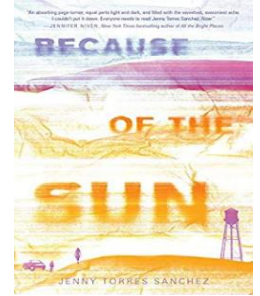


## **Because of the Sun by: Jenny Torres Sánchez** (Delacorte Press, 2017)



### **Who?**

#### **Falls Family:**

**Dani Falls:** At the start of the book, is a high school student at the end of her junior year and is almost 18 years old. Dani grew up in Florida with her single mom, Ruby, with whom she had a difficult relationship. Dani is frozen/paralyzed with fear/ denial/ shock when she sees her mom getting mauled to death by the bear in their backyard, and Dani then is haunted by the bear in her dreams and during the day. Dani is sent to New Mexico to live with an aunt that she did not know about. In her new home, Dani meets many people who help her work through her grief and issues from her childhood with her abusive, alcoholic mother that help her to become stronger and sympathetic towards her mom.

**(Anna) Ruby Falls/ Dani's mom:** Early in the text, we learn from Dani that Ruby had a drinking problem and was verbally abusive to Dani. After Ruby was killed by a bear while suntanning in her backyard, Dani goes to NM and begins uncovering some of *Anna Ruby's* secrets that she would have never suspected. Some of these secrets include her birth name being Anna Ruby which she changed to Ruby at some unknown point, the abuse that *Anna Ruby* experienced and witnessed in her own childhood, witnessing her mom kill her abusive, alcoholic dad as a kid and more.

**Shelly/ Dani's aunt:** Dani learns about her Aunt Shelly from the child services worker, who informs Dani that she will be moving to NM. Shelly meets Dani at the airport in El Paso, Texas and the two have a silent and perhaps awkward drive to the trailer park in rural NM where Shelly lives. In the second part of the text, we learn about the abuse that Shelly also endured as a child and the responsibility she felt towards her younger sister *Anna Ruby* and her mother.

**Shelly and Anna Ruby's parents:** In the second part of the text, as Shelly recounts her childhood, we learn that her father was a Vietnam veteran, who stole a trailer from the dealership he worked at in Colorado and then drove it with the family to New Mexico. We also learn of his temper/ anger problem, his drinking problem and how abusive he was, physically and verbally to his family. He was repeatedly abusive and violent towards his wife, and the one day that he started getting abusive towards Shelly led to Shelly's mom killing him in front of both children. Shelly's mom refused to move or leave her trailer home as she held on to the hope that *Anna Ruby* would one day return to their home in New Mexico.

#### **People who help Dani in Florida:**

**Dani's neighbors (Helen, Mr. & Mrs. Sterling, the man 2 doors down and his son):** Helen offered to take Dani in after her mother was killed so that she wouldn't have to go with child services. Other neighbors tried to save Ruby/ scare off the bear.

**Tom(?)/ Ruby's last boyfriend:** came by their house in denial about what happened to Rub and gave Dani some cash (like how he and other men used to do for her mother).

**Ms. Overton:** is a child services worker who checks in with Dani after her mom was killed. She informs Dani that she has an aunt in NM with whom she is going to go live and brings Dani to the airport for her flight to El Paso.

#### **People who help Dani in New Mexico:**

**Paulo:** Dani meets Paulo one afternoon when she decided to walk to the gas station out of boredom. Paulo works at the gas station (that his grandma owns), and he sees Dani faint on her way back home from the gas station and immediately runs out to help her. Through the developing friendship and relationship between Paulo and Dani, we learn that he was born and lived in Mexico as a kid and that his mom saw things getting bad and wanted to bring Paulo to the U.S. with her husband before anything happened to Paulo. Unfortunately, before they can leave Mexico, both of Paulo's parents are killed while he was hiding under his bed. This traumatic life event helps Dani relate and ultimately open-up to Paulo about her own childhood.

**Paulo's grandmother/ Doña Marcela:** We first meet Doña Marcela after Dani faints and Paulo rushed her to his grandmother's house for help. We witness Doña Marcela's humanity as Paulo explains why his grandmother brings water, food and crosses out to the desert near the Mexican border and in Shelly's reflection of her childhood in which Doña Marcela played a key, supportive role.

