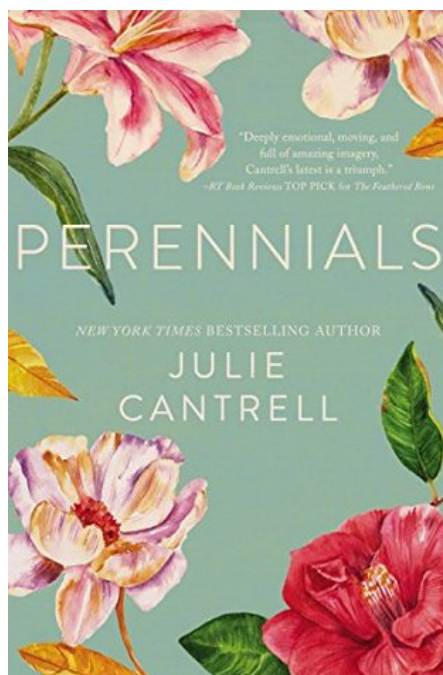




Perennials

Julie Cantrell

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When two estranged sisters reunite for their parents' 50th anniversary, a family tragedy brings unexpected lessons of hope and healing amid the flowers of their mother's perennial garden.

Eva—known to all as Lovey—grew up in Oxford, MS, surrounded by literary history and her mother's stunning perennial gardens. But a garden shed fire and the burns suffered by one of her best friends seemed to change everything. Her older sister Bitsy blamed her for the fire—and no one spoke up on her behalf. Bitsy the cheerleader, Bitsy the homecoming queen, Bitsy married to a wealthy investor. And all the while, Lovey blamed for everything that goes wrong.

At eighteen, Lovey turns down a marriage proposal, flees from Oxford and the expectations of attending Ole Miss, and instead goes to Arizona—the farthest thing from the South she can imagine. She becomes a successful advertising executive, a weekend yoga instructor, and seems to have it all together. But she's alone. And on her 45th birthday, she can't help but wonder what's wrong.

When she gets a call from her father—still known to everyone as Chief from his Ole Miss football days—insisting that she come home three weeks early for her parents' 50th wedding anniversary celebration, she's at wits end. She's about to close the biggest contract of her career, the one that will secure her financial goals and set her up for retirement. But his words, "Family First," hit too close to home. Is there hope for her estranged relationship with Bitsy after all this time?

Eva's journey home, to the memory garden her father has planned as an anniversary surprise for her mother, becomes one of discovering roots, and truth, and love, and what living perennially in spite of disappointments and tragedy really means. Eva thought she wanted to leave her family and the South far behind . . . but she's realizing she hasn't truly been herself the whole time she's been gone.

Perennials Details

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From Reader Review Perennials for online ebook

Suzanne Leopold says

Eva recently celebrated her 45th birthday and has a successful career at an advertising agency in Arizona. She supports herself, teaches yoga on weekends and is slowly recovering from a bad relationship. She grew up in Mississippi but hasn't been back since leaving for college. Eva is avoiding bad memories of a broken engagement and a volatile relationship with her sister, Bitsy.

Her parents 50th wedding anniversary is nearing and Eva receives a plea from her father to help plan the party. It's an odd request but he is insistent that she return home. Eva is in the midst of landing one of the largest accounts in her career and the timing is poor. She has mixed emotions about going back to Mississippi but she acquiesces to her father's demands. Once home, she faces friction from her sister along with pressure from her parents to reconcile their differences. She also finds time to reconnect with childhood friends and her onetime fiancé. Eva starts to fall back in her old habits and finds that life in Mississippi is better than expected .

Eva's trip home as an adult enables her to view life from a different perspective. She uncovers truths about her sister, friends, and parents. She also learns a lot about herself and what it takes to be happy. This novel by Julie Cantrell explores family relationships from many different angles.

Rebecca says

After woman (Eva/Lovey) returns to her hometown for parent's (Chief/Jim and Laurel) 50th anniversary party, her life becomes uprooted. -- See what I did there? Uprooted, like a plant? The book made do it! Ha. -- What was it about this visit home that caused Eva to feel so unsettled about her current life in Arizona? Will she find what she's been looking for? Will she finally make peace with her older sister (Elizabeth/Bitsy), as well as her childhood perception of herself? These deep questions, and more, are answered in this beautiful story of family, friends, and flowers.

