

Synopsis of *The Garden of Eva*

In particular, I want to work on my novel *The Garden of Eva*. It's about the teenage daughter of a man who runs a Savings & Loan in a tiny New England town in the late 1980s. Enraged by the Enron scandal of 2002, I wondered how it affected the sons and daughters of those responsible, and I wanted to write a book for and about the kids. Were they ashamed, embarrassed, pissed off, or in denial? How did it change their lives? The savings and loan debacles of the 80s were a perfect backdrop as I could take similar, well-documented events out of history and weave in my characters. In my research (which included watching the movie 'It's a Wonderful Life'), I found a paragraph about a savings and loan man who charmed and betrayed the people of a Northern California town so severely no one knew what had hit them. This man had no children, was quite unlike the character I envisioned for the father, and my novel would be set in New England, but I used a collection of newspaper articles to help me understand the sequence of events and the fury of the people. I rescued the daughter, Eva, and all of her circumstances from another novel. Instant family.

Motherless, rambunctious, and loyal, 13-year-old Eva McPhee is at first shocked and fiercely protective when she finds out that her father, a small-town Savings & Loan president, is being investigated for corrupt behavior. Her father is a Saint, a Sweetheart, a grown-up Boy Scout, adored and looked up to by everyone in their community – the allegations cannot be true!

But this remains to be seen. With the thrift declared bankrupt, many townspeople, concerned about their money and suspicious of the man they'd always trusted, now see Eva's father as thief. Eva is angered by the change in their feelings, but is tempered by her endearing and devoted Methodist nanny, Harper. Not assuaged enough, however, Eva quickly becomes much too involved in the investigation and is forced to leave for the summer and stay with an old friend of her dead mother's after being hospitalized for a strange panic attack. As the investigation continues a couple hundred miles away, Eva becomes taken with her lovely, yet flawed host family (which includes a curious 16-year-old boy named David), but still cannot wrest herself entirely from her father's ordeals. Using Nancy-Drew-like investigative skills, Eva discovers things about her father, her nanny, and her real family that she could never have imagined and has to come to terms with these things or lose the people she cannot help but love.

Maybe the book is a coming-of-age, historical-fiction novel. If kids are going to grow up faster these days because grown-ups cannot help but behave badly, how could a book like this help?