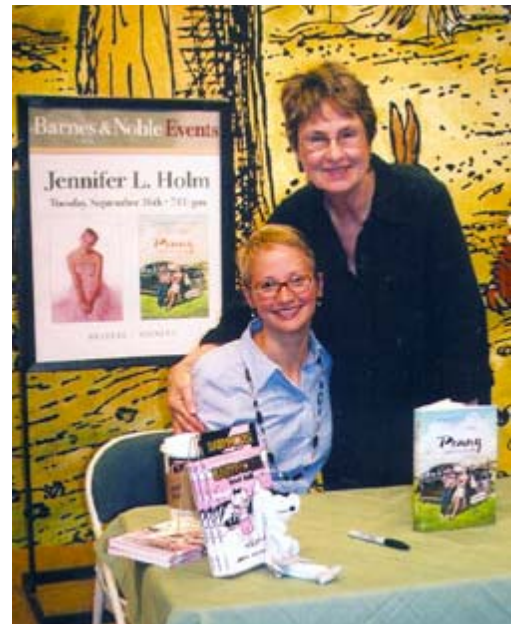


Penny from Heaven
Historical Fiction by Jennifer L. Holm
Random House Publishers
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**Picture of Jennifer L. Holm
and her mother
(the Penny from Heaven)**

About the Author

As a child, Jennifer L. Holm loved to read. On her website she quotes a neighbor saying, "his clearest memory of me as a child was watching me rake the lawn one-handed while I read a book with the other!"

Jennifer L. Holm majored in international relations at Dickenson College. Her senior year she audited a class in writing short stories. Several years later she received a gift of a great-aunt's (Alice Amelia Holm), journal. Reading the journal, she imagined herself in her aunt's pioneer life on the Washington state frontier. This provided the background for her first book, "Our Only May Amelia", which was a Newbery Honor Book in 2000.

She was born in 1968 in California. Her father was a pediatrician and her mother a pediatric nurse. Jennifer L. Holm has 4 younger brothers. She and her husband have one child, Will, and have collaborated on several children's books.

Jennifer L. Holm's website:
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Random House Publishers Website:

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780375836879>

Biography Resource Center

“Jennifer L. Holm.” Contemporary Authors Online, Gale, 2007 Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2007.

<http://www.inspire.net>

Jennifer L. Holm’s other books: Babymouse Series, Boston Jane Adventure Trilogy, The Creek, Middle School is Worse than Meatloaf, Our Only May Amelia, The Postman Always brings Mice, The Stink Files, To Scratch A Thief, You Only Have Nine Lives

Awards for Penny from Heaven:

- 2007 Newbery Honor Book
- New York Times Bestseller
- ALA Notable Children's Book
- Order Sons of Italy in America Summer Bookclub Selection
- 2006 New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing list

Annotation:

Penny from Heaven is inspired from Jennifer L. Holm's own Italian family. Her mother's name is Penny, and many of the stories in the book are based on Penny's experiences. She had eccentric uncles, enjoyed lots of Italian food, and dealt with tension between her mother's family and her deceased father's family. This work of historical fiction deals with many issues of the 1950's including the threat of polio, "wringer arm" injuries, Brooklyn Dodger baseball, and the treatment of Italian Americans.

Eleven year old Penny lives in two worlds, the plain dull life of her widowed mother and grandparents, and the lively, energetic world of her father's Italian family. Food is a common thread throughout the book. There are even two kitchens in her Aunt Gina's home because Grandma Nonny needs her own kitchen. And there is more than friendly competition between two Italian kitchens in the same house!

The story becomes personal, when Penny's widowed mother begins dating the milkman. Penny is bothered because no one seems to want to tell her about her real dad, although the Italian relatives share the most. She prefers to spend time with them and that is difficult for her mom.

Grief is difficult, especially when a death could have been prevented. As the story unfolds, Penny's encounter with a wringer washer lands her in the hospital, and an aunt finally reveals the facts behind her father's death.

Family, life, death and the true meaning of love and forgiveness are found in Penny from Heaven.

