



## The Other F-Word

*Natasha Friend*

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## **The Other F-Word** Natasha Friend

A fresh, humorous, and timely YA novel about two teens conceived via in vitro fertilization who go in search for answers about their donor.

Milo has two great moms, but he's never known what it's like to have a dad. When Milo's doctor suggests asking his biological father to undergo genetic testing to shed some light on Milo's extreme allergies, he realizes this is a golden opportunity to find the man he's always wondered about.

Hollis's mom Leigh hasn't been the same since her other mom, Pam, passed away seven years ago. But suddenly, Leigh seems happy—giddy, even—by the thought of reconnecting with Hollis's half-brother Milo. Hollis and Milo were conceived using the same sperm donor. They met once, years ago, before Pam died.

Now Milo has reached out to Hollis to help him find their donor. Along the way, they locate three other donor siblings, and they discover the true meaning of the other F-word: family.

## **The Other F-Word Details**

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ISBN : 9780374302344

Author : Natasha Friend

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Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Lgbt, Realistic Fiction

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## From Reader Review The Other F-Word for online ebook

### Seanean says

Hollis lost one of her moms a few years ago and has been dealing with that loss in the most inappropriate ways. Now she's being cyberbullied and slut-shamed as her birth mom continues to barely get by in life.

Milo has both of his moms, but no father to guide him through the pitfalls of being a teen boy who really really likes this one girl. Milo is also allergic to more things than he's not and he thinks that maybe knowing who his biological father is will help his doctors find better treatments for him.

Hollis and Milo couldn't be more different, and yet they're so very alike. They are both the children of #9677. He was a sperm donor who made their lives possible, and now they are looking for him.

On the way, they find three more siblings and discover what it really means to be a family.

Final thoughts: Nice piece of realistic fiction that deals with the pros and cons of being a child of a sperm donor. This is a niche that needed to be filled and Friend does that very well. It's also a fairly gender-neutral book as it goes between both Hollis's and Milo's points of view, so this should be a good fit for all children trying to figure out who they really are. The ending leaves room to continue the story, but doesn't require it.

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### Chris Wolak says

"That's all they wanted, wasn't it? Milo thought. To know where they came from? It wasn't right, it wasn't wrong, it just was."

In the 90s, test-tube babies, as babies conceived in vitro fertilization were called back then, were headline news and a huge topic of conversation in the LGBT community. I remember regular conversations with lesbian friends about who'd they'd prefer to have as their sperm donor if they decided to go that route to have a child. A stranger via a sperm bank? A family member? A friend? Gay guys were scrutinized on the dance floor by their lesbian friends like never before. I also had a friend who donated her eggs, which is a much more complicated and painful procedure than donating sperm.

One of the main arguments against using a sperm bank was that the kids wouldn't know who their dad was beyond a number and some basic descriptive information. Some countered that it was the same as being adopted. There were more issues, of course, and this novel addresses many of them.

I was drawn to this book but a bit skeptical. The description gave me pause:

*A fresh, humorous, and timely YA novel about two teens conceived via in vitro fertilization who go in search for answers about their donor.*

*Milo has two great moms, but he's never known what it's like to have a dad. When Milo's doctor suggests asking his biological father to undergo genetic testing to shed some light on Milo's extreme allergies, he realizes this is a golden opportunity to find the man he's always wondered about.*

*Hollis's mom Leigh hasn't been the same since her other mom, Pam, passed away seven years ago. But suddenly, Leigh seems happy—giddy, even—by the thought of reconnecting with Hollis's half-brother Milo. Hollis and Milo were conceived using the same sperm donor. They met once, years ago, before Pam died.*

*Now Milo has reached out to Hollis to help him find their donor. Along the way, they locate three other donor siblings, and they discover the true meaning of the other F-word: family.*

Trigger alert! I thought. Such a novel could be rife with homophobic sentiments and cringe-worthy scenes of heteronormativity. I don't read a lot of LGBT novels due to the obligatory gay bashing scene and/or homophobic attitudes presented as "facts," but this novel is a breath of fresh air.