When 45 year old Eva was summoned to her hometown of Oxford, Mississippi a few weeks before her parent's 50th wedding anniversary party, she wasn't sure how to also balance her job as an advertiser in Phoenix, Arizona. Once home, however, her father insists the family embark on nostalgic and sentimental day trips down memory lane, and Eva finally relaxes and enjoys her time with family.

I read this book while suffering from a cough and cold and found the story to be the perfect escape as instead, I was transported to a lovely garden full of sunshine and familial love. My favorite characters were Eva's father and Eva's childhood friend and first love, Fisher. I also loved all the flower references and how important they were to the family. Eva's mother, Laurel's, love of gardening reminded me of my own grandma and made me long for just a few more hours with her and her flowers. Lastly, I found the topic of visiting aging parents extremely timely as I will soon be visiting my own aging parents over the holidays. Several times throughout the story, I became teary eyed while reading about the touching moments between Eva and her parents.

This was my first time reading anything by this author, and I look forward to more. If you enjoyed the information about flowers in *The Language of Flowers*, then I would recommend you read this one next!

Thank you to the author, the publisher, and NetGalley for a free ARC of this book in exchange for my honest

review!

"Every one of us is a messy combination of all that has happened in our lives, all the hurts and heartaches, mishaps and mistakes. But there's one big difference. Some of us choose to love in spite of it all. And some of us don't." - Eva/Lovey

Karen says

A moving story filled with life lessons told in a lyrical Southern style.

Loved all the lovely garden metaphors used to express a spiritual or inspirational message. They were fitting for the situations, and a perfect way to drop a bit of truth in the moments. Family dynamics, sibling tension, and emotional/psychological struggles made this a story to perfectly illustrate grace and forgiveness, the choice to let go and move on in life, overcoming the past. It had me reaching for the tissues more than once, especially towards the end. The beautiful historical setting of Oxford, Mississippi with its literary fame sounded like a perfect place for a road trip too.

Recommend to readers who enjoy contemporary women's fiction with some romance and a spiritual message.

(An e-book was provided by NetGalley and the publisher. All opinions are my own.)

Deanne Patterson says

A mesmerizing Southern coming of age story. Lovey and her three years older sister, Bitsy grew up in Oxford, MS. Theirs was a typical childhood catching fireflies and getting dirty with the neighborhood boys, brothers Finn and Fischer. That all changes the day elegant Blaire moves into the neighborhood. That's the day Bitsy's childhood was over she wanted to be just like Blaire, fancy, wearing nail polish and showing interest in boys. Lovey isn't interested in all that though she wants to still get dirt under her nails and help her mother in the perennial garden. I love the research the author has done in reference to the flowers and it's mentioned throughout the book. The cover is gorgeous and very eye catching! Leaving MS at age 18 Lovely moves to Arizona and settles in . Making a life for herself she is a yoga instructor and has successful career at an advertising agency in Arizona. After recently celebrating her 45th birthday she is summoned home to help celebrate her parents 50th wedding anniversary. She is hesitant to return home because is estranged from her sister. Her sister blames her for a shed fire that happened during their childhood and won't stop bad mouthing her and telling lies about her. Once home her parents are so happy to see her Chief her father and her mother. Her mother has always been thin but she notices her picking at her food and getting thinner, her energy lags also. She wants to make a new start with Bitsy but Bitsy has the perfect husband, big house and lots of money, she just doesn't seem to need her sister or want to reconcile with her. After having a heart to heart talk with her father she feels better and sees things with a new perspective. After going back home and talking to her family she sees things with a new perspective through adult eyes now. Her eyes are opened as she realizes things about herself, her sister and her parents she hadn't known before.

Pub Date 14 Nov 2017

Thank you to NetGalley and Thomas Nelson--FICTION for a review copy in exchange for my honest review.

Melissa says

4.5 stars Top Pick

Cantrell has penned another quietly contemplative, thought-provoking novel. Her prose is so meaningful that every phrase begs to be mulled over. Hearts will break for Lovey, a somewhat prodigal daughter who never really knows the depth of her parents' love until it is almost too late. Anger bubbles up against Bitsy and her actions, yet the author's ability to pull out these deep emotions is what makes this novel so very touching and nuanced. This is a book that begs to be re-read and discussed.