Genre: Historical Fiction

Point of View: First person

Theme(s): Family, forgiveness, prejudice

Although the song "Pennies from Heaven" was popular at the time, the title is based on comments from Penny's dying father, which she will be the "lost penny", the "penny he will not be able to hold".

Conflict: The conflict in this novel is both internal and external. Told in the first person, Penny is learning to deal with her own feelings after losing her father. There is also external struggle in that she does not want her mother to remarry, causing many disagreements, complicated by the tension between her mother and father's families.

Conflict Resolution: After an accident, while Penny is in the hospital, the opposing families are brought together, the truth comes out about her father, and her mother’s boyfriend becomes an encouragement to Penny.

Characters:

Name of Character	Relationship(s)	Personal and Physical Traits
Penny Her mom calls her “Bunny”	11 year old main character	A fun-loving girl, who is sad because no one will tell her why her dad died
Eleanor, “Ellie”	Penny’s mom	Widow; is still grieving, until she starts dating the milkman!
Mr. Mulligen	Mom’s boyfriend	The milkman- very tolerant and patient
Nonny (Genevieve)	Fraternal Grandmother	Always wears black- a great cook! Is always feeding everyone
Frankie	Cousin	A pest, but Penny’s best friend. Has many schemes to deal with problems
Paulie Gina	Uncle and Aunt	Lives in house with Nonny She’s an Ex-Rockette (dancer from New York)
Nunzio Rosa	Uncle and Aunt	He owns a clothing factory- generous- always gives Penny new coats and nice clothes
Ralphie Fulvia	Uncle and Aunt	He owns a grocery store- is generous; she thinks he gives away too much food
Dominic	Uncle	Lives in his car; feels guilty about something in his past
Angelo Teresa	Uncle and Aunt Frankie’s parents	He spent time in jail; finally gets a job
Me-Me	Maternal grandma	Loves Penny and her mom; a terrible cook
Pop-Pop	Maternal grandpa	Hard of hearing; poor manners (burps and farts) and says what he thinks
Scarlett O’Hara	Me-Me and Pop-Pop’s dog	Is old; wets on carpet- Pop-Pop says when your old, body parts wear out!

Setting: 1953, New Jersey

Interest Level: Grades 6-8

Reading Level: 5.2 (Lexile- 730)

Booktalk:

Do you have any unusual relatives? Most people do, although they might be embarrassed to admit it. Penny has an uncle who lives in a car, a cousin who is a real pest, a burping, farting grandpa, and her mother is dating the milkman!

In the book Penny from Heaven, by Jennifer L. Holm, tells us many stories about Penny's life. Although 1953 does not seem like that long ago, coping with things we don't have now are part of this story. Penny is not allowed to go swimming with friends at a public pool because of a Polio threat. The Dodgers still play in Brooklyn and people listen to the radio, because people don't have television.

The most difficult thing for Penny is that no one wants to talk about her dead father. Her mother is unhappy most of the time, until she starts dating the milkman. This is unbearable for Penny who just wants to know more about her real dad.

When she finally finds out, it leads the reader to some uncomfortable facts about the way Americans treated Italians during and after World War II.

To find out more about someone like you, who lived about 50 years ago, read this book!

Discussion Questions for Penny from Heaven, by Jennifer L. Holm

Pre-reading

1. How would you feel if you found out that other people thought your dad was a spy for another country?
2. How would you help your mom if she was sad all the time?
3. Are any of your relatives good cooks? What do they make that you enjoy the most?