As the description states, the story is about a teenaged boy named Milo who lives in Brooklyn and a teenaged girl named Hollis from Minnesota, both of whom have lesbian moms. They met once when they were little kids and at the beginning of the novel are brought together again as teens. They track down more half siblings—kids whose heterosexual parents couldn't conceive. There's also Milo's best friend, JJ, a major character in the story, who is adopted.

There's so much that is gracefully packed into this story. There are the big issues at hand: what the kids struggle with, how the in vitro kids have similar yet different issues from the adopted, and how the parents cope with their own challenges regarding their decisions and fears. Also touched upon are numbing one's feelings, dating, bullying, gender vs genes, and grief after losing a parent/partner, among other things.

I was pleasantly surprised by this tender and seemingly "real" novel. I put "real" in quotation marks because I don't have direct experience with these issues, but I have friends who've dealt with a variety of them, both when they were children and now as parents. From what I know of their stories, this novel rings true.

In the end, being a teenager is hard no matter where you come from and who your parent/s is/are. As Milo's friend JJ says, "None of them get us, dude...They're parents."

Bottom Line: Highly recommend to teens and YA readers interested in non-traditional family stories and LGBT issues.

Source: Review copy via NetGalley

This review first appeared on my blog at <http://www.wildmoobooks.com/2017/03/t...>

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## **Heidi says**

Three and a half stars: An interesting book that explores what it means to be family as a group of half siblings seek out their sperm donor.

Milo is allergic to practically everything. In an attempt to get to the bottom of his condition, Milo's doctor suggests that he seek out his biological father. Milo has spent his whole life wondering about the man who donated his sperm to create him. Milo has long wanted to know more about his father, especially since he lives with his two lesbian mothers, and has never had a father figure. Milo doesn't want to do it alone so he decides to reach out to his half sister, Hollis, whom he met once when he was seven years old. Hollis, at first, wants to have nothing to do with his search, but after the two reunite and then connect with two other of their

half siblings, they decide to find the man who created them. What none of them expect is that they will discover they have more in common than they would have thought, and that family means so much more than they dreamed. Can they be a family?

#### What I Liked:

\*The Other F Word was an interesting read. I enjoyed exploring the different issues and themes presented. This book takes on many topics that I haven't really considered before. I like that it featured two protagonists who were raised in a non traditional family and grappling with self identity issues. The author presents many intriguing questions that I liked thinking on. This is a great book to start a conversation, and also a wonderful book for teens who come from non traditional families.

\*I liked that both Milo and Hollis were reared by two moms. Yes, they have their issues with their moms, just like any kid has with their parents, but no matter their differences, when it matters, they are family. I liked how supportive the moms were to the kids, and I also liked getting to know the moms and see their own insecurities. I also liked that the author incorporated some of the difficulties these kids and their parents encounter. It was especially heartbreak to learn that Hollis and her mother couldn't see her other mother when she was terminally ill because they weren't considered family in the eyes of the law. I appreciate the author called attention to these topics. This is a novel that explores all kinds of feelings and emotions, and I liked that.

\*I loved watching the relationship unfold between the genetic siblings as they connected and discovered all that they had in common. It was heartwarming and fun to see them bond. It brought so much more meaning to the term family.

\*Even though I was slightly disappointed in the open ending, I felt that the novel ended in a good place, and I had hope for the kids in the future.

#### And The Not So Much:

\*My biggest disappointment with this book was the way it ended. It felt too abrupt and open and there were many things left unfinished. Even though I liked that the author kept it real, I wished there was more. I think there needs to be a sequel because I want to see JJ's story unfold. I want to learn about Josh and see if he will finally connect with his siblings. I also want to know what will happen with Will. I need more.

