Book Award. In 1997, she enjoyed the Manhattan ceremony, where she met her editor for the first time in person and her literary hero Newbery-winner Katharine Paterson. By her plate, Nolan set a pen that her writer's group had given her as a good-luck charm.

Nolan especially likes writing for young adults because they are becoming autonomous individuals who might consider her novels as a means to privately contemplate issues they might be unable to discuss with family and friends. Nolan was the writer-in-residence for the children's literature graduate program at Hollins University in 2002.

Setting

JP is disoriented by his forced relocation from one home to another. His first house in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, nurtures him for the first fourteen years of his life. Owned by his Grandma Mary, the cheerful yellow house is not only a shelter for JP and his parents but also inspires his creativity and intellect. JP plays games with his friends in the neighborhood or on the Saint Ignatius school's basketball court. He delights in the creek that flows nearby, where he can swim and fish, picnic, and observe animals and plants, or reflect on his purpose and ambitions. JP compares the creek to an "arm gathering and caressing our tired homes" and declares it a "paradise." Sometimes, though, the creek poses dangers, such as when JP found his father soaking wet after teenagers tricked him into submerging himself by saying it was a baptism.

Grandma Mary kept the house tidy. Everything had a place. After her death, the house resembles a disaster area. Food is scattered across counters, in drawers, and on the floor because Papa is trying to make a flying saucer. This messiness represents how the O'Brien household is falling apart psychologically. JP's mother's solution is to sell the house because she cannot stand to live there any longer. Erin, JP's mother, explains that Grandma Mary's house is a haven and safe place where she and Papa could live like children and not be forced to mature.

JP resents her decision. He wants to stay where he has so many pleasant memories and is angry when the house's exterior is repainted from the yellow that Grandma Mary preferred to white in order to please the real estate agent and potential buyers.

Mary's stencils are also covered, obliterating JP's history. During this traumatic time, JP often retreats to his best friend Tim Seeley's house, which is a sanctuary. Later, that home becomes a hostile setting which causes JP to realize that people often act contrarily to his perceptions.

The farmhouse in New Hope, Pennsylvania, offers the O'Briens a new beginning.

Described by Jerusha as metaphorically being an incubator, the farmhouse is located in a country atmosphere where the characters can safely wander and interact. The lifestyle is casual, and people sleep in sleeping bags and on couches. JP selects an attic room where he can keep his microscope, nests, and other treasures. He is upset when Bobbi chooses the other attic bedroom and invades his privacy. JP does not like to share his bathroom or belongings with the other residents whom he considers interlopers. After Bobbi sleeps in his room one night, JP realizes he loves her and decorates his room with photographs he took of Bobbi and stocks items he thinks will please her such as soft drinks. He rips his room apart when she rejects him.

Larry's cabin provides characters a retreat from the main house. After a fight with Larry when JP tries to move into the cabin, but Pap, Jerusha, and the others join him. The cabin is the center of creativity.



Larry builds a table, which he hopes to give to his parents to prove that he is worthy.

Jerusha exhibits her musical talents in the cabin by playing her cello. Harold recites his poetry. The yard and woods also inspire characters' imaginations. They plant gardens and ponder their identities and futures.

JP finds other settings he once considered friendly, or at least benign, such as school and the train station, suddenly hostile. An emotionally overwhelmed JP rushes out of school without permission. He assertively confronts Dr. Mike at the train station, even considering pushing him in front of a train. The train then helps JP escape from what he considers an intolerable situation to runaway to where he thinks he will find peace and acceptance. Instead, JP sees peeling paint, sagging steps, and discarded junk and realizes he belongs in New Hope. The concluding settings in an airplane, taxi, and hospital deliver JP to resolution with his mother and himself as they attain maturity.

Social Sensitivity

Nolan intends her novels to be thoughtprovoking for readers who might be unfamiliar with the characters' conflicts. In this book, she treats people with mental illness respectfully. She develops Pap's character to show that he is a loving, kind, capable person even if he is not fully competent.

Pap's mental deficiencies do not make him a person that any of the other characters are afraid of or frightened by his actions. Instead, they feel protective toward Pap and want to comfort him and make his life easier. JP insists that people respect Pap's need to have the nativity on the roof or wherever he wants it placed. He also respects Pap's need to keep some of Grandma Mary's items safely hidden.

Similarly, the elderly are considered valuable members of the community. According to JP, the characters revere Grandma Mary as the family's matriarch both when she is alive and deceased. They celebrate her memory by preparing her recipes, saving some of her belongings, and remembering her. Youthful characters are not dismissed or ignored. The teenagers living in the O'Brien's house are treated equally and permitted to pursue their interests without rigid rules or restrictions. The environment is among the social issues that JP and other characters support, wearing rain forest shirts and cultivating gardens. The characters value education at all levels, from Pap's classes to Jerusha's college curricula, as a means of self-improvement.