Eva "Lovey" Sutherland grew up adoring her older sister Bitsy and basking in the love of her parents in Oxford, Mississippi. One day a horrific incident occurs, and that changes the course of all of their lives. Yanked from her feelings of safety and security, Lovey eventually moves to Arizona and establishes a comfortable, steady life for herself. When her father calls and convinces her to return home to help her sister plan their parents' anniversary party, Lovey has to confront the painful emotions she has stuffed deep inside for most of her life. As the truth about things past and present begins to surface, Lovey examines her beliefs and understanding about what love and family really mean.<https://www.rtbookreviews.com/book-re...>

Staci says

Perennials is a beautiful novel. The writing style, the cover and the flower touches on beginning of chapter pages are elegant.

In this novel, we get a window into the soul of main character Eva "Lovey". I suspect there are aspects of Eva's world we can relate to...ambition, struggles, successes. Perennials gives readers a look at human behavior and why people behave the way we do. And how we choose to react.

While there was much to love about Eva, my favorite character was Fischer. Fischer delivers southern gentleman throughout the novel. Another main character was Bitsy. Bitsy is an easy person to dislike and the author does a nice job of helping us see why she is the way she is. Do we love her anyway? That's a rather tough question.

The setting in both Sedona (Arizona) and Oxford (Mississippi) were remarkably described. I could visualize, smell and feel the scenery. The symbolism and visual of flowers throughout the novel was well done.

Julie Cantrell is a talented author with both historical and contemporary novels. Perennials is her fourth novel. I've enjoyed all of them.

My gratitude to the author for a complimentary copy of the novel. I was not required to post a review and the opinions expressed are my own.

Iola says

I don't usually read reviews before reading a book I've asked to review, because I don't want to be influenced (in contrast, I do read reviews before buying a book. Call me weird, but I find it easier to ignore a book's faults if I know them before I start reading page one).

Anyway, if the review I read was accurate, this book had a lot of faults. The chief fault appeared to be that it

was from a Christian publisher, yet was not Christian fiction.

Well, sold.

Okay, not sold. But I requested a review copy from NetGalley, because I wanted to find out for myself.

The writing was brilliant.

Julie Cantrell has a gift with words, with emotion. The plot was generally strong. I thought the plot device used to get Eva home to her family was contrived almost to the point of being unbelievable, but the writing was outstanding and the characterisation was solid enough that I was prepared to let a less-than-believable plot point pass.

Perennials is the story of a middle-aged professional woman who learns the hard way success isn't defined by your salary or your job title (or your ability to live a Pinterest-worthy life), but by being true to yourself. She also learns that we can't judge and resent others for their Pinterest-perfect lives, because we don't know what they're hiding.

These are powerful lessons.

Eva, the main character, wasn't the most likeable person to begin with. She has a chip on her shoulder the size of a small planet, and even at forty-five years of age, it's never occurred to her that her outlook on life and on her family (especially on her family) is anything but right. Being home again forces her to review and rethink some of her perceptions. The more I saw of her in her home town, the more I was able to sympathise and empathise with her situation.

Overall, I'd classify this as an inspirational women's fiction version of *Just Look Up* by Courtney Walsh. It definitely doesn't fit in the narrow echo chamber of Christian fiction. If it was a romance, I'd say it was angling for a RITA nomination for Romance with Religious or Spiritual Elements, because it had plenty of spiritual elements—but most of them weren't Christian:

Namaste. The light in me sees the light in you.

The ancestors have a lot to teach us.

Kachina Woman, Hera, Kuan Yin, Mary. Whoever she is, she is timeless and omnipotent, representing all things feminine and calming and wise.

Definitely not Christian—and that last quote is in direct contradiction to the Gospel of John, which makes clear that Jesus is the way. Not one of many. Yet there were also lines like this:

Love keeps no record of wrongs.

And:

Jesus experienced the worst. Betrayed by someone he trusted, destroyed by the people he loved. Public shame, humiliation ... but despite it all, he chose to love.

No, *Perennials* doesn't fit into the shiny bucket that is CBA fiction.

If you're looking for a typical Christian fiction novel, then I wouldn't recommend *Perennials*. But if you're looking for something that doesn't fit the Christian norm—perhaps as a gift for a non-Christian friend who appreciates good writing and enjoys books such as *Eat, Pray, Love*—then *Perennials* may be a good option.

