



## A Corner of the Universe

By Ann M. Martin

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**A Corner of the Universe** By Ann M. Martin

Ann Martin's phenomenal Newbery Honor book, now in paperback

The summer Hattie turns 12, her predictable smalltown life is turned on end when her uncle Adam returns home for the first time in over ten years. Hattie has never met him, never known about him. He's been institutionalized; his condition involves schizophrenia and autism.

Hattie, a shy girl who prefers the company of adults, takes immediately to her excitable uncle, even when the rest of the family -- her parents and grandparents -- have trouble dealing with his intense way of seeing the world. And Adam, too, sees that Hattie is special, that her quiet, shy ways are not a disability,

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## A Corner of the Universe By Ann M. Martin Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Martin (Belle Teal; the Baby-Sitters Club series) hints at a life-changing event from the first paragraph of this novel narrated by a perceptive and compassionate 12-year-old, and set in the summer of 1960. Hattie Owen had been anticipating a summer as comfortably uneventful as all the others ("I just want things all safe and familiar," she admits), helping her mother run their boarding house, painting alongside her artist father and reading "piles" of books. Then Uncle Adam (whom Hattie never knew existed) makes a surprise entrance, turning everything upside-down. Hattie's mother says that Uncle Adam has "mental problems." Hattie's grandparents act embarrassed whenever he is around, and her peers laugh at him. The author authentically conveys the ripples Adam sends through this small town. The heroine is continually amazed by his outlandish antics, moved by his sudden mood changes and secretly wonders if she and Adam might be kindred spirits. Hattie finds adventure and tragedy as well as enlightenment as she "lifts the corners of [her] universe" in order to better understand Adam. With characteristic tenderness and wisdom, the author portrays the complex relationship between the sympathetic heroine and her uncle ("I feel a little like his baby-sitter, a little like his mother, not at all like his niece, and quite a bit like his friend"). Readers will relate to Hattie's fear of being as "different" as Adam, and will admire her willingness to befriend an outcast. Hearts will go out to both Hattie and Adam as they step outside the confines of their familiar world to meet some painful challenges. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 5-8-Watching home movies, Hattie looks back over the summer of 1960 and the events that changed her perception of life. The 12-year-old has difficulty making friends her own age, but enjoys the company of an elderly boarder, the friendly cook, and her artist father. Her relationship with her mother is sometimes difficult because they must always negotiate clothing and behavior to suit her wealthy, overbearing maternal grandmother. Suddenly, an uncle whom Hattie has never heard of comes to live with her grandparents because his school has closed. Although she is totally shocked at the existence of this rapidly babbling, Lucille Ball-quoting, calendar-savant child in a man's body, Hattie comes to appreciate his affection for her, his exuberance for life, and his courage in facing society's rejection. When she suggests that he sneak out to join her for a night of fun at a carnival, tragedy ensues. Hattie's narration is clear and appealing. Her recollection of the smallest of behaviors shows that each family member has felt both love and pain for her uncle, but could not express it. As she comes to understand what Uncle Adam meant when he spoke of being able to lift the corners of our universe, she is hopeful that her family can learn to heal and communicate. Martin delivers wonderfully real characters and an engrossing plot through the viewpoint of a girl who tries so earnestly to connect with those around her. This is an important story, as evocative on the subject of mental illness as Ruth White's *Memories of Summer* (Farrar, 2000).

*Cindy Darling Codell, Clark Middle School, Winchester, KY*

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 6-8. It is 1960, Hattie Owen is about to turn 12, and her world is about to be turned upside down. She loves her small town and the boarding house her parents run (enabling her father to pursue his art), in part because of the security and familiarity her surroundings represent. The boarders seem to be as much a part of the family as her grandparents, who live in a mansion and literally look down their noses at the Owens. But Hattie's perceptions of life in general--and her life in particular--change when 21-year-old Uncle Adam returns to town after his residential school closes. Adam seems to be manic-depressive, and he's a savant

when it comes to dates. He's news to Hattie, but he mostly delights her, and she feels she can help him. His problems, however, are more than anyone--including Adam--can handle. The book's message--that people like Adam help "lift the corners of the universe"--is passionately offered, though perhaps too oft repeated. It is Martin's characters that shine, especially Hattie, who is trying to feel her way through family secrets, and Adam, whose valiant efforts to forge a life for himself are as uplifting as his failures are heartrending. The supporting characters are strong pillars that hold up the rest of the story, and their subtle depictions provide a depth that makes it much more than a "problem novel." This is a fully realized roller coaster of emotions, and readers take the ride right along with Hattie. *Ilene Cooper*

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