\*One turn off was that there was a mean girl theme and some bullying. I didn't like the way that Hollis handled the bullying situation. However, there was a resolution at the end, and I was pleased the way it settled out. I am never a fan of mean girls.

Josh was a conundrum for me. I wish that he had a bigger part as I wanted to understand him better.

\*The book didn't have the humor that I was hoping for. In fact, I didn't find it funny at all, so I am not sure why it is being billed as a humorous book.

The Other F Word is a book that explores what it is like to grow up in a non traditional family. I enjoyed learning about the difficulties kids growing up in a non traditional household face and how they handle their situation. This is a book that brings new meaning to the word family, and it goes to show that family comes in all different forms. This is a great book to read and start a discussion. The only reason I didn't rate it higher was because I was disappointed in the open ending, and I didn't like the mean girl theme. Still, this is definitely a book to try.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own, and I was not compensated for this review.

Posted@Rainy Day Ramblings.

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## Lacey says

This story starts out when two lesbian couples go to use IVF to become pregnant. One couple have a girl named Hollis, while the other has a boy named Milo. They met at a very young age, and haven't seen each other since. Milo suffers from severe allergies to many different things. Hollis has been dealing with a lot since one of her moms, Pam, died from cancer. Hollis's other mom, Leigh, has been going a little out of her mind with the fact that the ghost of Pam still is with them, and when Milo reconnects with Hollis through Pam's e-mail, Leigh believes it more than ever. It was a sign from Pam, according to Leigh. Leigh and Hollis hop on a plane to Brooklyn, New York where she spends a lot of time with her half brother and his best friend JJ Rabinowitz (winky face). When Milo and Hollis go through information, it turns out they have three other donor siblings (oh my god could you imagine!). Meeting again with the other siblings this time, they make a bond stronger than they've ever had before. This book was not only to show how donor kids feel (like they're not good enough, etc.), but also shows that the other F-word - family, is the best thing you can have. Whatever life throws at you, your family is who will be by your side. I think this book definitely taught this very important lesson well.

There were many memorable moments in this book. I loved the fact that Natasha Friend brought some real issues and true definitions.

According to this article, "Regardless of socioeconomic status, donor offspring are twice as likely as those raised by biological parents to report problems with the law before age 25. They are more than twice as likely to report having struggled with substance abuse. And they are about 1.5 times as likely to report depression or other mental health problems." Natasha Friend wrote about Milo who had this awful issue with allergies to food, pollen, etc., and it wasn't his biological mother who had it, therefore, there would only be one option left. He felt excited to possibly know who his father was to get some answers about his medical history. Hollis was different than Milo. Hollis didn't want to know who her father was because she got the feeling of being "damaged goods". Her father didn't want her. He went to this donor building, why? She wanted the answers without having to meet him. She was depressed, still reeling from her mother's death seven years prior. Natasha Friend brought some real issues to light and I'm very glad she did so.

Next, I want to talk about the characters. The character development in this book was very well written. The way that Hollis was in the beginning of the book was frustrating. At 14, she is pretty out of control. I guess it's possible to blame the fact she is depressed and dealing with bullying throughout the school day, but she is pretty reckless. At the end of the book, her character really figures out who she is. My favorite character in this book is JJ Rabinowitz. His dialogue actually made me laugh out loud multiple times. He has this "I don't care attitude", but yet he struggles with his own demons of being adopted. Again, Natasha Friend brought the struggles that an adopted child might feel into this book.

The only thing that I disliked (I wouldn't even call it that) is the fact that each character was written seeming a little older than they actually were. Hollis especially was a little bad with this. There were times in this book where she was hooking up with a guy named Gunner and skipping class just to do that. I mean I guess I could see it today where things are pretty sexualized, but I think at 14 years old, that's a problem. She has a loving mother at home, and she doesn't realize that what she's doing is wrong. I don't see how it's justifiable for a 14 year old. If she was written at age 16/17, I would've been better with it.