Perhaps Perennials does present Jesus as an option to be considered rather than as the answer. But in doing that, it may attract readers who wouldn't ever pick up a 'Christian' novel. And if those readers are true to themselves, they will consider Jesus. And I believe we need more books written by Christians for a general market audience, books that address real-world problems and present Jesus as an option.

As Perennials does.

Thanks to Thomas Nelson and NetGalley for providing a free ebook for review.

Tania says

Every part has a purpose. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

3.5 stars. I loved The Feathered Bone by Julie Cantrell, and was very happy that Netgalley approved my request for Perennials, to be released later this year. The author has a beautiful, straightforward and emphatic writing style. I enjoyed all the historical information about the South, it's museums and famous authors. The botany references was interesting and well-integrated. Lastly I liked that the christian element was never preachy and was beautifully balanced with a more spiritual, almost buddhist, outlook. The reason I did not rate this book higher is that the jumping from then to now sometimes felt a bit forced, and I would have liked Lovey to have more character flaws. All in all Perennials is a welcome escape from our rushed and stressful lives.

The Story: When Lovey is enlisted to help her father create a memory garden for her parents' 50th anniversary, she learns about herself, her roots, her mother's perennial garden, and the importance of family bonds that can never be broken.

Mary Jackson _TheMaryReader says

A Perennial kind of love...

Southern style, Life lesson with the greatest being love, all in one book. Why yes, I think I will devour this book in one sitting thank you.

I was hooked from the very first chapter.

I think all of you readers that are fans of southern fiction are going to agree with me on this one.

I will warn you there is mention of Buddhist in this book and those of us that are secure in our Christian walk with be fine with this.

If you are a new Christian and have a lot of questions and your just not sure yet, this may not be a book for you!

I gave this book 4 stars.

The Mary Reader received this book from the publisher for review. A favorable review was not required and

all views expressed are our own.

Lisa Johnson says

Title: Perennials

Author: Julie Cantrell

Pages: 368

Year: 2017

Publisher: Thomas Nelson

My rating 3 out of 5 stars.

When I first read the synopsis of the book, I was really looking forward to reading Julie's latest offering. It wasn't too long into the book that I kind of wondered what I got myself into. Let me explain. There are some ideas mentioned in the story that I was uncomfortable with and unsure what the author's point was in having it in the story.

I enjoyed the characters of the book, even the family tension that is at times very climactic. To me, that is a real-life experience as well as the forgiveness that can be extended and fractured relationships bound up and made whole. I enjoyed learning about the various flowers in the book and a couple of authors from the past mentioned periodically in the tale.

What I found hard was, of course, the tragedy in the book because it hits close to personal experience in my life. I would encourage publishers to be careful publishing tough heart-breaking stories right before the holidays even if it can be someone's real life at the moment. I don't like to always be reminded of the pain and broken heart that comes with loss, especially around the holidays at the end of the year.

What I could get was the "wheel" to identify the hurts in the main characters life called "Lovey". Supposedly these "wheels" are where ancestors can "teach us" and Lovey is just supposed to walk in the "wheel" to gain insight into her heart and life. Really? The other weird idea for me was the vision Lovey has a couple of times in the story and at the end readers understand as well as the character what the vision is and who the person she sees in the vision is supposed to be.

I just couldn't agree with the doctrines represented in the book and don't see them as being biblical in any way. The flowers and their names along with the general plot was okay, but this other "spiritual" add-in was just frankly too unfounded to be in a story. I am not sure I will read anything in the future this author presents if she continues to include New Age ideas and unbiblical truths.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received one or more of the products or services mentioned above for free in the hope that I would mention it on my blog. Regardless, I only recommend products or services I use personally and believe will be good for my readers. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255. "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Lauren Denton says

In Perennials, Julie Cantrell has written a love letter to her home state of Mississippi, Deep South summers, and flower blooms that can heal the soul. Through main character Lovey's return trip home, we see what it means to keep "Family First" no matter what. And her journey home is much more than just miles traveled--it's a glimpse into a life full of heartache and longing, the illuminating light of truth, and the redemptive power of love.

Jeanne Grace says

I received an Advanced Reader Copy from NetGalley for my unbiased opinion of the book. I loved, loved, loved this book! I couldn't read it fast enough! The characters are very likeable. I loved all the gardening symbolism in relation to life. I come from a long line of garden lovers. Eva was a strong woman character, who in the process of this book figures out where she is meant to be. A great story about love, family, gardening references, and life obstacles. I am putting this book on my family book club reading list!!!

