



Hello, CLJ Readers.

In this issue, we have encouraged our reviewers to also send us reviews they prepare for their own blogs. Carol Gehringer has shared several with us. We are now inviting other bloggers to share their reviews with CLJ. We believe this will benefit both bloggers, who will reach a wider audience, and CLJ as a gathering place for reviews from a Christian point of view. If you are interested, email us using our contact form online. We'll send you the information you need to get started.

Enjoy reading about the good books our reviewers have shared with us in this issue. Because of health problems, there are no new entries to the core collection at this time, and will not be until I recover from back surgery.

Blessings,
Nancy

Books for Young Children

Bunting, Eve

Have You Seen My New Blue Socks? / by Eve Bunting; illustrated by Sergio Ruzzier.

Clarion Books ISBN 9780547752679

PRI Ages 2-5 Rating: 5

With help from his friends, Duck looks for his lost socks. *Have You Seen My New Blue Socks?* unfolds in rhyme, as Mr. Fox, Mr. Ox, and the peacocks join the search to a charming conclusion.

In this adorable picture book, author Eve Bunting uses rhyming words both simple (“I have lost my new blue socks. Did I put them in my box?”) and clever (“I’m trying not to be depressed. Without my socks I feel undressed”). This is a great read-aloud book for preschoolers, who will giggle at the unexpected scenes and silliness. Sergio Ruzzier’s gentle pen, ink, and watercolor illustrations add to the soft tone and grace the book’s endearing characters with personality and sweet expressions.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Zarins, Kim

The Helpful Puppy / by Kim Zarins; illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully.

Holiday House ISBN 9780823423187

PRI Preschool-Grade 2 Rating: 4

All day a little puppy desperately tries to help out on the farm by sharing the chores of the other animals, but he is unable to cock-a-doodle-do, push an ox cart, lay eggs, or grow wool. *The Helpful Puppy* concludes when he realizes he already has the perfect job for a pup his size.

Kim Zarins' sweet story of a little dog who wants to be useful will resonate with every young child who has ever felt unimportant in a big world. The rhyming text is sophisticated and lyrical, expanding the typical picture book audience to include older readers. The ending is a tender reminder that no one is too small to be needed! Emily Arnold McCully's watercolor illustrations wonderfully capture both peaceful and busy scenes of life on a farm as well as the delightful rapport between the puppy and his boy; a shift from full-page scenes to small vignettes adds extra visual interest.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Pinborough, Jan

Miss Moore Thought Otherwise / by Jan Pinborough; illustrated by Debby Atwell.

Houghton Mifflin ISBN 9780547471051

PRI Grades 2-6 (all ages) Rating: 5

Growing up in the late 1800s, Annie Carroll Moore dreams of adventure beyond her life in Limerick, Maine. From a young age she aims to challenge the popular view of what children and women ought to do. At age 19 she heads to New York and graduates from library school. Libraries are just beginning to allow children patrons, and Miss Moore implements many changes to make libraries more accessible and inviting to the children of New York City. In 1911, the new Central Children's Room of the New York Public Library features many of Miss Moore's revolutionary ideas, which will later be copied by libraries throughout the world.

Miss Moore Thought Otherwise is an enlightening picture book for young readers who will have trouble imagining a time when public libraries did not welcome children. Author Jan Pinborough introduces the little-known Annie Carroll Moore and tells how the creative vision and determination of this influential American woman led to many of the features children enjoy in libraries today. Debby Atwell's folk art style illustrations perfectly evoke the time period and wonderfully capture both rural and city scenes from Miss Moore's life. This would be an excellent book to share during a library story time or as part of a women's history lesson. Endnotes contain additional biographical information, photographs, a helpful list of sources for further study, and a brief description of five other "trailblazing librarians" from the same era.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Applegate, Katherine

The One and Only Ivan / by Katherine Applegate.

Houghton Mifflin ISBN 9780061992254

INT Grades 4 and up Rating: 5

The One and Only Ivan by Katherine Applegate is a fictional story based on the life of Ivan, a real gorilla, who now lives at Zoo Atlanta. Before being transported to the zoo, Ivan lives at the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade. He lives at the mall for so long that he doesn't remember life in the jungle. He loves to draw and his drawings are sold at the gift shop. Ivan's best friends at the mall are Stella, an elephant, and Bob, a stray dog. The caretaker always brings his ten-year-old daughter, Julia, with him to work. Julia spends her time talking to the animals and drawing with Ivan. The mall's owner, Mack, is worried because he isn't making as much money as he used to. Mack's new attraction is a baby elephant named Ruby. Stella is excited to see another elephant and becomes Ruby's mother figure.

