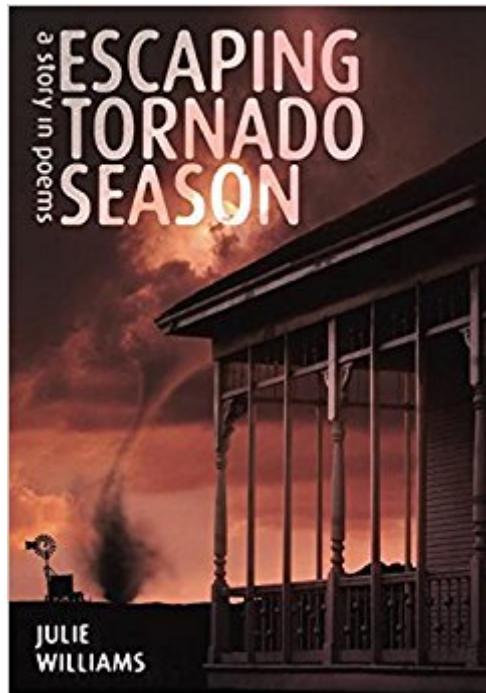


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Escaping Tornado Season: A Story In Poems



Synopsis

Allie Benton's summer at her grandparents' house in Minnesota is the same as it's always been: northern lights and pine trees, family gossip and root beer floats. She's come here to escape Nebraska's tornado season every summer for as long as she can remember. The only difference is, this time no one's coming to take her back to Nebraska when fall rolls around. With her father dead, her mother run off to heaven knows where, and her twin brother, seven years buried, just a ghost in her memory, Allie settles in with her grandparents for a cold Minnesota winter. But it's hard to fit in at a new school when her family can't afford to buy her a pair of blue jeans. And, in an ethnically divided community, Allie isn't even allowed to choose the friends she wants-handsome Joey Redfern and Lidia, the beautiful Ojibwe girl who calls Allie my *niijikwe*, "my friend." With a strong poetic voice, Julie Williams creates snapshots of Allie piecing a new life together- longing for her mother, grieving for her father, remembering her brother, and struggling to do what's right in an imperfect world. As the people around her come and go, Allie starts to get a sense of who she is, and of what she can hold on to despite the changes in her world.

Book Information

Hardcover: 272 pages

Publisher: HarperTeen; 1 edition (March 2, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060086394

ISBN-13: 978-0060086398

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1 x 7.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #817,371 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #124 in Books > Teens >

Literature & Fiction > Poetry #408 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family

Issues > New Experiences #527 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Parents

Customer Reviews

Grade 7-9-"You can only hunker down so longâ |" hoping that "nothing you love has been/blown away." That's the overriding, laborious theme in Williams's novel in poetry form, which is set in the 1960s. The idea of weathering tornadoes becomes a metaphor for 13-year-old Allie's life as she deals with her father's death, adjusts to a move from Nebraska to a small town in Minnesota, tries to

reach out to her emotionally distant mother, struggles to make friends, and refuses to go along with the local prejudice against the Ojibwe people who live nearby. Unfortunately, the story line is confusing from the start, as Allie's poems move back and forth in time, describing the events happening to her now and gradually revealing important occurrences from the past. It is clear that her family has survived the devastation of a tornado, but it takes a long time for readers to discover the calamity's true effects and to understand just what caused the death of her twin brother several years ago. In trying to craft small poetic glimpses at the characters' lives, the author loses sight of telling her story coherently. There is no clear characterization here, and none of the potentially intriguing relationships are focused on in a cohesive way. All in all, the poems are neither insightful nor well written.-Sharon Korbeck, Waupaca Area Public Library, WI Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Gr. 7-10. Allie, who turns 14 during the story, reflects on life in Nebraska and in northern Minnesota, where she moves with her mother, Maggie, following Dad's death. Gram and Gramps become Allie's family when Maggie withdraws the same way she did years earlier after the death of Allie's sickly twin brother. Feeling abandoned by her mother and treated as an outsider at her new school, Allie finds a glimmer of hope in a budding friendship with an Ojibwe classmate, Lidia White Cloud, but the friendship ends after Lidia is raped by a white teacher and drops out of school. Allie courageously tries to help Lidia, but her efforts aren't enough. In a deceptively simple, first-person verse-narrative, Williams plumbs deep emotion without explicit description or melodramatics, filling in the minutiae of daily life during a time gone by and painting a clear picture of racism in Allie's school and community. The book's title symbolizes not only the tornados that Maggie fears but also the whirlwind of emotions both mother and daughter experience. Sally Estes Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I loved this book. I simply could not put it down. The poetry blended the story and made it unique. This book will appeal to all ages - young and old. It is a story of adolescent discovery and loss with none of the teenage angst so prevalent in most of these type stories. Filled with love and hope and understanding. A wonderful story that will stay with me - and I will read it over and over again.

