



The English American

By Alison Larkin

"I'm dancing on air about the fact that the book is hitting the mainstream because I SO wanted to write a novel that would genuinely appeal to the general public. I hoped that if I could turn it into the kind of fiction I like to read, even people with no concentration span, like myself, would 'get' what it might be like to be adopted. Most of all I wanted to create an adopted heroine who everyone would relate to and empathize with. I have always believed that if you can get a reader to laugh, you can also get them to feel and cry and then laugh again... I wanted people to laugh and cry with my adopted heroine, Pippa, as she emerges at the end, still funny, but stronger, wiser – an American with a British accent – who has a true chance of happiness." ~ Alison Larkin

Alison Larkin, born in the USA, was adopted as an infant by a British couple working and living in Washington DC. She spent a happy childhood in Africa and the south of England, and a creative young adulthood honing her writing, music and performance skills at the University of London and the Webber-Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art. Alison's world came to an emotional and artistic head when she found her enthusiastic all-American birthmother alive and ready for reunion in Bald Mountain, Tennessee. Living the incongruity of being a "redneck" with a posh English accent sent Alison to the stage with a highly successful one-woman show based on the wild divide of her personal story.

The English American is a fictionalized account of Alison's own journey. Like the author herself, the book is a warm, expansive read – a blend of American over-friendly energy and English charm and social correctness. Larkin's heroine, Pippa Dunn, never quite 'fits' into her staid adoptive family, and is ecstatic to meet her charismatic genetic connections in the USA. She is thrilled to recognize herself within her birthparents, and revels in filling in her missing pieces while living near NYC with her birthmother, Billie.

Slowly, Pippa gets to know the genuine Billie, and her birthfather, Walt, and is forced to learn to set down boundaries and stand up for herself while she sorts out her double whammy relationships: two sets of parents, two sets of siblings and two potential lovers...

Alison clarified, "I was interested in exploring the fantasy – reality elements. I think for an adopted person, if you know nothing about the parents who gave you birth, you will replace that with fantasy, and both Pippa and myself did that. I think that fantasy goes into the romance arena as well...But I did want to keep the heroine authentic."

Pippa works hard to separate fantasy from reality, and Larkin deftly handles the strange mix of light, romantic fiction and adoption issues, weaving an enchanting tale bolstered by



unalterable, gritty life-truths. Characters are developed beyond potentially easy stereotypes of buffoonish rednecks and rigid Brits; no one person in *The English-American* is the 'bad guy' of the story, and Larkin manages to keep Pippa and her emotional journey real, without making her pathological.

"So many novels or books portray adopted people as eternally damaged at best or serial killers at worst and I thought, I've had it with this! We adopted people have internal and external hurdles to overcome" said Alison, "but in my opinion, every adopted person who has ever even thought about trying to find a birthparent is a true HERO. And I wanted people to understand why!"

"Remember, there can be no courage without fear" Pippa is told throughout *The English American*, and in facing the unknown, telling the truth and risking rejection, she is able to move bravely forward. Her quiet adoptive parents, Pippa realizes, have given her the strength to grow from her encounters with Walt and Billie, and have infused her with the empathy necessary to acknowledge her birthparent's magnificent gifts-- and to understand their clay feet.

Pippa earns her hero's medal by the end of the book, and she comes full circle through her personal experience with humor, heartbreak, romance and hard-won knowledge. Larkin begins her novel with a quotation from T.S. Eliot that captures Pippa, wiser from her quest and poised for new adventure, at book's end. This piece of poem summarizes an adoptee search and reunion, but on another level, it works for returning to one's adopted home, too, medal proudly in place...

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time*

--T.S. Eliot. "Little Gidding"