

Reading notes  
*The Erratics* (Vicki Lavau-Harvie)

*Understated in its language and emotion, and raw in its exploration of family and personality, The Erratics is a beautifully drawn portrait of the tension that exists between duty and self-preservation – a tightrope that is both tense and fragile, and at times dangerous. Neither saccharine nor sentimental, Lavau-Harvie weaves the Canadian backdrop into this memoir that asks as many questions as it answers.*

1. Although the author lives in Australia, the book takes place in the Canadian town of Okotoks. A 'landscape of uncommon beauty', it is typified by the giant rocks called Erratics. What is the significance of the Erratic in the book, and why is the book named after this formation?
2. The author's mother is described early on as 'mad as a meat-axe' (page 1), and though we may wonder whether she suffers from a personality disorder or a mental health issue, we are never quite sure what has made her such a formidable player in the family. Has the author done this deliberately, kindly, or is she also at a loss to understand her mother?
3. 'His eyes are bright as he looks at her, mute devotion to the moment ... when he can believe that whatever it costs, it is worth it to be enfolded in the aura.' Why has the author's father sacrificed so much? Has he been a willing participant in the family's downfall and dysfunction or simply weak in the face of his wife?
4. 'With your family history, he says ... logically you should be a serial killer. You're not, he adds reassuringly. You're a good person' (page 71). How is it that we can be so different from our family of origin? If not nature, or nurture, then what?
5. Apart from the author's visit to her son, and a few references to her ex-husband, we do not hear much of her life or family. Why is this?
6. 'The one who doesn't care has all the power (page 114). An old adage, but true?
7. 'Blood calls to blood. What can I tell you?' (page 18). Why do the sisters not relinquish their responsibility to their parents in the face of absolute abandonment, coldness and cruelty?
8. 'Confronting the real makes you a person of substance' (page 64). What is the author's purpose in writing this book?
9. 'I do know this: where there is nothing, there must have been pain. That's why there is nothing. Be glad if you forget' (page 123). Can we truly forget the pain of the past?

10. The author admits to 'the struggle never to be caught off guard or to let crazy become the new normal' (page 127). How easy is this, and is it, in fact, possible?
11. 'My sanity [is] always dependent on living somewhere remote' (page 135). Is the author's decision to move away a wise, necessary, or selfish move?
12. 'I tell her that I feel differently about Mum's story now that the last page has been written ... Dad should be allowed to feel this too' (page 211). Were they right in telling their father about their mother's passing?
13. 'Were you even listening to the story about my cloak? It's about not taking back what you have given' (page 216). What does this mean in the last chapter of the book? Are you satisfied with the end of the story?