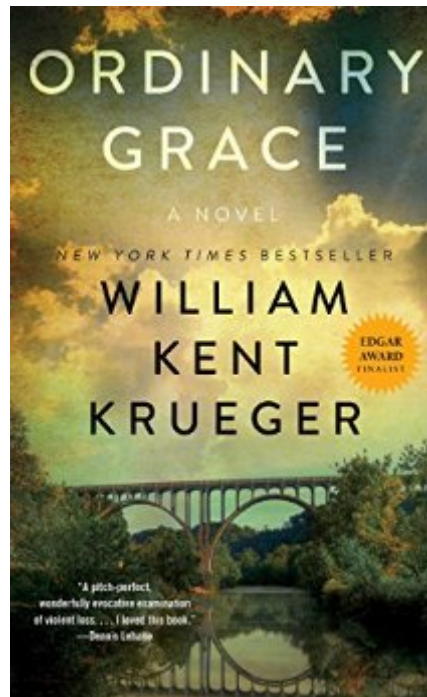


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Ordinary Grace: A Novel



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLERWINNER OF THE 2014 EDGAR AWARD FOR BEST NOVELWINNER OF THE 2014 DILYS AWARD A SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL BEST BOOK OF 2013

That was it. That was all of it. A grace so ordinary there was no reason at all to remember it. Yet I have never across the forty years since it was spoken forgotten a single word.

New Bremen, Minnesota, 1961. The Twins were playing their debut season, ice-cold root beers were selling out at the soda counter of Halderson's Drugstore, and Hot Stuff comic books were a mainstay on every barbershop magazine rack. It was a time of innocence and hope for a country with a new, young president. But for thirteen-year-old Frank Drum it was a grim summer in which death visited frequently and assumed many forms. Accident. Nature. Suicide. Murder. Frank begins the season preoccupied with the concerns of any teenage boy, but when tragedy unexpectedly strikes his family—which includes his Methodist minister father; his passionate, artistic mother; Juilliard-bound older sister; and wise-beyond-his-years kid brother—he finds himself thrust into an adult world full of secrets, lies, adultery, and betrayal, suddenly called upon to demonstrate a maturity and gumption beyond his years. Told from Frank's perspective forty years after that fateful summer, *Ordinary Grace* is a brilliantly moving account of a boy standing at the door of his young manhood, trying to understand a world that seems to be falling apart around him. It is an unforgettable novel about discovering the terrible price of wisdom and the enduring grace of God.

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Customer Reviews

This is a story to which everyone of a "certain age" can easily relate. The story has a beautiful simplicity that reflects the earlier time it so accurately depicts. It is filled with the genuine, often flawed, characters that inhabit most small towns and whisks the reader back to a time when a real treat was attending a 10 cent movie or enjoying a cold drink or a chocolate sundae at the corner drug store. It is now 40 years after the fateful summer of 1961 and Frank Drum, son of a Methodist minister, is taking a retrospective look at that time in the small Minnesota town where he and his brother Jake experienced the events that have defined the men they have become. Ordinary Grace, is an extraordinary coming-of-age novel that is at times reminiscent of Stephen King's THE BODY (or if you are a movie buff rather than a reader, the movie STAND BY ME) and Harper Lee's TO KILL A MOCKING BIRD as it documents the strength of a father, the depth of friendship and the horrors of misfortune while capturing small town life and the profound and enduring bonds of sibling love. Krueger has a talent for drawing the reader in with the beautiful word pictures he paints and captures the deeply layered aspects of every situation without making them convoluted. His writing is simple without being simplistic, poignant and expressive without being maudlin, and manages to be touching and inspiring without resorting to lecturing and moralizing.

"Ordinary Grace" is a standalone novel, a project the author has long desired to write. The book is significantly different from his multiple-award-winning Cork O'Connor series. Yet there are links to the thoughtful, carefully structured, series of crime novels. In one sense, for those so inclined, a case can be made that here, Krueger addresses the ultimate mystery. "Ordinary Grace" benefits from everything the author has learned over the years writing the O'Connor novels. It is directly and powerfully written, wasting no words, yet always moving the story ahead at an appropriate pace, depending on the actions of the characters and the plot. "Ordinary Grace" is a novel that will affect readers in unusual, interesting and, quite possibly, surprising ways. Set in a small community in southern Minnesota in 1961, this is how the story begins: "All the dying that summer began with the death of a child, a boy with golden hair and thick glasses, killed on the railroad tracks outside New Bremen, Minnesota." The narrator is an adult white male, son of the Methodist minister in town. Frank is recalling the momentous events of that bygone summer when he was but thirteen years

old, a teen-ager on the cusp of young maturity. The death of that child sets in motion events and revelations of suppressed attitudes that alter the lives and futures of many people in the town. Some of the people affected are important and wealthy, others, as plain and ordinary as one could imagine. Yet everyone in the novel is required to come to terms to greater or lesser degree, with who they are and how they must relate to family, friends, members of their faith, and how they function in the wider yet limited community.

This novel is so well written and the story is so touching, I did not want it to end. The year is 1961 and Frank Drum is a thirteen year old son of a Methodist minister in New Bremen, Minnesota. It should have been a summer of innocence, like the era. But there were four deaths in the small town that summer. And that changed everything for Frank. The story is narrated by Frank now forty years older. He looks back and remembers the fateful summer that was full of lies and secrets. Frank's father has a secret - something that happened in the war that made him responsible for the deaths of many. Frank's artistic mother didn't marry to be a pastor's wife and has difficulty living the role. Frank's little brother, though wise beyond his years, stutters. And Frank's older sister is an accomplished pianist, organist, and composer. Frank tries to make sense of the events as they happen over the summer. There is the death of a young boy on the railroad tracks. Later Frank and his brother stumble upon a homeless man, dead under the train trestle. And then his sister is missing. Frank knows she had been sneaking out at night but never told their dad. As the days go by, secrets come to the light and Frank has much to think about and understand. This is much more than just a coming of age story. It is a look into the lives of those struggling to understand what is happening to them. It is a story about the awful grace of God and the ordinary grace of God. The author has given readers much to think about in this novel. How would we face the tragic loss of a loved one at the hands of another? Could we exercise forgiveness? Would we seek revenge? Experiencing the events of the summer through the eyes of Frank is amazing.

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