Chapter One: The Best Seat in the House

4. Why the main character is called Penny and not what's on her birth certificate? (page 2)

Chapter Two: The Lucky Bean

5. What gift does Uncle Dominic give Penny, and what is its significance? (page 5-6)
6. Why does Penny almost not recognize her mother in the picture? (page 10)

Chapter Three: Mrs. Morelli's Brains

7. What happens to Mrs. Morelli's brains? (page 30-31)

Chapter Four: A Man Who Can Fix a Toilet

8. Describe how Penny has decorated her bedroom. (page 41)

Chapter Five: The Luckiest Fella Ever

9. What does Penny's Italian family talk about that her other family doesn't? (page 54-56)
10. What does the title of this chapter refer to? (page 56-57)

Chapter Six: Uncles, Uncles Everywhere

11. Why does the family not allow Penny to learn Italian? (page 59-60)
12. Give a brief history of Uncle Dominic's dogs. (page 61)
13. Describe an Italian meal. (page 64-65)
14. What emergency does Penny cause and who fixes it? (page 72-74)

Chapter Seven: The Translator

15. Who is the translator in this chapter? What does the translator do? (page 85)

Chapter Eight: Nonny's Underwear

16. Why does Penny decide that Nonny always wears black?(page 100)

Chapter Nine: The Slider

17. What does Penny think of her mom dating the milkman? (pages 101-110)

Chapter Ten: The Water Boy's Treasure

18. Why could this chapter be renamed "Dumb Boy Shot by Grandmother"? (Page 111-123)

Chapter Eleven: More Peas, Please

19. List three funny things that happen during Mr. Mulligen's dinner visit. (page 124-136)

Chapter Twelve: No Poking

20. What does Frankie do at Aunt Concetta's wake?

Chapter Thirteen: Better Than Angels

21. Why does Penny not like the gift that her mother gives her for her birthday? (page 151)
22. What happens to the birthday dinner that Me-Me cooked? (page 157-158)

Chapter Fourteen: All for the Best

23. What does Frankie do to get himself in trouble? (page 165-167)

Chapter Fifteen: A Punishment Worse than Death

24. What did Penny believe her mother learned in nursing school? (page 177)

Chapter Sixteen: So This Is Heaven

25. What happens at the same moment that Frankie finds a cigar box of money in Nonny's basement?

Chapter Seventeen: Dumb and Unlucky

26. What is life like for Penny in the hospital? (pages 197-202)

Chapter Eighteen: The Last Person on Earth

27. Why does Penny cry when Nonny visits her with the pastiera? (Page 217)
28. What does Mr. Mulligen do when he comes to the hospital? (page 218-219)

Chapter Nineteen: The Bomb

29. Who finally tells Penny about her father?
30. What was Penny's father's only crime?

Chapter Twenty: What's in a Name

31. Why would Penny's mom not let her go to a movie with Jack Teitelzweig? (page 237)
32. How does Uncle Dominic explain Penny's name? (page 241)

Chapter Twenty-one: A Lucky Girl

33. What does Mr. Mulligen ask Penny? (page 246-247)
34. How would you finish this sentence? "It's nice to have a man around to fix a _____"
(page 248)
35. Why does Penny remember the night when her mother invited all the Italian relatives for dinner? (page 253)

Chapter Twenty-two: A Regular Norman Rockwell Family

36. Why does Penny think her family is now a regular "Norman Rockwell Family"?

Post-reading

37. How do you think things will work out for Penny with her new dad, Mr. Mulligen?
38. Why do you think that both families got along at the end of the book? Who do you think helped them get along the most?

Language/Vocabulary for Penny from Heaven, by Jennifer L. Holm

Hermit (page 3)- a person who lives away from others, who seems to be hiding from something (example: Uncle Dominic living in his car)

Shrapnel (page 7)- metal pieces from an exploded bomb

Stock (page 18)- liquid in which meat, or vegetables have been cooked and which is used to make soup

Macaroon (page 20)- a cookie or small cake made of egg whites, sugar, and ground almonds or coconut

Pneumonia (page 55)- a serious illness of the lungs

Translator (page 85)- someone who makes something clear because someone is speaking in a different language; Penny was the translator between her parents' families who did not understand each other

Slider (page 101)- a baseball term for a pitch that you can't see coming- it may refer to an event in your life that happens without warning.

Chianti- (page 155)- wine

Polio (page 177) – a contagious disease that affects nerve cells, and may cause paralysis (not being able to move an arm or leg); in the 1950s, before a vaccine (a shot so you don't get it), there was a polio epidemic in the United States.

