

Imperfect Birds
By Anne Lamott

Imperfect Birds is Anne Lamott's latest work of fiction. Lamott is one of my favorite authors, and I have often said that I would be happy reading anything she had written including her grocery lists. While I enjoyed this book and other novels she has written, my favorite works still remain her non-fiction books on faith and her own life. *Imperfect Birds* is the story of a family in crisis over their teenage daughter, Rosie's escalating use of drugs and the struggle of her mother and stepfather to find the right path to help Rosie without totally alienating her.

Rosie, the daughter, is a good kid, doing well in school, pretty, athletic, a volunteer working with children in their church – and doing drugs. Like most teens, indeed, like most of us, she wants to find her place in the scheme of things – in her family, in school and among her friends. When things aren't going well, drugs take the painful edge off, and we learn that in the past, her mother has used the same kind of escape through alcohol. Lamott has had her own struggles with substance abuse, a subject about which she is very frank and open. Sometimes I think that much of her fiction is a working out of her own struggles, including struggles with her own family, through fiction. She is now the parent of a son who is either a teen or already past that stage, so she is working both sides of the parent/child equation.

Lamott is a good storyteller, and as always, this is a good read. I think it might particularly appeal to parents who have either dealt with the issue of teen drug abuse in their own lives or fear that they might have to deal with it in the future. As with her non-fiction, Lamott is determinedly honest in writing of the mother/daughter relationship

which lies at the heart of the novel. We get to see the events in the life of this family, and the feelings and responses of both mother and daughter.

I enjoyed reading the book, and for those of us who have been there as parents of teens, it may be an uncomfortable reminder of time past. The mother struggles with figuring out the right action, the right words, and only rarely thinks that she has done parenting right. The pain of her daughter shutting her out physically and emotionally rings so true. All of the happenings in the book raise so many questions about issues of trust. Love is a constant. We know that the mother and daughter love each other, but there are ways that each has violated the trust of the other. How should parents confront a child when it becomes apparent that the child is lying? When does a parent realize that the life of the family is totally out of control and drastic measures must be taken? I think readers will sympathize with the mother, but also with Rosie and the stepfather who perhaps sees some things more clearly but has to be judicious about when to interfere.

If you aren't familiar with Anne Lamott, this might be a good place to start.

Imperfect Birds is published by Riverhead Books and retails for \$25.95.