Responsibility and accountability for behavior are stressed. Dr. Mike is shown to be fickle when he abandons Erin after she becomes pregnant as a result of their affair.

He exhibits a lack of respect for Pap, JP, and the other residents. Dr. Mike also hints of elitism and a sense of superiority over people he considers his inferiors.

For the most part, Nolan's characters exhibit tolerance for people's differences and discourage disrespectful behavior. Those that demean or ostracize people for perceived weaknesses are shown to be the characters who are actually flawed. Members of the O'Brien household demonstrate acceptance of different cultures and sexual orientations such as those expressed in Harold and Larry and Ben. Abusive situations are not permitted. The O'Brien home provides a sanctuary for anyone fleeing from a dangerous situation (such as Bobbi) or seeking a happier life (such as Colleen).

Family is described as being many possible combinations of people. Regardless of who and how they choose to live, Nolan's characters emphasize the need to respect the families that people choose to form.

Parenting is an important aspect of families. While JP's parents may not seem traditional, they are essential to his well being.

Sometimes he is ashamed of them or angered by their shortcomings, but JP realizes that his parents unconditionally love and accept him. He matures and learns not to



criticize them or others who he feels have betrayed him. Although his mother probably broke her marriage vows and conceived an illegitimate child, JP forgives her and delights in the infant Mary.

Literary Qualities

Nolan's writing tends to present complex psychological layers for readers to explore and contemplate. JP narrates his experiences during two years after his beloved Grandma Mary dies. By choosing to write her novel in first person, Nolan focuses on one character's perceptions of the chaos the death sparks. JP is a biased narrator. He derogatorily calls Dr. Morris Dr. Mike to express his contempt for him. Sometimes JP is more clichéd than profound to emphasize his immaturity and dismay at the lack of control he has over fate and people.

Intensely grieving, he is upset by changes, mainly initiated by his chronically ill mother, that are altering the way life was with Grandma Mary. Through language and imagery, Nolan shows how JP's point of view gradually shifts from being tinged by his depressed bitterness to accepting his and others' flaws and learning to love and be loved.

Seeming to appeal directly to readers, the characters' voices both reveal and conceal essential elements of their personalities. JP often isolates himself because of his anger and confusion. Some characters speak frankly, while others keep secrets which are gradually exposed. Some dialogue seems confessional. Awareness of self-identity is a phase all of the characters undergo as they relate to each other. They also develop a sense of their purpose and position in life.

As a result, some passages seem almost too honest and self-conscious. Dialogue occasionally resembles therapeutic sessions.

Nolan's writing excels at presenting reality through eccentric characters and absurd situations. She presents readers with visual scenes such as a nativity on a rooftop. Her sensory details of noises, smells, tastes, sights, and textures enhances dialogue. Nolan uses humor, albeit often dark, to lighten serious tones. Her reference to a Harpo Marx quotation emphasizes the characters' awareness of frivolity. Scenes in which characters express empathy, tolerance, and understanding also establish mood. Even though New Hope, Pennsylvania, is an actual place, that community's name is a symbolically optimistic setting for this novel about rebirth and redemption as characters metamorphose.

Nolan's metaphorical use of windows in her title suggests that readers are glimpsing into the private world of her characters. She uses other literary images to suggest how her characters are feeling. For example, the hole in Erin's heart symbolizes Erin's emotional emptiness. When JP unravels the sweater that his grandmother made him, she responds with sadness that he has chosen to destroy something that she worked so long to make him. His action hints of how he unconsciously feels his environment is fragile and subject to becoming undone. The yarn could represent his unhappy psyche, which needs to be given structure to heal. The photographs JP takes document how he perceives the world, not how it really is—until he is ready for the truth—such as Bobbi's emotional reactions to her father, not to JP.



This novel contains fairy-tale imagery.

Erin is like Snow White surrounded by dwarves with unique qualities. Or she could be Cinderella, discovering her true prince in her backyard. Unfortunately, she could not fill Mary's shoes. Mary is depicted as a fairy godmother. Colleen's love interest is described as a leprechaun. The group's devotion to specific pieces of poetry, music, and art provides Nolan with alternate ways to reveal the characters. Nature is an important literary element. JP stands in the creek by his Philadelphia home, feeling as if it has become a part of him. Erin vows to remain outside because so much of her life has occurred in hospitals. And Pap communicates well with plants and animals who do not comprehend that he is mentally unsound.

