

FAQs

Spoiler warning - reading the novel first will not spoil the drama or plots.

Q: What inspired the unique, multi-book architecture of the *Real Family* series?

A: I've always been fascinated by the massive developmental shifts that happen in our twenties, yet so much fiction skips right over those quiet years of individual formatting. I wanted to write a sweeping ensemble story that captures both the raw bond of childhood and the stark reality of how distance changes us. Volume 1 lays out the macro-timeline across 15 years, but the next five books will actually go back and step *inside* that ten-year gap. Each subsequent novel will focus entirely on a single character's solo path, filling in the missing pieces of how they became the adults we meet in the year 2000.

Q: Nicholas's vintage 1930s L.C. Smith & Corona typewriter is practically its own character. Why did you choose that specific object for his 14th birthday?

A: A manual typewriter requires a certain level of physical aggression and deliberate choice, you have to pound the keys, and every character leaves a permanent mark on the page. It perfectly mirrors Nicholas's internal journey. He is a young man struggling to articulate his own identity under the weight of his father's rigid expectations, and the typewriter gives him a space where he can be completely, unfilteredly honest, even if he hides those pages beneath his floorboards.

Q: The book reads like a tender coming-of-age story in the first half, but takes a sudden, high-stakes leap into a psychological thriller in the second. Why the sharp genre shift?

A: Because that is exactly how childhood trauma operates. It feels like a slow, quiet hum of background tension until a sudden catalyst forces everything to explode into pure survival. The fire, the murder, and the meticulous kidnapping plot engineered by Turner aren't just for suspense, they serve as a crucible. I wanted to test the absolute boundaries of this "chosen family" to see if their bond could survive under the most extreme psychological and physical pressure imaginable.

Q: Can you unpack your newly coined word, *humanerance*, and how it challenges the concept of standard social tolerance?

A: In Chapter 40, Nicholas dictates an article arguing that "tolerance" is a fundamentally flawed and passive concept. To tolerate someone implies a hierarchical superiority, you are merely choosing *not* to persecute or cast out someone you inherently disapprove of. I wanted to introduce *humanerance* to represent something deeper: the innate, proactive ability to accept human differences directly, without taking offense and without judgment. It's about moving past

conditional tolerance into absolute human respect.

Q: Lopez is the self-appointed "protector" of the group, yet his worldview completely shatters during the park ambush. What does his arc explore?

A: Lopez is deeply influenced by a rigid, cultural standard of *machismo*, he equates manhood with physical strength, virility, and the obligation to dominate and protect. But because he correlates vulnerability with weakness, his standard completely breaks when faced with Nicholas's sexuality, causing him to freeze and turn his back during a brutal hate-crime assault. His journey explores the toxic flaw of trying to protect people from external threats while refusing to confront the internal prejudices that endanger the people you love.

Q: Eileen undergoes a severe social climb, abandoning her old friends to join the popular crowd, only to end up in a deeply cynical place. How do you view her trajectory?

A: Eileen is an only child who deeply craves immediate validation and physical "flutter" in her relationships, masking her deep insecurities with a hard, snobbish exterior. She buys into the elitist worldview of the popular high school clique, even betraying Anna to protect her spot at the "top of the pile." Her eventual decision to join the Peace Corps is her reckoning, an intentional stripping away of material wealth and social status to discover the genuine human connection she spent years throwing away.

Q: The final twist revealing that the quiet, introverted Christopher Mills spent ten years transforming into the Broadway star Rina Starr is incredibly moving. How did you approach this narrative reveal?

A: Authenticity and narrative care were my absolute priorities. Chris spends the first half of the book feeling entirely invisible, struggling to fit into a world where she doesn't align with standard gender expressions or peer dynamics. Her ten-year departure from the cul-de-sac was a necessary journey of self-discovery. Revealing her as a triumphant, beautifully confident woman on that talk show stage brings the entire concept of *Real Family* full circle. Her friends' immediate embrace proves that their chosen bond is rooted in unconditional love, not societal compliance.

Q: You are currently collaborating on a graphic novel adaptation of *Real Family* with a transgender creator. How does a visual medium alter the story?

A: Graphic novels rely heavily on subtext, body language, and visual contrast. A visual medium allows us to beautifully emphasize the things the characters *aren't* saying, the fleeting glances between Nicholas and Logan, the isolating shadows surrounding Chris, or the claustrophobic tension inside the Kiniski household. Collaborating with a trans creator ensures that Chris's early physical dysphoria and eventual transformation are illustrated with absolute dignity and nuanced, first-hand truth.