Overall, I think this book really hit a lot of great topics that need to be discussed: adoption, IVF, cancer, depression, anxiety, family, etc. Natasha Friend's writing captivated me right from the beginning. The first few sentences had me wondering what was going to happen at the end. The end did surprise me and

I definitely wouldn't be mad if there was a sequel. If there isn't, I think it's great just the way it is.

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### **Frau Nightingale says**

4,5\*

Tolle Figuren. Wichtige Themen. Ewig kein Buch so leicht und schnell durchgelesen.

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### **Mandy says**

Thanks to Netgalley for the advance copy of this book.

[Click here for entire review.](#)

3.5 stars. A sweet story with some great messages, but ultimately feels a little unfinished.

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### **Paige (Illegal in 3 Countries) says**

\*opens mouth\*

\*closes mouth\*

DNF #2. In just 84 pages, *The Other F-Word* hit astounding levels of NOPE and I simply can't do it. Please see my status updates for details. The simple act of detailing what's wrong with this book *one* time for status updates hurt my soul, so I don't want to do it a second time. It just hammers in that what's in this book is actually IN A BOOK.

Fun fact: the female lead Hollis is fourteen. She and male lead Milo (fifteen) feel like they should be two or three years older.

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### **Jen Ryland says**

Overall, I enjoyed this, but not without a few bumps along the way. There were a few things about this book that I had to get used to. First off, though the characters range from 14-16, this book read a little on the young side to me. It's hard to say if it was the voice (maybe) or the fact that the book was narrated in alternating third-person, but I couldn't get away from the feeling that I was reading tween/middle-grade. Ultimately I think that's where a story like this belongs. To me, "where do I fit into my family?" feels like more of a middle grade theme. In a YA story, characters are usually figuring out their place in the wider world. If this book had focused more broadly on identity rather than family, it might have seemed more like YA.

The other thing I had to get past was that, for me, this book throws a LOT at the reader straight off. (I see this a lot in contemps, as if the author worries that a "real" story isn't interesting enough, so throws in everything

but the kitchen sink.) There were a bunch of characters (the two narrators, their three parents, and then a total of three or four other kids, also with parents) and a LOT of issues (grief, sperm donation, the parental rights and emotional issues of gay/non-biological/adoptive parents, food allergies, adoption, slut shaming and cyber-bullying) that were raised. I tend to prefer books that a little more streamlined.

After a period of adjustment, I settled into the story. Yes, there were a lot of issues, but eventually I could see the purpose for each one. Hollis and her mom are both still suffering from the loss of Hollis' other mom, and I thought the grief aspect was handled well. Not sure if all of the other issues were handled as thoroughly as they should have been, which is a drawback for these issue-packed stories: important stuff is raised, but not really discussed and resolved as thoroughly as I might wish.

tl;tr: Reads a little young and has a lot going on, but with a nice emotional core.

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*The FTC would like you to know that the publisher provided me a free advance copy of this book, that free books can be enjoyable or not, and other readers may disagree with my opinion.*

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**Jon Ebron says**

This was a well written and hilarious rollercoaster from start to finish. The voice of each character was amazingly authentic and realistic.

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**Amber says**

I enjoyed how similar yet different the two main characters are. I enjoyed how Milo wanted to know about their sperm donor mostly for medical reasons. It did an excellent job discussing how the other parent feels when the child isn't biologically theirs.

*I received an ecopy of this book through Netgalley; however, my opinions are my own.*

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**Michelle (Pink Polka Dot Books) says**

**This book was practically perfect.** I consider myself a fairly pessimistic person, and always find at least one or two annoyances with every book. Even if they are minor. I think good reviews should always point out the good AND the bad, so I like to explore what I like and what didn't work as well for me. So as I'm reading this book, I'm like WHAT am I going to say that I would change?? Upon closing the book, I realized I got nothing.