Stella is elderly and, when she becomes really sick, Ivan promises Stella that he will take care of Ruby. After Stella's death, Ivan wants to help Ruby find a better home. Ivan draws pictures of Ruby in a zoo

and the letters H, O, M, and E. Julia urges her father to post the pictures on the mall's billboard for everyone to see. Soon Mack starts receiving a lot of attention because of his Ape Artist. Will Ivan's actions lead to a better life for him and his friends?

This is a touching, heartfelt story of Ivan's determination to help Ruby. Ivan, Stella, and Ruby were taken from their families and homes for someone else's financial gain. Ivan is determined to keep his promise to his friend, Stella, and save Ruby from a lifetime in the mall. This book shows that animals have feelings also, and is very well-written with clever illustrations. One caution; early in the book, Ivan the gorilla says, "I am a great ape, and you are a great ape."

Trina Chase, CLJ

Coble, Coleen

Rock Harbor Search and Rescue / by Coleen Coble and Robin Carroll

Thomas Nelson ISBN 9781400321063

INT (MS) Grades 3-6 Rating: 5

Award-winning author Colleen Coble collaborates with Robin Carroll to present *Rock Harbor Search and Rescue*, a children's mystery series set in the familiar Rock Harbor, Michigan, featuring some characters from Coble's Rock Harbor adult series.

In *Rock Harbor Search and Rescue*, thirteen year old Emily's stepmom, Naomi and her dog Charley are part of the Rock Harbor Search and Rescue team. Emily wants to be a part of the team and is saving the money to buy a puppy of her own to train.

But when an expensive necklace disappears while in her care, she must prove her innocence to everyone who considers her guilty, including her dad. Only her friend Olivia believes she is innocent. Her dad wants to believe her but the evidence (she has motive and means) makes it difficult, so she turns over her savings to the owner of the necklace.

While she works to clear her name and find the real culprit, she must deal with middle school girl-drama. She grapples with her faith ("Why God would allow her to be accused of wrongdoing?"), as well as the Native American beliefs about evil spirits ("Is the Windigo real?").

Coble and Carroll do an excellent job of taking that familiar series and creating a good clean mystery/suspense appropriate for upper elementary readers. Coble fans will appreciate the plot twists and a visit with the familiar Rock Harbor characters. This new series will earn new and younger fans.

Rock Harbor Search and Rescue is told from Emily's point of view and readers will appreciate the realistic narrative. The series includes mystery, action, suspense, and loose ends, leaving room for story development in the next book.

Highly recommended for school libraries and youth collections in public libraries.

Carol R. Gehring, www.worthy2read.wordpress.com

Hest, Amy

Letters to Leo / by Amy Hest.

Candlewick ISBN 9780763636951

INT Grades 4-6 Rating: 5.

Letters to Leo by Amy Hest contains letters that Annie has written to her new dog, Leo. Annie has always wanted a dog, but her father won't let her have one. Finally, her dad gives in, and they get a dog. Annie is so excited. Annie loves to write, so she keeps a journal which is actually a collection of letters to Leo. Annie is an only child, and her best friend is moving away, so Leo becomes her best friend. Annie has so many stories to tell Leo about school, her friends, and just everyday things. One day her teacher tells them about a contest for young city authors. Each person has to write an essay about an idea for a

better New York. Annie wants to win the contest so badly. She already knows where she'll put the trophy. Annie's idea for a better New York is to remove all the "No Dogs Allowed" signs and allow dogs everywhere!

This book is a very cute story and well-written. The illustrations look like they were drawn by Annie herself. Children will be able to relate to the story because it is about the ideas of a child. The dramas of fourth grade can be amusing—for instance, Annie finds a book in the library titled *You and Your Elderly Parent: Tips for Getting Along and Having Fun*. It is cute when she refers to her father as her elderly parent and lists tips on how he needs to try new things. This story shows the friendship and bond between a child and her pet.

Trina Chase, CLJ

Hutts Aston, Dianna

A Rock is Lively / by Dianna Hutts Aston; illustrated by Sylvia Long.

