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When we were little and I needed Warren, I would rub my earlobe. And perhaps it was the alchemy of childhood, a magic that happened because I believed it could, but I swear it worked. He always came.

Theirs wasn't always the misfit family in the neighborhood. Jenna Parsons's childhood was one of block parties and barbecues, where her mother, a former beauty queen, continued her reign and her twin brother, Warren, was viewed as just another oddball kid. But as her mother's shopaholic habits intensified, and her brother's behavior became viewed as more strange than quirky, Jenna sought to distance herself from them. She is devoted to her career and her four-year-old daughter, Rose. But now, in his peculiar way, Warren summons her back to 62 Royal Court.

What she finds there—a house in disrepair, a neighborhood on tenterhooks over a rash of petty thefts, and evidence of past traumas her mother has kept hidden—will challenge Jenna as never before. But as she stands by her family, she also begins to find beauty in unexpected places, strength in unlikely people, and a future she couldn't have imagined.

House of Wonder Details

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Brought to you by OBS reviewer Kim

This was an awesome book and a very emotional read at that. It was charming and funny, heartwarming and sad all rolled into one.

This will open your eyes to the fact that our eyes are open but we don't really see and we all fear things that we don't understand. Sadly we lose out on so much because of what we see on the outside and not really see what's held on the inside.

Life was hard for Priscilla, the adults in her life failed her on so many levels that it took many years for her to really find out what happened to her mother, to understand her father and find release from her stepmother. Priscilla had endured a lot in her life which made her a strong and loving mother to her children especially her son Warren who was so much different than other kids that he was shunned as an outcast by the community until the day came when all was finally made right.

Jenna is Warren's twin and they say that twins speak a language that only they can understand and that is what it took to bring Jenna back to Royal Court, a place that Jenna has outgrown and wanted no part of it.

When Jenna comes back home to help, she's come to realize that her family has become outcasts in the beloved community in which she was raised. No longer do they see Priscilla as the beauty queen she once was or Warren as the misguided and lost youth who was a little different than other kids, what they now see is an old woman who hoards stuff in a rundown old house and Warren as a threat to the community as thefts are occurring around the neighborhood.

Now it's apparent to Jenna that she has to fix this but with an old flame back home and the hostility of the people it's getting harder and harder for Jenna to come to terms with what is really wrong with her family. When the skeletons come crawling out of the family closet, things are starting to make sense and she has a better understanding of life and what she wants out of it.

As the pressure builds up and her world is starting to crumble, it takes a near tragedy to right it all. One thing for sure, NEVER judge a book by its cover because you just may be missing the best read of your life.

OBS would like to thank the publisher for supplying a free copy of this title in exchange for an honest review

Nancy says

House of Wonder is, at its very essence, a very well written book about connectedness of family. The writing style is superb, providing subtle metaphors and symbolism. There are two time frames running,

although the bulk of story is today. The book begins with 36 year old Jenna, in Jenna's POV, Getting a call from Priscilla, her mother, to ask her to come home. Warren is missing.

Jenna and Warren are fraternal twins. Jenna graduated from high school and left her small Jersey town. She needed to escape the definition of her family. Her mother was a former beauty queen who married out of the pageant circuit. In middle age, her husband left her for Mrs. Stroppe, a neighbor woman, leaving her with two teens; one relatively normal one and one who just hadn't matured, according to her. The reader quickly ascertains that Warren is on the PDD scale. Priscilla has been hoarding for years. Neighbors are, at times, unkind or at least ignoring of the trio. The house is full of stuff, Warren is still living at home, and Jenna is a single mother experiencing a degree of success.

How did Priscilla get this way? What caused Warren to be so unconventional? Who is responsible for the neighborhood burglaries? Love interest alert: What will happen with Jenna and Bobby?

Through sparse prose, the book provides short chapters on Priscilla's formative years and pivotal points. The author does not explain the parallels or describe the cause and effect regarding Rose or even Warren and Jenna. The author assumes her reader possesses enough intellect to make the connections and I really loved that. She provides enough information to tell the story but does not overwhelm the reader.