Themes and Characters

Family, friendship, and tolerance are the predominant themes of this novel. Teenage narrator James Patrick "JP" O'Brien reveals many dimensions of his personality as he relates how his family changed during the two years following his grandmother's unexpected death. JP belongs to an unusual family. He is the only child of a couple who seem unlikely parents because of their mental and physical limitations. When he is not in school, JP spends most of his time with his Grandma Mary whom he cherishes and unconditionally accepts.

JP has great aspirations for his life. Gifted with computers, he plans to earn the highest grades in his class to become valedictorian then study at Princeton University. JP is motivated to prove to his community that he is not like his mentally handicapped father. He feels remote from his parents who frequently embarrass and disappoint him. JP believes that he is most compatible and belongs with Grandma Mary and his best friend Tim Seeley. His days prior to his grandmother's death consisted of blissful hours playing at school or in the neighborhood, exploring the creek area, and talking with Grandma Mary. On recipe cards she gives him, JP catalogs the scientific classifications of wildlife and plants he finds in nearby woods and craves order. By achieving order, he thinks he can control his fate.

Mary's death stuns JP, and he feels betrayed when his mother begins to remove all physical evidence of Grandma Mary from their home.

Moving away from Grandma Mary's house is the most upsetting change for JP.

He resists his mother's efforts to empty the house and prepare it for sale. JP behaves sullenly and angrily because he is frustrated about the situation that his mother has forced upon him. He despairs at what he perceives as his mother's cavalier attitude toward abandoning the only home JP has known. He also is suspicious of the intentions of his mother's physician, Dr.

Mike Morris, who is giving her driving lessons and seems to devote excessive amounts of time to her. Not sure if he is dealing with infatuation or infidelity, JP blames Dr. Mike, as he calls him, for causing his mother to reject him and his father.

He attributes disappointments such as receiving a camera instead of a computer to his mother's obliviousness to his interests.

JP feels further isolated when his parents move into the farmhouse that his mother won. Removed from his lifelong home, JP feels like a stranger in this house. As his mother introduces more strangers into the O'Brien home and treats them like family, JP perceives himself as an outcast. He retreats to his attic room then Larry's cabin in an attempt to attain distance from the people he considers intruders and antagonists, but his seclusion is short-lived. Forgiveness is a crucial theme in the novel's later chapters as JP develops an awareness of his own limitations and begins to respect other



people's differences. He realizes that he truly loves his parents and should not hate his mother for her choices and mistakes. The theme of maturation emphasizes how all of the characters grow psychologically in this novel.

Grandma Mary represents the theme of grief. She suddenly dies while blow drying her hair, and her death stuns and paralyzes the O'Brien household. A devout Catholic, Mary took her son to daily mass. She had been the catalyst for her son, Patrick, befriending the neighbor's daughter, Erin.

The trio shared picnics and games. When Patrick unexpectedly proposed to Erin and she accepted, Mary supported the couple who settled in Mary's home. She helped Erin deal with Patrick's deficiencies and nursed Erin when she was sick. After JP was born, Mary raised him as if he were her son. According to JP's account, Grandma Mary was flawless. She was the source of security and comfort and took care of everyone. Her abrupt absence catapulted the O'Brien family into chaos.

Patrick O'Brien, whom JP calls Pap, is mentally handicapped. JP portrays Pap as an innocent, vulnerable man who loves his family and friends. Pap hugs everyone he meets except Dr. Mike, but this observation could be JP's attempt to discredit Dr. Mike.

JP does not explain whether Pap is aware that Dr. Mike is probably Erin's lover or if he comprehends adult sexual relationships.

JP tells Grandma Mary's account of how his parents met when they were children because Mary taught the ill Erin at home to protect her from germs. Mary, Patrick, and Erin built blanket tents and ate fudge. Having seen the movie *The Sound of Music*, Patrick decided that he should be the Captain and Erin his Maria. He offered her a bouquet of wildflowers and asked her to marry him. JP says that Grandma Mary told Patrick that marriage was different than how she and Patrick lived together. Nolan does not clarify if Patrick is JP's biological father, but she does offer hints that he is not when JP lists how he and Pap differ physically such as hair color and freckles.

Pap is a childlike character and emphasizes the themes of immaturity and naivete.

He prefers to sit on the roof with the nativity characters Grandma Mary gave him.

Pap also uses a spoon to dig holes in the yard to fill with birdseed. He mostly acts exuberant and cheerful, singing loudly and baking soda bread. At times, especially after Mary's death, Pap's behavior is too much for JP. Pap becomes unmanageable, protesting, "Hey, yer not me mam, and I'll be doin' what I please." He scatters displays at the grocery store and disappears on his bicycle, causing JP to become the father figure and clean up after him and miss classes to find him. JP notes that he was "keen, focused" while Pap was "just off center." He loves Pap unconditionally but sometimes wishes Pap was like his friends' fathers.