Crippled (page 177)- a person with a disability

Iron Lung (page 177)- a machine that makes a person breathe, when they can't breathe by themselves; it forces the air in and out of the lungs

Wringer (page 190)- an old fashioned washing machine that has two rollers to press the water out of clothing.

Orderlies (page 198)- a person who helps doctors in a hospital

Internment Camp (page 226)- a place where they kept "enemy aliens" during WWII; It was not as bad as a prison, but people were not allowed normal freedoms.

Some Italian phrases used:

Tesoro mio- (page 48) my treasure

Non e giusto- (page 55) bad men

Belissima (page 68) most beautiful girl

Pazza (page 29,105)- crazy

Patanella mia (page 237)- my little potato

Indiana Academic Standards met by novel content

Social Studies 6.1.18, 6.1.20, 8.1.27, 8.1.31, 8.2.1, 8.2.3

Language Arts 6.2.3, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 7.1.3, 7.2.4, 7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.5, 8.1.3, 8.3.2, 8.3.4, 8.3.5, 8.3.7

Anticipation Statements

Before		Penny from Heaven By Jennifer L. Holm	AFTER	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		It's better to listen to a baseball game on in a car than in your house.		
		Americans from another country should be treated differently than those born here (or who "look like" Americans)		
		If your father had died, you would want people to tell you what happened, even if it was hard for them.		
		It is o.k. to play tricks on your mother's boyfriend if you don't like him.		
		You feel better when you blame someone when something bad happens.		

Read-Aloud Passages

Read Aloud from Chapter Six- Uncles, Uncles Everywhere

Page 58-60, beginning with “My Italian family starts...”, ending with “curse words anyway.”

Importance of this passage: This passage introduces the reader to most of Penny’s uncles, and an Italian meal.

Read Aloud from Chapter Nine- The Slider

Page 101-103, beginning with “Uncle Dominic says...”, ending with “putting on her lipstick..”

Importance of this passage: This passage is the point where Penny realizes that her mother has been dating the milkman.

Read-Alikes

If you like The Penny from Heaven, by Jennifer L. Holm, then you may like:

Other books about Italian families:

The boys of San Joaquin : a novel, by D. James Smith.

Granny Torrelli Makes Soup, Sharon Creech

West to a Land of Plenty: the Diary of Teresa Angelino Viscardi, by Jim Murphy

Other books about families with difficulties:

A Corner of the Universe, Ann M. Martin

Olive's Ocean, by Kevin Henkes

Ozzie on His Own, by Joanna Hurwitz

The Watsons Go to Birmingham, Christopher Paul Curtis

The Window, by Jeanette Ingold

Biography

Small Steps, by Peg Kehret- this book gives real life insights to the disease that afflicted many during the 1950s.

Also, check out other historical fiction, by Jennifer L. Holm

Our Only May Amelia

Boston Jane Trilogy: An Adventure, Wilderness Days and The Claim

Across the Curriculum Connections Subject and Activities

ART: A Norman Rockwell Project

Activity: (may be done individually or in groups)

- Materials
 - Notebook paper
 - Copy of Norman Rockwell's "Freedom from Want" (pictured on following page)
- The last chapter in Penny from Heaven is titled "A Regular Norman Rockwell Family". At last, Penny believes her family is normal. Make a list of at least 10 adjectives that Penny would use to describe in family in the last chapter
- Spend at least 5 minutes looking at Norman Rockwell's "Freedom from Want" print, thinking about the characters, mood and setting
- Write a paragraph explaining why this picture could illustrate Penny's family.

If time allows, have students research Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms prints, created in 1943.

IN ART Academic Standards 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.3, 7.1.1, 7.1.3, 8.1.1, 8.2.1

"Norman Rockwell." Authors and Artists for Young Adults. Vol. 54. Gale, 2004. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2008.

www.inspire.net



Norman Rockwell, "Freedom from Want"

History Activity- Why were Italians interned during WWII?