The bottom line is the relationship between twins, the hazards of keeping skeletons in closets, and unresolved losses manifesting in other areas of life. Very well written.

Viviane Crystal says

Jenna and Warren grew up as twins in a small New Jersey town throughout the 1950s and thereafter. Their mother was a famous beauty queen who was primed for fame but neglected and abused in every other way. Jenna was born without trouble but Warren had to be delivered half an hour later by C-section. Warren has an obvious mental disability but is sweet, loving, smart and extremely sensitive to those whom he trusts. He and Jenna have an obviously close relationship; all they have to do is pull on an earlobe when in distress and the other will come to help immediately!

Jenna is grown now and has a daughter of her own, Rose. She is drawn back to her hometown when her mother starts exhibiting strange behavior arising from shopaholic tendencies. One senses something else is wrong with Priscilla but as with Warren the disorder is never named and that's a good thing as the reader is drawn to learn more about them rather than stereotypically labeling them and fitting future behaviors to that label. We also are able to discern the positive aspects of their personality that we might miss otherwise!

This is the story of Jenna returning to help her mother and Warren, who is beat up severely and accused of the random, frequent robberies in the neighborhood. Add to that that Rose's absent Dad has now returned and wants to be a father, although his new wife makes everything more than difficult. The bright life in Jenna's world is an old high school friend Bobby who is preparing to be a doctor and his daughter Gabby. Both of their children have a prescient feeling about their relationship which makes it all the more endearing as their relationship grows into something lovely!

Many secrets are gradually revealed throughout this novel that hurt but hurt less than the lack of ability to explain the way things have evolved with Priscilla and her family and her husband. There's something wonderfully unique about this story that manages even in the worst of scenes to maintain a respect and love for each other that supersedes all else. Love isn't easy but it is healing when one sticks around long enough to observe, reflect and act rather than react. Love is precious in this highly recommended novel about family, dysfunction, mystery and growth!

Ashley says

I received a paperback copy of this book through Goodreads: First Reads giveaways.

This book is more of a 3.5 so I choose to go with 4 stars instead of 3 as it definitely deserves better than a 3.

This is not my usual genre of preferred reading, but sometimes I feel like I need to step out of my little comic/horror world and read something else. Granted I actually thought this had a touch of supernatural in it when I read the summary and it talked about Warren always showing up when she rubbed her ear... but I was mistaken and I truly didn't mind.

In all honesty, I spent most of this book being mad. Mad at the neighbors for treating Warren so unfairly, mad at his mom for babying him, mad at Jenna for not wanting to go back home and leaving Warren with just his mom for company, mad at the customers for complaining about him being the delivery guy..... just MAD. I wasn't a "mad at the book/author" deal, just mad because I know there are really people out there like that and it is something that I truly hate.

I was a little iffy when I realized there were flashbacks about the mom and HER mom but they were short chapters that didn't distract from the main story and they did help shed light on the over all story.

Overall, I thought this to be a well-written novel that I hate to pigeon-hole as "Chick Lit", one that ended on a rather happy note (which I normally don't care for) and wasn't burden down with a typical "love story". It was a nice glimpse into a different type of family dynamic than most.

Not scratching Sarah Healy off my list of authors to read.

Joanne says

I received "House of Wonder" by Sarah Healy as a Goodreads First-reads giveaway winner. For me, this was a perfect book because it evoked many different emotions as I read it and I didn't want to put it down.

"House of Wonder" is about a family with it's own unique set of problems, about relationships and also about mental illness. While understanding and treating mental illness has certainly improved since the 50's, it still has a long way to go. Many people don't understand or recognize people that are different than they are. I also enjoyed it because it felt authentic - both the characters and the story itself, and while it showed cruelty, it also had compassion and strength. I have only given a few books 5 stars before, but this one deserved it. I look forward to reading other books by Sarah Healy.

Donna Hines says

Jenna is being challenged like never before with a mother and brother that will test her limits of acceptance as they become known as the 'Misfit Family'.

Her twin brother Warren is just an odd and quirky guy and when coupled with the former beauty queen turned shopaholic mother it's not a question of just how nuts they all are.