Chronicle Books ISBN 9781452106458

PRI Grades K-3 (all ages) Rating: 5

A Rock is Lively presents many features of rocks: their composition, history, function, and variety, as well as their use in both ancient and modern times throughout the world as weapons and tools and by artists and builders. With its catchy title, vivid graphics, and inclusion of both simple and more complex information, *A Rock is Lively* has appeal for readers of all ages. The layout and clever headings ("A rock is mixed up", "a rock is inventive") add excitement and interest to the exploration of rocks both on Earth and in space. Watercolor illustrations by Sylvia Long range from the intricate detail of a single rock's core to sweeping panoramas and a bold two-page volcanic eruption. Sculptures and monuments such as Stonehenge, the Pyramids, Michelangelo's *David*, and Mt. Rushmore are wonderfully drawn and help expand the book's scope, as does a section on how animals use rocks. There is discussion of ancient peoples (12,000-17,000 years ago) and the oldest rocks on Earth (4.5 billion years old). The opening pages depict 51 spectacularly unique rocks, repeated at the end of the book with labels that allow interested readers to practice identifying these beautiful rocks by name.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Jenkins, Steve

The Beetle Book / written & illustrated by Steve Jenkins.

Houghton Mifflin ISBN 9780547680842

INT Grades 2-6 (all ages) Rating: 5

The Beetle Book introduces many varieties of beetles and how they grow, move, live, fight, and communicate. Author/illustrator Steve Jenkins uses his signature cut and torn paper collage technique for which *The Beetle Book* was deemed a *New York Times* "Best Illustrated Book of the Year".

Young readers who are already interested in these insects will find the pages rich with amazing facts and descriptions. Over 75 types of beetles are presented, with fitting common names that kids will relish ("stink beetle", "dung beetle", "pleasing fungus beetle"). Endnotes include the Latin name and location of each insect, along with a brief bibliography. There are so many fascinating details in this large picture book that even bug-squeamish readers will be captivated. The oversized color artwork smartly contrasts with the actual-size black silhouettes throughout the book, though some readers may have difficulty with the small font. There is mention of beetles existing 230 million years ago along with dinosaurs, and passing references to mating behavior.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Potter, Alicia

Mrs. Harkness and the Panda / by Alicia Potter; illustrated by Melissa Sweet.

Alfred A. Knopf ISBN 9780375844485

PRI Grades K-2 Rating:*5

After the death of her explorer husband in 1936, Ruth Harkness departs for China to complete his mission to bring the first live panda to America. People ridicule the notion of a woman embarking on such a dangerous trip, but the determined Mrs. Harkness travels to Shanghai, up the Yangtze River, and into the bamboo forests. With a guide, a cook, and 16 men hired to carry 22 pieces of luggage, Ruth Harkness presses on, unwavering in her commitment to fulfill her husband's dream.

This fascinating and true story introduces a little-known but remarkable woman who achieves the near-impossible. There are hints of superstition in the narrative. In one scene, Mrs. Harkness takes a child's wave as "a sign of good luck". Later, weary and blistered, she "cursed the wet bamboo that soaked her", but is finally rewarded with the discovery of a baby panda. After scattering her husband's ashes in China, Mrs. Harkness returns to the United States with the panda she names Su Lin, who is placed in a zoo near Chicago.

The compelling details of Mrs. Harkness's adventure are brought to life through Alicia Potter's energetic storytelling and lively anecdotes that will engage young readers. Melissa Sweet's delightful watercolor illustrations pair well with the use of speech bubbles, maps, old postcards and stamps, collage materials, recreated news clippings, and actual photographs. The end notes include a helpful timeline and selected bibliography, as well as an author's note contrasting our knowledge of this beloved endangered animal with an earlier view of pandas as "mythical beasts, like unicorns". The author describes the conservation work of the international World Wildlife Fund and addresses how taking a baby panda from the wilderness would be viewed very differently today, a timely discussion point for young readers.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Thomas, Peggy

For the Birds: The life of Roger Tory Peterson / Peggy Thomas.

Calkins Creek ISBN 9781590787649

INT Grades 3-6 Rating: 4

As a biography, *For the Birds: The Life of Roger Tory Peterson* by Peggy Thomas connects easily with young readers, describing Peterson's early fascination with nature and birds the way kids would experience them. Readers will be caught up in Peterson's hikes in the woods and his passion for capturing them in authentic illustrations. They'll be inspired by the ornithologist's perseverance to save to buy his first camera at age 14, and to work at a monotonous job while perfecting his art that eventually received national recognition.