JP's feelings for his mother are less certain. Erin personifies the theme of change.



Chronically ill because she has a hole in her heart, Erin, whom JP calls Mam, seems to use her condition to avoid unpleasant situations and avoid committed love. She also seems to suffer depression or some other mental disorder. Even though she is a mother and a wife, Erin is unable to accept responsibilities associated with those roles.

She describes herself as an unworthy person and incapable of making appropriate decisions. Erin tells Mary and Patrick that she does not fit in at college or her family.

She feels that she belongs with them.

JP remembers when his mother was happy, drawing wildflowers and playing with him and his father. According to him, the woman who emerges after Grandma Mary's death is a hostile stranger who exhibits self-destructive tendencies. Both Erin and JP admit that he has hatred for her. She says that they should be friends but does not seem comfortable acting as his mother.

During her hospitalization, Erin is attracted to Dr. Mike, whom JP describes as someone who is always touching Erin's arm and finding excuses to be with her. For example, he teaches Erin how to drive. Erin conceals any unfaithful behavior she engages in with Dr. Mike. She seems to have led a secretive life separate from Patrick and Mary, as evidenced by the unspoken issue of JP's paternity, and some of her actions JP incorporates in his narrative are probably based on lies.

Erin impulsively places Mary's house on the market in the belief she will win a farmhouse as the prize in an essay contest.

She insists that she must leave Mary's home in order to renew her life because people expect her to be like Mary and she cannot.

Erin stresses that she cannot and will not cook, sew, or do any domestic chore like Mary did. She wants a "fresh start," and, conveniently, her plan to achieve that succeeds. Winning because her wish to see "a face in every window" appealed to the house's owner, Erin fills the empty space with artistic people she befriends or saves from unhappy homes. She is oblivious to how her need to help others causes emotional torment for her son.

Erin's sister, Colleen, is her opposite.

Pretentious and vain, Colleen initially is critical of Patrick, telling JP that his father should be institutionalized. Colleen cloaks herself in brand name clothing and a car and promotes her marriage to a rich brain surgeon as preferable to her sister's situation. She declares that Erin is foolish to believe she could win a house. JP is amused when he witnesses fussy Colleen become romantically interested in the painter Mr. Fitzgerald, whom JP calls the Leprechaun.

Like the other characters, Colleen undergoes a transformation as she rejects aspects of her life which displease her and tests different opportunities. The awareness, creation, and revision of identity are consistent themes.



In his depictions, JP's friends tend to be fickle. He likes his best friend Tim Seeley but realizes that their relationship is irrevocably altered by his move. JP is disappointed when he realizes that he and Tim no longer share the same interests or outlooks on life. Initially, JP dislikes Bobbi Polanski because she is a bully and he knows that Tim is interested in her. JP also is concerned that Bobbi might hurt Pap. He knows that Bobbi's father abuses her and that Grandma Mary pitied her. Only when Bobbi moves into the farmhouse does JP recognize her merits. She works at the animal shelter and brings a dog home. JP develops feelings of love for Bobbi and believes that she reciprocates. He is devastated when she rejects him in favor of an abusive boyfriend, Don, who causes Pap to fall from the roof.

The residents of the farmhouse bring diversity to the O'Briens and suggests that everyone feels like an outcast and is seeking acceptance. Erin fills her house so that she has many faces to fill the windows. JP initially distrusts Larry Seeley, Tim's brother, who empowers the family by providing them with his van. A recovered drug user, Larry intends to improve his life by learning how to build furniture and houses.

Nolan foreshadows the revelation that Larry is gay when JP sees his mother comforting Larry, who is crying. Jerusha is understanding and motherly to JP. A gifted musician, she ignores JP's hateful comments about appearance and offers him advice about how to relate to people and his parents. She decides to leave the house to return to college. The other characters each present subtle lessons through their expressions and experiences.

Negative characters who try to erode others' confidence and identity include Bobbi's abusive father and the intolerant Seeley parents who reject Larry because he is gay. JP realizes that these people are worse parents than his own. Self-absorbed Dr. Mike dismisses Pap when he tries to demonstrate his bicycle-riding skills. Dr.