So this book is initially about Milo and Hollis (and the book features them as dual narrators) and how they are half siblings-- related through their sperm donor. They had met as small kids and haven't kept in touch, but now Milo wants Hollis to help him find out who their sperm donor is. Milo SAYS it's for medical reasons (he has severe allergies), but it becomes obvious that the reason goes way deeper than that.

Eventually they find out that there are more people that had children using the same donor as theirs--

meaning they have OTHER half-siblings. They all join in group email sessions discussing everything from their feelings about finding their donor to home life to genetics to everyday life things.

Milo has this pot-head friend at school, and I kind of thought ah-ha!! This is what I'm not going to like about this book. The D-Bag friend. But, no. JJ freaking GREW on me. Once we really get to know JJ, it's impossible not to like him.

**So what exactly did I love about this book:** Besides everything?? Okay, I loved the way the author handled Hollis and her hook-ups with Gunner (a football player that she was using to get back at a friend and also distract her from her feelings). It could have left me with a bad taste in my mouth-- but I kind of loved Hollis for it. FINALLY!! A girl who admits that she likes hooking up. It's okay for us to do it too people!! Also, I think a lot of people use sex and sexy-times as a way to feel good about themselves or for all sorts of various reasons that have nothing to do with the person they're hooking up with. I love that that was explored.

I loved all the siblings and their relationships with each other!! I loved the parents and all their issues and complicated feelings about the kids wanting to find the donor. I loved how Ms. Friend took us on a journey-- and that journey ended up being really exciting. By mid-point in the book, I was on pins and needles waiting for them to figure out how to find their donor & wondering what this man would think about finding out his sperm donation resulted in having 5 children.

This was the most unique book that I've read in a long time. It didn't go into any usual tropes and it didn't randomly let a romance take over the plot when there were bigger issues to deal with. I can't wait to read more by Natasha Friend!!

**OVERALL: This book needs WAY more attention. I thought it was witty, silly, nuanced, and one of the most unique YA books I've read in a long time. Do yourself a favor and add this to the TBR.**

**My Blog:**

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**Kelly Hager says**

Hollis has known that her moms used a sperm donor to conceive her for basically her entire life. She also knew that she has a half-brother who was conceived from the same donor. But now Milo has contacted her for the first time in years because he wants to find their father. And we soon learn that they have siblings. All told, there are six of them (though one is adamant about not meeting their donor).

I am so in love with this book. A lot of it could be my story (though I was adopted, so it's not exactly the same) and I think I have had at least one conversation in this book almost word for word.

But the real best part is Hollis. Watching her go from an only child to having brothers and a sister is awesome. Family is a weird and kind of fluid thing sometimes, and this book reflects and honors that.

I am so glad I found it. Highly recommended.

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## **Tiff at Mostly YA Lit says**

Review originally posted on Mostly YA Lit:

The Other F-Word started off a little slow for me – I needed to get used to the slightly prickly characters of Milo and Hollis and their narration styles. There's a lot to learn in the first 100 pages, and as a result, it took me that long to get into the story.

That said, I'm glad I did, because The Other F-Word is a unique, honest, and smoothly written novel about teens dealing with their unusual family situation.

Hollis and Milo have known about each other for many years – they were born of the same sperm donor. They're not friends, or even really siblings, but when Milo realizes he may never get to the bottom of his many allergies, he begins to wonder what it means to be born from a sperm donor. the consequences of the decision their parents made to have them, and what it means to be a family.

What I loved about this book was how well-done the research was, and how honest about the situation the characters were. From about page 87 on, I was completely hooked on this story, waiting for the next big thing to happen, whether it was deciding to look to see if there were other siblings, or contacting their sperm donor.

The Other F-Word also seamlessly weaves in friendship, bullying and other issues that teens are dealing with. It was a very complete story and character study of a family.

I think what stopped me from giving it a solid 4 stars was being worried that the characters were a bit forgettable.