### **Where? When?**

The book begins at Dani's house in Florida. The location then changes to New Mexico after Dani's mom is mauled by a bear forcing Dani to move to New Mexico to live with her aunt. We learn from Dani's Aunt Shelly that Shelly and Anna Ruby were born in Colorado but grew up in rural New Mexico near the Mexican border.

## The relationship between Dani and Ruby:

**How does Dani describe her mom, Ruby?** Dani says that she hated her mom because “she made it hard to breathe” (5). She explains that she never wanted to be anything like her mother and that her mother was very hungry for attention as “all she [Ruby] ever wanted was to stand out. And she did. Her hair, her clothes, her voice. She was loud” (18). According to Dani, Ruby used men, like Tom, her last boyfriend for money; always wanted to rent big places (4-bedroom places) despite not earning enough income at her waitressing jobs to afford the rent (41). However, once she moves to NM to live with Shelly, Dani realizes that she didn’t fully know her mother and begins to become sympathetic towards her.

**How did Ruby feel about Dani (according to Dani)?** Dani recounts many verbally abusive and degrading remarks that her mother said to her. One example is that her mother always told her that she was “her terrible daughter” (5). Another example would be Ruby calling Dani ungrateful and unappreciative when Dani would ask her why Ruby insisted in living in homes above her means. Other examples would include Ruby saying: “you always have to ruin everything” (43) and Ruby expressing/ implying that her life would be better without Dani.

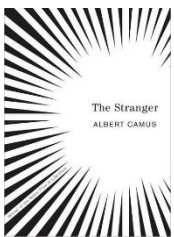
## The relationship between Dani and Shelly:

**How does Dani describe her aunt, Shelly?** Dani initially has a tough time connecting with her aunt Shelly, as the two never knew about each other. Shelly didn’t attend Ruby’s funeral, so their first meeting is in the El Paso airport. They both shared a quiet and perhaps awkward car ride back to Shelly’s home. At first, the two characters do not interact much with each other. Dani explains that Shelly mainly just left her notes to say that she was at work or running errands.

In Part 3, Shelly finds Dani in the old mobile home in the middle of the night and sees her with a bandana around her head—like what her sister, Anna Ruby, would do. Shelly then tells Dani about all that happened in that trailer and all that Anna Ruby, Shelly and their mom had endured as far as the abuse and violence from their dad. This moment helps the two bond and start to have a communicative relationship. Shelly asks Dani to fly out to Florida with her to visit Anna / Ruby’s grave, which gives the two a chance to grieve and express their thoughts to Anna/ Ruby. At the end, when they drive back with the U-Haul truck full of Dani and Ruby’s belongings, they are closer than ever, and Dani says that she finally feels at home as she enters Shelly’s house.

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## Other resources to facilitate the use of *Because of the Sun* in the classroom:



***The Stranger* by Albert Camus** *Because of the Sun* is full of references to Camus’s *The Stranger* and uses it to explain how Dani was grieving her mother’s death. Torres Sánchez explains at the end of her book in the author notes how Meursault’s indifference and numbness to his mother’s death in *The Stranger* influenced her creation of Dani. Consider reading part of *The Stranger* and drawing connections between the two texts, and, specifically, between Dani and Meursault. Also consider watching this short YouTube video that pays homage to Camus’s *The Stranger* to draw connections between Dani and Meursault **and** between the film that Paulo created in *Because of the Sun* as homage to his parents’ deaths and the film that Leo Levy (director of the following YouTube Video) created as an homage to *The Stranger*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4czS8NgXLjQ>



**Listen to the Beatle’s “Here Comes the Sun”** As a way to “lighten the mood,” consider using this Beatle’s song to discuss the change we see in Dani by the end of the book. Proposed discussion question: Thinking back to all the characters who tried to help Dani grieve and process her mother’s death, what or who is Dani’s “sun”? Explain how this “sun” (could be a thing or person/people) has helped bring light to Dani’s life. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUNqsfUwhY>

**Consider sharing resources with students** (*should they need them*). Here are numbers for resources in Albuquerque, NM:

AGORA Crisis Center: 505.277.3013	New Mexico Statewide Crisis Line: 1.866.435.7166
NM Crisis & Access Line: 1.855.662.7474	USA National Suicide Hotline: 1.800.784.2433
UNM Psychiatric Center: 505.272.2800	USA National Crisis Hotline: 1.800.273.8255

**Text line:** Crisis Text Line: **Text “TALK” to 741.741**