Peterson, once a teacher and camp counselor, eventually became known as the naturalist whose art and research came together in *A Field Guide to the Birds* during the Depression. Carefully detailed illustrations by Laura Jaques add visual value to the text. Children will see how a scientist grows his skill while absorbing plenty of avian facts. Thomas' subtle humor and upbeat tone are lovely; her use of ornithological terms may intrigue readers, though it seems a bit overdone by book's end. Peterson's own sketches adorn the inside front and back covers along with a quaint "Topography of a Birder" diagram. Overall, this well-written biography accents science and art studies and can prompt children to pursue their passions.

Karen Schmidt, CLJ

Books for Middle Schoolers

De Graaf, Anne

Son of a Gun / by Anne de Graaf.

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers ISBN 9780802854063

MS Grades 6-8 Rating: 5

Son of a Gun by Anne de Graaf tells the story of two children, Lucky and Nopi, living in Liberia. Lucky is eight years old and his sister, Nopi, is ten. While they're in school one day, they are kidnapped along with many other children and forced to become child soldiers in Liberia's civil war, a war that would last 14 years. These children are given AK-47 rifles and told, "This gun is your god. You listen to the voice of your god and go where your gun tells you." Lucky and Nopi escape, but must continue searching for their family. Once they are reunited with their family, they still have to live with the memories of the horrors they saw and experienced. A great number of children are not so fortunate. Some that survive have lost their families and homes. Others decide that a soldier's life is the only one they know.

This book is based on true stories of former child soldiers interviewed by the author. It is told from the viewpoints of Lucky and Nopi. It is a very well-written but heartbreaking tale. It doesn't go into any graphic details, but does adequately describe the pain and suffering of the child soldiers. Unfortunately, there are many other children like Lucky and Nopi. They were robbed of their childhoods and forced into unimaginable situations. The United Nations convinced a lot of the children to turn their guns in for money. However, this was a hard decision for many because their commanding officer had convinced them to never part with their guns, as their guns were their god. The book also includes a section of notes and additional information about Liberia.

Trina Chase, CLJ

Books for High Schoolers

Coker, Rachel

Chasing Jupiter / by Rachel Coker.

Zondervan ISBN 9780310732938

HS Grades 8-12 Rating: 4

** Pre-Publication Reviewed

[Rachel Coker](#), author of *Interrupted*, returns with a novel about sixteen year old Scarlett Blaine whose dreams and reality clash as the world around her changes.

In *Chasing Jupiter*, Scarlett lives in the shadow of an older rebellious sister and a younger autistic brother. Both parents work hard to make ends meet. Their grandfather who also lives with Scarlett's family, begins to suffer from dementia. It is the summer of 1969 when Neil Armstrong lands on the moon. Scarlett's brother Cliff announces he wants to be the first person to fly to Jupiter. Scarlett promises to help him by selling peach pies to raise the money to build Cliff's rocket. A farmer's son, Frank, helps Scarlett, and they become close friends.

Scarlett's mother volunteers her to teach the pastor's wife to cook one afternoon each week. As they spend time together, Scarlett talks about her desire for God to fix everything in her life, so she would have a (normal) family again. Mrs. Greene tells her "God's grace isn't in him solving our problems

instantly,” but in the assurance that “he has a greater plan.” When situations arise to complicate matters further, Scarlett’s faith is weakened until she is able to recapture God’s purpose for her life.

Although this is her second novel, Coker writes at a level beyond her years. Her well-written narratives and character development are excellent. The reader is drawn into the middle of Scarlett’s family and each family member’s challenges. Some scenes told after the fact might have enhanced the story if they had been included.

Chasing Jupiter is realistic fiction, historical fiction, and a light romance, all rolled into one. If you haven’t discovered Ms. Coker’s books yet, do so now!

Carol R. Gehringer, www.worthy2read.wordpress.com

Otte, John

Failstate / by John W. Otte

Marcher Lord Press ISBN 9781935929482

HS (Adult) Grades 8-12 Rating: 4

John Otte pens an intriguing novel about two brothers competing on a teenage reality show, where the winner becomes an official licensed superhero.

In *Failstate*, Robin and Ben join other contestants on *Who Is America’s Next Superhero?* The brothers live in a world where superheroes are governed by regulations. Without a license, superheroes are limited to what they are legally allowed to do.

Ben is Gauntlet. He wears blue spandex with a rising star on his chest, and wins over the females with his good looks. Robin, on the other hand, is Failstate. He wears a scruffy grey sweatshirt and worn-out cargo pants, hardly the image of superhero. Ben looks the part while Failstate can barely control his powers. But when a fellow competitor is murdered, Robin tries to prove he is not a failure by finding the murderer.