Even though I really enjoyed the characters and I thought they were rounded, the realness of them made for somewhat predictable responses to an unpredictable story. I'm not sure whether Hollis and Milo will stay with me a year or two from now.

Still, The Other F-Word was pretty enjoyable. I liked the little side romances, and all of the different characters that come into Hollis and Milo's life in their search. It felt realistic, honest, and effortless.

## **THE FINAL WORD:**

The Other F-Word is a well-researched story about two teens who are born of the same sperm donor, and what it means to be a family. Even though it took me awhile to get into it, I did enjoy it in the end, and I'd recommend it to anyone who is looking for more information about donor insemination. It's a surprising concept for a YA book, and one that I've never seen before. I'm glad to say that it totally works.

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## **Alexa says**

The Other F-Word follows Hollis and Milo through the struggle of not knowing their father and being

created by vitro fertilization. Milo wants to find his father for more than one reason and Hollis struggles with wanting to know her biological father and not wanting to know at the same time. Throughout the book readers follow the struggle of being raised by parents that one isn't biological and finding half siblings and learning where they belong in each others lives and creating a special bond. Each character is fighting a different struggle, which gives readers many different issues that can be relatable but at the same time, personally, I didn't feel any connection with any of the situations.

I had never read about vitro fertilization before and I was interested in reading a story that focused on it but while reading The Other F-Word I didn't feel any excitement or curiosity from the plot. As unique as the focus of this book was, I didn't find anything to keep me interested. I guess, what I was expecting from this book was more information about this topic and readers don't necessarily get solid information about being born by vitro fertilization and about growing up with the curiosities. Readers are thrown into the story and I feel if there was more backstory about both of their situations and feelings I could have connected with the main characters more.

However, I was still interested where the story would go and finished the book. It wasn't bad but it wasn't great. I didn't get much out of the plot and I wouldn't say this is a strong book to recommend to someone who wants to read about this topic, perhaps if there was less focus on the other character struggles along side Hollis and Milo's struggles I could have sympathized with the characters.

The Other F-Word was pitched as a YA book but I keep seeing other readers connecting this book to middle grade, and to think of it, I'd feel more inclined to recommend this to a middle grade audience rather than a young adult audience.

\*A copy of this book was provided to me by Raincoast Books\*

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### **C. Purtill says**

Hollis and Milo are half-siblings, sharing a sperm donor as a father. Together they discover several other children who were conceived using the same man's sperm and they all set out to contact him.

I know a few families like this so I was eager to read and hopefully have something to recommend to their teenaged kids. I wanted so much to like this more than I did. I think I might still recommend it to them but with the caveat that it didn't feel realistic to me and therefore might not feel realistic to them.

The very first thing that I wish had been better was Milo's reason for contacting his sperm donor: severe allergies. Like his mom Frankie asks, why? The doctor's suggestion seems wholly unnecessary, especially since the donor was anonymous. I find it difficult to believe a doctor would tell a 16 year old patient he should track down his sperm donor for...what? information? If it was life-threatening, perhaps, but this isn't anything the donor can do to help him. Milo can be tested for the genetic component of the allergy on his own.

With that in mind, the story follows a path of another book referenced in the novel: The Hobbit, or actually Lord of the Rings, with Milo as Frodo on his quest to return to Mordor with his group of 9. We didn't truly get to know any of the other half-siblings other than Hollis who also narrates the book. She isn't too excited about finding her donor but she goes along with Milo plus Milo's best friend, JJ, an adopted kid, is cute and funny.

I probably bought Hollis' story a little more. It felt more fully fleshed-out and real to me. However, a major issue for her is that she fooling around with a guy who is involved with a girl she has hated since second grade. Revenge, okay, I get that but when this finally becomes resolved - in a scene that is barely a page long - I found it completely implausible.

The book was a quick read, just one day for me and I didn't skim or anything! Others might like it more than I did. Thanks to Netgalley for the book to review.

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