Activity: (may be done individually or in groups)

- Materials
 - Notebook paper
 - Access to a computer; or a printout of the Segreta.org Internment page

- Complete two reading assignments:
 - Read Penny from Heaven, Author's Note pages 260-264
 - Una Storia Segreta- When Italian Americans were "Enemy Aliens"
<http://www.segreta.org/>
Select Internment option on left

Answer the following questions:

- a) "Alien" refers to an immigrant who is in America legally, but who is not a citizen. Why do you think our government was so concerned about these citizens?

- b) Describe how the Italian "enemy aliens" were treated.

- c) Do you think it was fair how they were treated? Explain.

- d) Ethnocentrism is the attitude that ones' own culture is superior to any other culture. In what way would ethnocentrism affect:
 - i) The way the enemy aliens were treated

 - ii) The way Penny's parents' families interacted

IN Academic Standards, Social Studies 6.1.18, 6.1.19, 7.5.7, 8.1.27, 8.1.28, 8.1.29, 8.2.3

Supplemental Resources

Books

The following two books provide background information on Italian Immigration:

Witkowski, Michael. Italian Americans. Vero Beach, Fla. : Rourke 1991.

Marcovitz, Hal. Ellis Island. Philadelphia : Mason Crest Publishers, 2003.

This following two books provide background on the polio vaccine:

Mulcahy, Robert. Diseases: finding the cure. Minneapolis, Minn: The Oliver Press, 1996.

Peters, Stephanie True. The Battle Against Polio. New York: Benchmark Books, 2005.

Here's an Italian Cookbook If you wanted to try some recipes!

Bisignano, Alphonse. Cooking the Italian way. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Co.,
c1982.

Websites

The National Italian American Foundation- background on Italian Americans

<http://www.niaf.org/>

Una Storia Segreta- When Italian Americans were "Enemy Aliens"

<http://www.segreta.org/>

Book Activities

Book Related Activity #1

Penny from Heaven, Jennifer L. Holm “Pennies from Heaven” Writing Prompt

The purpose of this activity is to make connections between novel content and the lyrics to the song “Pennies from Heaven.”

Materials:

- Notebook paper

Read the lyrics to “Pennies from Heaven” (on the page following the Table of Contents). These lyrics have several examples of literal and figurative meanings for words and phrases.

1. Write down 3 reasons why these lyrics represent Penny’s life, using specific examples from the story
2. Write a paragraph explaining why these lyrics represent Penny’s life, using your examples, and examples of the figurative language in the lyrics.

30 point Essay- grading:

10 points- Specific examples from novel used

10 points- Specific literal and figurative language used.

10 points- Grammar, spelling, punctuation

IN Academic Standards Language Arts 6.1.2, 6.3.7 6.6.1, 6.6.2, 6.6.3, 6.6.4, 6.6.5

IN Academic Standards Language Arts 7.1.1,7.6.6, 7.6.7, 7.6.8, 7.6.9

IN Academic Standards Language Arts 8.1.1 8.3.3, 8.6.4, 8.6.5, 8.6.6, 8.6.7

6. Frankie almost gets them shot!

7. Penny's mom started dating Mr. Mulligen.

8. Frankie's exploration of Nonny's basement causes Penny to have the accident with the wringer washer.

9. Penny finds out dad's death might have been prevented.

10. Penny is faced with giving permission for her mother to marry Mr. Mulligen.

Grading (30 points)

3 points for each question

- 1 point content
- 1 point reason why
- 1 point grammar, punctuation, spelling

IN Academic Standards Language Arts 6.3.2, 6.4.1, 7.3.3, 7.4.1, 8.3.3

Bibliography

Elements of Literature- Second Course, Orlando: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 2008.

Follett Book Company, <http://www.titlewave.com/login/>

Indiana Academic Standards, <http://www.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome2.html>

Indianapolis Marion County Public Library, www.imcpl.org/

Ingram Book Company, <https://ipage.ingrambook.com/ipage/hm001.jsp>

Withington, Janice J.. "Genres of Literature, Thematic Study Guides and Bibliographies." 01 January 1996: 1-147. ERIC. Electronic full-text.ED396337. <www.inspire.net>.

In addition, all the Supplemental Resource websites were used to gain background knowledge.