Distance and boundaries is part of the exit plan for Jenna but can she hold her wits about her while raising her own daughter Rose as Warren seeks her out and wants her to return.

Beauty and magic is all around if you're just open to the possibilities.
A cute read with House of Wonder.

Jennifer Ricks says

Her writing was awesome. Her characters were totally memorable. If only the morals weren't so bad!! Sex on the third date? Really??

I really wanted to finish it, but I just didn't know if I'd be slammed with another sex scene. I love Warren. Julia is very likable but a little unrealistic to me. Would she really just be chill about everything? And the perfect mother? And never meet another single dad until perfect Bobby just happens to be available? I really liked the flashbacks into her mother's life. The red herrings were a little predictable, but I liked the hometown story feel. And I live in NJ and she mentions Warren fishing in the river that's half a mile from my house, so that was super cool.

All in all, I wish I could have liked it. I feel kind of jipped that I couldn't. Can we just skip the immoral content next time, please?

Tiya Miles says

I picked up this book on a whim in Barnes & Noble while shopping with my son for a book he wanted. I was intrigued by the cover and the description of a family meal on the first page. Although the book took its time to move, it slowly enveloped me. Half-way in, I was riveted. The story is so sad, beautiful, and touching, that it kept me up nights with worry about the main characters. The fleeting moments of deep insight that the protagonist has about life and its meanings are stunning. I wasn't always sure that I would be able to hang in there with the story the more troubling things became for the characters, but now that I have finished the book I can declare the ending to be totally satisfying. The sadness was worth it and absolutely necessary. I am eager to read what Sarah Healy writes next.

Deanna (A Novel Glimpse) says

Jenna Parsons is a successful business owner and single mother. She's spent her adult life trying to distance herself from her eccentric twin brother, Warren, and her enabling mother, Priscilla. But when Warren goes missing and strange things start happening in the neighborhood, Jenna and her daughter must return to her childhood home to support her family. Returning home will have Jenna seeing the past and future in ways she never has before.

First of all, I must thank Goodreads First Reads and Leslie Schwartz Powers for the copy of House of Wonder. I really appreciated the chance to be introduced to an author I haven't read before and honestly review her novel.

House of Wonder is a beautifully written story about family, love and perceptions. I loved the author's descriptions and the individual voices she gave her characters. I really identified with Jenna when she would

look back at her childhood assumptions and thoughts and see a much bigger picture of how things really were. Another thing I found interesting was the backstory of Priscilla and her mother woven throughout the book and how it strengthened the characters of both Priscilla and Warren.

I would highly recommend House of Wonder to readers that enjoy reading about families and maybe those that enjoy a little bit of mystery in their fiction.

Cheryl says

House of Wonder is a charming, endearing read. Jenna and her family may be different but I like different. I would not call them weird as I would call them quirky. Which is what makes them unique. I like the way the author gave both Jenna's mother, Silla and brother, Warren mental illnesses but did not make them debilitating with them. Rose was such a doll. She helped to liven things up in the story. The relationship she and Warren had was a good one. Also, I like that the author slowly revealed Silla's past and how it affected and shaped her into the person she was now. It really gave me a good insight into who she is as a person and helped me become closer to her as well.

While Warren may not have said much in the story, he was still an very important person in this book and one to listen to. You just had to have patience. The budding romance between Jenna and Bobby was great. I like that they took things slowly and let it develop into something. They made a cute couple. I look forward to reading the next book by this author.

Brenton Jennings says

Wow, isn't GoodReads.com just the very best. It helps readers like me and authors like Sarah Healy. See, thanks to the author, Sarah Healy, and Goodreads First Reads I won the book, "House of Wonder, for F R E E. You couldn't ask for anything better. Everyone loves a free book, right? I get to read this wonderful book and write a review describing my thoughts and feelings about "House of Wonder" in hopes that others find my review to their liking and go out to purchase their very own copy. All I know is that I am so excited. So now it is in the postman's hands.....I here waiting.

Just a delight read, would recommend to all!