Failstate had good character and plot development. Everything seems to come easily to Gauntlet (Ben). Meanwhile Failstate (Robin) struggles with bitterness and unforgiveness when Gauntlet gains success. They learn from each other and to value each other.

Otte writes an engaging comic-book novel without the comics. Even the cover has a comic-book feel to it. In fact, one is slightly disappointed that a few illustrations were not included. Still it is a good read and one can picture this book as a movie!

While there is some violence, none of it is graphic; all of it is expected in a world where superheroes are battling evil. With its short chapters, comic-book feel, a mixture of humor, light romance, mystery, and adventure, *Failstate* is the perfect read for teens.

Recommended for high school libraries, as well as teen collections in public libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, www.worthy2read.wordpress.com

Williamson, Jill

Captives (The Safe Lands, 1) / Jill Williamson.

Zondervan ISBN 9780310724223

HS Grades 8-12 Rating: 4

In this young adult dystopian novel, award-winning author Jill Williamson tells the story of how one brother’s choice dramatically affects the lives of those around him.

In *Captives*, three brothers live in a rural village outside the walls of the Safe Lands. The youngest, Omar, struggles to fit in, making him susceptible to the lies of a better life behind the walls. Mason dreams of

becoming a doctor and helping others, while the eldest , Levi, eventually will follow in his father's footsteps as the elder.

Omar sends Levi on a wild goose chase while he helps the Safe Land enforcers take over the village. Promised wealth and power, Omar doesn't realize his choice will result in deaths and captivity. When Levi returns, he finds his fiancée, Mason, and others taken captives. Those who resisted, like their father, are dead. Levi vows to enter the Safe Lands and rescue them. Will he be able to rescue his beloved before it is too late?

The walled cities are built to protect people, but not necessarily families. With its citizens infected by a deadly disease, the government tries to increase the population by capturing uninfected males as donors and females as surrogates. When the villagers are captured, can they maintain their faith in the midst of their captivity? What will happen as they live among the pleasures and perceived freedoms of the Safe Lands?

Williamson is a master storyteller, setting the stage with fascinating storyline, excellent character and plot development, and a believable future world. *Captives* is based on Daniel 1, the Babylonian captivity, but set years in the future, after the world's population was decimated by a pandemic.

Recommended for public and school libraries.

Carol R. Gehringer, www.worthy2read.wordpress.com

Books for Adults

Bricker, Sandra D.

If the Shoe Fits: A Contemporary Fairy Tale / Sandra D. Bricker.

River North ISBN 9780802406286

Adult Rating 4

Pre-Publication copy reviewed

Sandra Bricker kicks off a new romantic comedy contemporary series based on classic fairy tales. *If the Show Fits*, based on Cinderella, tells the humorous story of a modern-day Cinderella waiting for her prince.

In *If the Show Fits*, on the very day Julianne opens a law firm with her childhood friend, Will, she sees a handsome stranger rescue a dog from the middle of a busy intersection. As he carries the dog off, with his long coat flowing out behind him, she is captivated by his physical beauty and love for animals. When she looks again, he is gone. Then she notices that his tool box and his work boot fall out of his truck. Julianne takes it as a sign that she has seen her Prince Charming. She tracks him down to return the items, but is he as charming as she dreams? She thinks she has found her prince, but more she gets to know him, the less charming he seems to be.

Julianne wants God's plan for her life but will she recognize it before it is too late? For this Cinderella, the shoe (boot) is on the other foot – she is looking for her prince, not the other way around. How hard should she work to make things fit? Cinderella (Julianne) has her ball and eventually her prince, but not before facing challenges in finding her "happy ending."

Bricker writes her trademark humor in this laugh-out loud story where Cinderella doesn't recognize God's plan for her. With witty narrative and likeable primary and secondary characters, Bricker strikes just the right balance to bring a twist to this contemporary fairy tale. The Christian elements are light,

not preachy. Its humor and romance are clean, not unlike the old black-and-white romantic comedies featuring one's favorite actors.

Carol R. Gehringer, www.worthy2read.wordpress.com

Green, Jocelyn

Wedded to War / by Jocelyn Green.

River North ISBN 9780802405760

Adult Rating: 5.

Wedded to War by Jocelyn Green is the first book in the series *Heroines Behind the Lines: Civil War*. Charlotte Waverly leads a privileged life but she'd rather help nurse the soldiers in the Union's army. Neither her family nor her beau approves, but her childhood friend, Dr. Caleb Lansing, understands Charlotte's interests. Charlotte presents herself to the Women's Central Association for Relief (WCAR) as a nursing candidate. Charlotte travels with the Army everywhere she is needed. She witnesses unimaginable horrors, but she is not ready to give up her dream of becoming a nurse. She experiences some obstacles along the way such as doctors who do not feel women should be nurses. Her boyfriend, Phineas Hastings, has other ideas. He's so intent on marrying Charlotte because he finds himself in desperate need of her family's wealth. Despite these obstacles, Charlotte doesn't give up.