Mike suggests that Erin enter the contest to win the house near where he lived, perhaps in the hopes that she would leave her family. He selfishly encourages her to travel to Switzerland with him. After Erin's pregnancy is revealed, she ends her relationship with Dr. Mike. He arrogantly ignores the confrontational JP, who demands answers then leaves with another woman. In contrast to the jaded, narcissistic characters, infant Mary brings promise and redemption that suggests a return to the stable, loving life JP enjoyed with Grandma Mary.



Topics for Discussion

1. How is innocence equated with mental impairment in this novel? How does Nolan depict characters' handicaps? In what ways do her characterizations seem realistic? How might they be stereotyped or exaggerated?

2. How did characters react to abusive situations? How could they have responded differently and how would this have altered plot development?

3. Why is food an important element in this novel?

4. How do characters gain or lose independence?

5. In what ways is Nolan's conclusion credible or incompatible with the plot?

What ending did you expect? How would you rewrite the conclusion?

6. Discuss how friendship is depicted in this novel between immediate family members, relatives, and acquaintances.

How do the characters associate sharing with friendship?

7. Why is school important to JP? How do his changing attitudes and behavior at school reflect his altered personality?

8. Which characters assume the most responsibility in this novel? How does this influence their characterization and that of less capable characters? Why does JP feel alienated from his family?

9. How does Nolan define family? Why is a sense of belonging at the O'Brien's house important to each character? How does rejection from their own families shape their behavior? What is each characters' vulnerability? What is their strength?

10. What aspects of this novel seem too coincidental, unbelievable, or exaggerated? In what ways does the story seem like a fairy tale?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Write a paper discussing the window imagery in this novel and other children's literature.
2. Research the steps involved in making a table.
3. Prepare an answer to the question for the win-the-house contest.
4. Describe various forms of communal living. How does JP's home compare to other types of communes?
5. Analyze the religious imagery in this novel. What might the nativity, wise men, and the name Mary symbolize?
6. Write a paper about the role of nature in this novel.
7. Research and compare Philadelphia and New Hope, Pennsylvania, and Switzerland. What is appealing about each place and why would you want to visit or live there? Where do you wish you could visit or live? Why?
8. Analyze tolerance as depicted in this novel. How does intolerance shape characters?
9. Study psychological patterns of grief and outline how JP and his parents each respond to Grandma Mary's death.

Who conforms most closely to the stages of grief? Who deviates the most? How does this influence Nolan's characterization and plot development?
10. Write a journal entry in which one of the characters justify their behavior.

For Further Reference

Folios, Alison. Review of *A Face in Every Window*. *School Library Journal*, vol. 45 (September 1999): 228. This starred review praises Nolan for her "adroit writing skills," which expose the "pathos of unusual circumstance within everyday lifestyles." Folios states that the first person narration will help readers understand JP's struggles to find his place in his family.

"Nolan, Han." In *Something about the Author*, vol. 109. Detroit: Gale, 2000. In addition to biographical information, the entry provides Nolan's insightful answers to an interview in which she discussed how her family and regional experiences shaped her literary development.

Review of *A Face in Every Window*. *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 246 (November 1, 1999): 85. This starred review describes the characters and plot as producing an "emotional roller-coaster ride" and declares that Nolan "delivers a profound and heartwarming message about the various manifestations of love."

Swagler, Susan. "Award More Than Big Prize for Author Han Nolan." *Birmingham News* (November 23, 1997): 1-E, 7-E.

This article from Nolan's hometown newspaper at the time she won the National Book Award includes information about her writing philosophies and practices and her family and friends.



Related Titles/Adaptations

Nolan has previously written about mental illness and nontraditional families in *Dancing on the Edge* (1997). Books which have similar themes include Kimberly Willis Holt's *My Louisiana Sky* (1998), in which Tiger Ann takes care of her mentally challenged parents, and Betsy Byars's *The Summer of the Swans* (1970) which describes a sister's devotion to her mentally handicapped brother. Lisa Rowe Fraustino's *Ash* (1995) shows how a mentally ill person affects their family. Fraustino also edited *Dirty Laundry: Stories About Family Secrets* (1998), which depicts mental illnesses and dysfunctional families.

Children's literature about non-traditional families and living situations include Bettie Cannon's *Begin the World Again* (1991), in which teenager Lake becomes frustrated with her parents and people on the farm commune where she lives. Cassy lives with her mother at an artists' settlement in Gillian Cross' *Wolf* (1990), and Sara moves into a New Hampshire barn with her father and artists in Lee Kingman's *The Refiner's Fire* (1981). The protagonist of Marion Walker Doren's *Nell of Blue Harbor* (1990) is angry when her parents act irresponsibly and move from their commune to the city. Gloria Whelan's *Fruitlands* (2002) is a fictional diary based on the real Utopian community where Louisa May Alcott and her family lived.



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