

# Debut novel a family affair

## *The Reader*

By Joe Gross

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Andrew Porter writes about families their hopes, their fears, the way they look at the world and the way they think the world looks back at them.

In his debut novel "In Between Days," Porter casts his eye on the Hardings, a Houston family who are coming apart at the seams.

Elson and Cadence are recently divorced and have taken up with partners different from each other. Elson has trouble keeping up with younger Lorna, while Cadence cannot figure out where her new relationship is going.

Their kids are leading similarly messy lives. Richard is a strong student poet, but is unsure if he should make it his life's work and is increasingly confused about the intentions of his mentor, Dr. Michelson.

Meanwhile, Chloe might be in the most trouble of all, either a witness to or participant in a brutal crime.

For the record, Porter, the director of the creative writing program at Trinity University in San Antonio, would like to assure everyone that this is not his family.

"I am very happy to say the Hardings have nothing to do with my own family," Porter said. "I am sure to some extent my understanding of family as a thing is partly in the book, but the Hardings' various conflicts are entirely fictional."

Porter went to Vassar College in New York expecting to be a filmmaker. "But I took a fiction writing class and really fell in love with short stories and what they could do."

Perhaps fittingly, Porter is best known for his well-regarded short-story collection, "The Theory of Light and Matter," which won the 2007 Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction.

"The subject matter of the short stories and the novel is the same: families, and family dynamics," Porter said, "But the style is very different. The stories are first person and the novel is this third person omniscient voice which I had never attempted before."

Indeed, Porter hadn't attempted a lot of "In Between Days" before.

"I was wondering if I could actually tell a long story," Porter said. "I was daunted by it. I was a guy who put out a collection of first person meditative pieces. Plot has never been the thing that excited me. I was much more drawn to character, which is why I've spent most of my writing life writing short stories."

Like many novelists, he was unsure where everyone would end up. "The characters were a mystery to me," Porter said. "The mother, Cadence, especially. When I started, I was completely sure she was someone who seemed pretty firm in her decision about her divorce. I expected her to be firmer, more stable, the practical-minded one. But as the novel went on she makes her own poor decisions and has her own

neuroses and problems that I hadn't expected."

Andrew Porter discusses, reads from and signs "In Between Days" at 7 p.m. Monday at BookPeople.