Q: Nicholas officially comes out to his father, Mr. Barnhart, who is a police officer. What does their interaction reveal about parental love and expectations?

A: That conversation is one of the most pivotal emotional turning points in the novel. Mr. Barnhart is explicitly established as a "man's man," a masculine police officer who carries traditional, rigid expectations for his only son. When Nicholas reveals his truth, it fractures the future his father had meticulously envisioned. However, the narrative highlights a profound truth: while Mr. Barnhart admits to his own deep discomfort and need to adapt to the reality of two men being together, his fundamental, structural love for his son remains completely unshakeable. It shows that parental acceptance is a continuous journey of dismantling expectations to protect the child you love.

Q: Turner's tragic end on the roof is a dark, heavy climax. What did his final words to Chris mean for the narrative?

A: Turner's entire arc is a tragic exploration of absolute psychological isolation, grandiose delusions, and an intense, unrequited obsession with finding a safe space. He commits horrific, violent acts, including the murder of Rock, to forcefully construct the "family" he was denied after being cast out by his own parents. When he realizes his forced sanctuary has imploded, his final words to an unconscious Chris are a deeply tragic, permanent seal on their bond. By taking his own life, Turner escapes his personal "bad nights," but his final plea ensures that his memory will forever shadow the group's journey toward their eventual reunion.

Q: Why does Nicholas use photography as a vehicle to explore his identity in the second half of the book?

A: Photography is entirely about perspective, lighting, and what we choose to reveal or hide in the shadows. For Nicholas, who spent his adolescence hiding his true self and his intense attraction to his best friend beneath his floorboards, looking through a camera lens gives him a safe barrier to observe the world. When Logan boldly steps forward to act as his physical, raw muse, the camera forces Nicholas to finally stop hiding. It serves as a literal and figurative lens that captures the beauty of the male form, ultimately giving Nicholas the creative courage to step out of the closet and into the running water of his true reality.

Q: Now that *Real Family* is complete, how do the upcoming sequels build on the foundations of the first book?

A: *Real Family* was always envisioned as the anchor for a much larger, deeply interconnected character study. Now that the first novel is fully finalized, the subsequent books will step directly inside that ten-year gap between high school graduation and the live television reunion in the year 2000. Rather than moving the timeline forward globally, the sequels act as structural mirrors. Each book will dedicate an entire volume to a single character's isolated path, pulling back the curtain on the hidden environments, adverse trials, and personal shifts that shaped them while they were separated from their chosen family.

Q: Volume 2 is titled *Real Family: Nick's Search for Purpose*. What core themes does this next novel explore for Nicholas?

A: In the first book, Nicholas's journey is heavily defined by the struggle to articulate his sexual identity, capture his voice on a vintage typewriter, and survive a high-stakes gauntlet of domestic and community trauma. He finishes the novel on a triumphant note, landing a prestigious National Geographic internship and finding romantic clarity with Logan. However, *Nick's Search for Purpose* dives headfirst into the daunting reality of the corporate and creative world. Moving to Washington, D.C., Nicholas must learn how to transition from writing local community columns to executing heavy, high-impact investigative features. This volume focuses on his professional formatting, the professional anxieties of a young gay man in the early 1990s, and his relentless drive to turn his personal lived experiences into a larger storytelling calling.

Q: You have also announced that you are currently writing *Real Family: Eileen's Search for Humility*. Why is humility the defining catalyst for her solo volume?

A: Eileen has arguably one of the most polarizing and complex arcs in the initial narrative. Driven by deep-seated physical insecurities, she spends her high school years executing a calculating, cutthroat social climb, ultimately abandoning her childhood circle, dismissing the genuine love of people like Haroon, and even betraying Anna to secure a spot with the "elite" crowd. While she wins the cheerleading scholarship and seems to have "won" the social game, her diary reveals an inner world consumed by profound loneliness and estrangement. *Eileen's Search for Humility* follows her raw, unfiltered reality as she joins the Peace Corps and leaves her wealthy environment behind. Thrown into a world completely stripped of material excess and manufactured status, Eileen is forced to look into a mirror, dismantle her protective snobbish defenses, and unearth the baseline empathy and strength she spent years running away from.