Even though this is a work of fiction, it is inspired by a Civil War nurse, Georgeanna Woolsey. Her letters and journals reflect the type of lives these nurses led. This story shows women's contributions during the Civil War and the impact it had on them. Soldiers were promised money for their service, but many didn't receive compensation. Many wives couldn't support themselves while their husbands were at war, so they turned to prostitution to survive. It was almost the only way some of the women could afford to live. The female nurses also faced trials of their own. The lack of supplies and the unsanitary conditions made it difficult to treat the soldiers. The nurses didn't let this deter them from helping tend to the soldiers. Even if it was just writing a letter to home or holding a soldier's hand, the nurses' caregiving was appreciated by the soldiers.

Trina Chase, CLJ

Pura, Murray

The Wings of Morning / Murray Pura.

Harvest House ISBN 9780736948777

Adult (HS) Rating: 4.

Jude Whetstone is a young Amish man who loves to fly; however, not all members in his community appreciate his love for this new invention. Mr. Kurtz is one of those members, and as a result, he has forbidden Jude to court his daughter, Lyyndaya. Both Jude and Lyyndaya are heartbroken, but Lyyndaya obediently submits to her father's wishes. Meanwhile, the United States has joined the Great War and is in need of soldiers and pilots. Amish men are exempt from this law based on religious grounds. Despite this, Jude and his friends are taken to a military detention base where they are mistreated and degraded for refusing to bear arms. After much abuse and starvation, Jude is faced with a proposition that can save his friends, at the expense of being shunned by his community. Will Jude survive this war without betraying his faith or losing his girl?

Amidst the backdrop of World War I, Murray Pura weaves an Amish tale of faith, love, and grace. The author does an excellent job creating an authentic setting using historical events, such as the outbreak of the Spanish Flu, to support time and place, while interspersing Pennsylvania Dutch throughout the text to create an authentic tone. The author's emphases on character and plot development are equally

balanced, each working to enhance the other and progress the story. The two main characters are full of depth and emotion, portraying weaknesses that keep them human and relatable. Jude's inner war between his convictions and his sense of honor and revenge mirror the war around him. Lyyndaya's desire to honor her parents and her Amish faith battle her love for Jude. Through Jude and Lyyndaya's lives and actions, surrender and sacrifice are exemplified. Concerning war, the author sensitively addresses the convictions of both the Amish and those of the English world, condemning neither. Themes of persecution, vengeance, sacrificial love, forgiveness, and grace soar together through the pages, invoking a variety of emotions.

Justina McBride, CLJ

Tatlock, Ann

Sweet Mercy / by Ann Tatlock.

Bethany House ISBN 9780764210464

Adult (HS) Rating: 4

Christy Award winner Ann Tatlock presents the story of a seventeen year old during the Prohibition (1930s) who discovers life isn't black-and-white, and mercy is something we all need.

Sweet Mercy opens with Eve, a grandmother, returning to the Marryat Lodge in 1978 with her grandson to locate a box left in the attic years ago. She tells him how she moved to Mercy, Ohio in 1931 when she was seventeen and her father lost his job with the Ford Motor Company.

Her family moves back home to work and live in the Marryat Lodge run by her Uncle Cyrus. She makes new friends, including a summer romance. Eve is glad to leave behind the evils she has seen on the streets of St. Paul, Minnesota (including a murder).

Eve thinks she is leaving behind the lawbreakers and criminals of St. Paul. But not everything is what it seems to be on the surface. There are secrets in the small town of Mercy. Once they surface, they threaten to destroy the peace Eve thinks she has found.

Tatlock's novel reads like a glass of sweet tea on a hot summer day, best enjoyed by sitting back and taking one's time to savor it. The book moves slowly at first. But eventually one is caught up in the light romance, intrigue, family relationships, and spiritual crises.

The characters are flawed, endearing and realistic. Mercy is central to the overall theme of the book. Eve struggles with this until she faces the secret her uncle hides. Will she turn him in when he has been so generous to her family?

Sweet Mercy is recommended as a clean read, one that older teens and adults can enjoy.

Carol R. Gehringer, www.worthy2read.wordpress.com