Cousin says

I read an ARC of this beautifully written novel. I hoped that it would have something beyond the trope of a typical love story, and it did. At its core, it's a poignant exploration of the love and bond between a brother and sister and their mother. Jenna (the main character) and Warren (her twin brother), now adults, are raised in a prototypical suburban New Jersey development, eating, doing and experiencing things so many of us experienced growing up in NJ in the 70s and 80s. Except that that words like "normal" and "typical" really

only describe Jenna. Warren, on the other hand, marches to his own drum-beat. But these were the days before Aperger's and Autism were a part of the common lexicon. Their mother, Scilla, desperately wants to believe that Warren is just a "late bloomer" and will mature into himself, but she knows that within her own family history there may lay other explanations. To their father, Warren is the embodiment of failure and embarrassment - not a son son of whom he can be proud. The story explores the dynamics of years of keeping secrets, and how family wounds can fester and deepen.

Ms. Healy's prose is just wonderful, and she uses 3 different time-period settings to great effect (contemporary New Jersey, 1980s NJ, and late 1960s/early 1970s Texas). I found that so many of her nuanced descriptions resonated deeply with me. And I was pleased that while there is a love story within the novel, the more important story is that of Scilla, Jenna and Warren, and how generational secrets can have detrimental, lasting effects.

Debra says

Although difficult to follow at first, I eventually found myself enjoying reading this book. There were three main characters being developed, sometimes through a series of flashbacks, but each was built with a fine craftsmanship. The ending was a bit abrupt, but it did tie up the loose ends nicely, while still leaving things open for a sequel.

I was really intrigued with the author's style and will be looking for more from her! It was a clean book that I can share with my teen daughter - no cursing, detailed sex scenes, etc. It was a good story that could happen to anyone.

I was provided a copy of this book, but this is a faithful rendering of what I thought of it.

Kristen Deshaies says

I loved this novel so much, and truly was moved by it. The writing is so evocative -- over and over again Healy's descriptions transported me inside this masterfully told story that spans several generations.

The tender and complex relationships in this novel are so genuine and nuanced. The relationship between Jenna and her daughter Rose captured a mother/daughter relationship so well. The 'conversation' Jenna has with sleeping Rosie was one of my favorite parts of the novel. And the simple acceptance in Rosie's relationship with her Uncle Warren moved me to tears. Above all, I loved how respectfully and honestly Healy wrote about Warren through Jenna's (in some ways unchanged and in some ways evolving) view of him, and her protectiveness, reverence, and acceptance of him. The language she chose was thoughtful, tender and mature, and the effect is rich and moving.

"It seemed it was the small moments that made us who we are, the moments that were supposed to be insignificant, the ones that we didn't know quite why we remembered. They were the ones that mattered, those that were like messages in a language we didn't yet speak". Beautiful.

Laurel-Rain says

Growing up on Royal Court in Harwich, NJ, was full of poignant memories for Jenna, now an adult with her own preschool daughter Rose.

But the memories of a childhood with her twin brother Warren would be bittersweet, as now in adulthood, Warren and her mother are both considered a blight on the old neighborhood. Her mother, Priscilla, once Miss Texas, has turned into a hoarder, and Warren is “weird” to those around him. He is a loner with obsessive behaviors and habits, but to Jenna, he will always be the beloved twin who was there for her. And she wants to be there for him.

When the neighbors rise up to protest the Parsons home and Warren, Jenna will do whatever she can to clear her brother’s name against the allegations of the neighbors, some of whom have been sending harassing letters.

But there is still some good in that old neighborhood, Jenna discovers, as she reconnects with a high school flame, Bobby Vanni, now a resident at the nearby hospital, and the single father of Gabby, Rose’s new playmate.

House of Wonder is narrated by Jenna’s first person voice, and also flips back into the past where we see Priscilla (Silla) growing up in the 50s and 60s, with a horrible stepmother Hattie, and the loss of her own mother. Secrets veil the past for Priscilla...and probably set in motion some of her present day habits and behaviors. But beneath the secrets lie the freedom from the scourge of the past and an offering of hope for the future. A delightful story that earned 4.5 stars.