Lisa says

PERENNIALS

Julie Cantrell

MY RATING ??????????

PUBLISHER Thomas Nelson

PUBLISHED November 14, 2017

A poignant and moving Southern family saga of an errant daughter that returns home again.

SUMMARY

Lovey and Bitsey Sutherland were the closest of sisters when they were young and catching fireflies on the farm. But that was a long time ago and a lot has changed. At eighteen, after years of her beauty queen sister's hostile attitude, Lovey fled the farm, leaving behind one of her favorite things, her mother's beloved perennial garden. The sisters rarely speak to each other anymore, and now Lovey, an advertising executive in Arizona excited about closing the biggest contract of her career. But her father, Chief calls on her 45th birthday demanding that she come home three weeks early to help him prepare a memory garden for her parents 50th wedding anniversary. Upon arrival back in Oxford, Mississippi, Lovey realizes that despite the passage of time, Bitsey's immense hostility has not changed. What was the cause of such long lasting bitterness? Can it ever be resolved? Can Lovey ever truly come home again to a place she loves?

REVIEW

She had me at the fireflies! One of my favorite memories as a child was catching fireflies in a large pickle jar with holes punch into the lid, right alongside my big brother. PERENNIALS is a beautiful story about family relationships, and is stocked full of engaging characters.

Julie Cantrell writes exquisitely about family love, facing difficulties and returning to our roots. Cantrell's writing is both descriptive and inspirational. The memory garden, where every bloom is tied to a past memory is a charming idea, complete with hydrangeas, gardenias, black-eyed-susans and a labyrinth. You can practically see the fireflies and smell the fragrances in the air at the anniversary party big reveal.

Those facing family adversity will truly appreciate this poignant story. Other books by award winning Cantrell include: *The Feathered Bone* (2015), *When Mountains Move* (2012) and *Into the Free* (2011).

"No matter how bad life gets, we must always, always, always continue to grow, preparing ourselves for our next big bloom."

—Perennials

Julie Cantrell

Linda Zagon says

My Review of "Perennials" by Julie Cantrell

Kudos to Julie Cantrell, author of "Perennials" for such an emotional and heartwarming novel. The symbolism in this book, leads to many layers of life. The genres of this novel are Fiction and Women's Fiction. The timeline of this story as it relates to the characters is the present and as the two sisters in the story were growing up. The story take place mostly in Oxford, Mississippi, where the author shows her characters love for literature, history and flowers. It also takes place in Arizona.

The blurb from the books says "When two estranged sisters reunite for their parents' 50th anniversary, a family tragedy brings unexpected lessons of hope and healing amid the flowers of their mother's perennial garden." The father wants to give his wife a "memory garden" as a special present. The mother has a love for all perennials and living things.

The author describes her characters as complicated and complex. She often uses the symbolic example of a garden, seed, roots foundation, care, love and growth to compare to the characters. The lesson of Judas is brought up and is used to explore the characters flaws, betrayals, secrets, needs, strengths and weaknesses. The author also discusses the concept of "Family First" in this story. Also discussed is sibling rivalry. Secrets and lies also are in this story.

Lovey has left Mississippi at an early age headed to Arizona, where she is a financial success in advertising, and also teaches Yoga. She is called home to help celebrate her loving parents 50th Wedding Anniversary. Told it is an emergency, Lovely leaves immediately and sees her estranged sister Bitsy. Bitsy has two children that Lovely has longed to have a relationship with, but Bitsy has kept them away from her. What has made Bitsy so bitter and angry? What had made Lovely leave Mississippi, and go to Arizona.? What is so important that her parents want Lovely home?

I appreciate the historical research that Julie Cantrell has done in the literature, flowers, and gardens. I love that the author discusses sibling rivalry, betrayal and loyalty, lies and the truth. self-worth, and growth, and positive people and positive things in our lives. The author also talks about the importance of family, friends, support, encouragement, growth, love and hope. Be warned: there are a few Kleenex moments. I would highly recommend this book to readers who appreciate a loving and memorable story. I received this Advanced Reading Copy for my honest review.

Tia says

Such a heartwarming and frustrating read. Loved every minute of it. Fisher, Finn, Bitsy, Chief, Laurel and Lovey were all great characters. The main characters were the flowers and the bits of literary references. I

learned a lot. I hope I can visit those places in Mississippi one day.