I enjoyed this book immensely, as did (all!) the members of my book club. The descriptions are lovely, the characters real, the story poignant, the end satisfying. In spare language, the author shows us through a heartwarming main character what it is like to lose a twin and a father. I felt her

anguish about having an unstable mother, and going to a new school without the right clothes to fit in. I felt the heartbreak of her Native American friends who, in the sixties when the novel is set, are scorned by most of the townspeople. It's awesome how much insight and information was conveyed, and how much I was made to care, in such a short book.

I absolutely love this book! Not having read many stories told in poems, I wasn't quite sure what to expect when a friend recommended "Escaping Tornado Season." Before I knew it, I'd read fifty pages, and found myself totally involved in the story, the characters, and the wonderful imagery the author was able to evoke with such simple, yet powerful language. Being male, mid-thirties, and having spent my childhood in New York City, my life experience couldn't be more different than main character Allie's-but I was able to completely connect with her situation, and her feelings about the world around her. I must commend author Julie Williams for building such a rich story with seemingly simple poems. Her accessible style draws you in first with words, but then leaves you breathless with a depth of feeling and emotion. I highly recommend this book to everyone, young and old alike. We've all felt out of place at one time or other, and "Escaping Tornado Season" shows us so wonderfully that it's okay to be different, and that one person's voice can make a difference.

Escaping is the example set for Allie by her mother and it is Allie's triumph that she does more than escape. Circumstances over which Allie has no control-metaphorically symbolized by tornado season-have left Allie lonely, grieving, and angry-but never on the verge of giving up. Through free verse poetry, the reader experiences what any fourteen-year-old must face and, in Allie's case, a great deal more. She learns how to ward off sorrow and neglect and to take risks that define her character. The poems are moving but not sentimental. The words are sparse and powerful and they engage all the senses. I can smell the damp earth beside the grave, hear the Ojibwe drums across the bay, see the dark water between the creaking floes of ice on the lake, taste the special treat of Neapolitan ice cream, and feel Allie's hope carry her through her own tornado season. This is an exquisite book that I will savor over and over.

This book is exquisitely written. Telling the story in poems produces a demand on the author to make every word count. And Julie Williams delivers a spare, haunting, passionate tale about loss, injustice, tenderness, and forgiveness. The characters are complicated and not always likable yet the author treats them with compassion. She respects the difficult histories of her characters.

Readers will experience a wide range of emotions in reading this incredible book--joy, sadness, anger. There are also moments of warm sweetness in the book, where the descriptive powers of the author give the 13 year old protagonist a touching, achingly beautiful voice.

I am a 55 year old male man who didn't want to read "a story in poem" about anything. I was given this book and resisted reading it for a very long time. One night I started reading and I could not put it down. It was powerful and moving. It's about a 14 year old girl learning to live in this life. It's a poem. I cried like a baby! I am currently buying up every copy I can. I give this book to anyone I care about. If you, or maybe your very close friend, had a difficult childhood. This book is for you. Poem and all! Poem just means all the unneeded words are missing. Read this book! (...)

Emotionally Powerful. In "Escaping Tornado Season" Julie Williams has told a story of a girl coping with the death of her father and huge changes in her life at an age when she is most vulnerable. The poems are so well done that they really tell the story in a manner that is gripping in its emotional power and with a wealth of detail that enables us to picture the place and people. I couldn't put it down; it made me laugh and cry. It's a terrific book for adults as well as the young adults for whom it is intended and I can't recommend it highly enough.

My daughter and I each have a copy of this book and had the same experience reading it: we couldn't put it down. My daughter said that she carried such an ache around in her heart for this young girl. She said she felt as if she truly knew her and loved her. This is a powerful story told in the spare, searing language of penetrating poetry. As a teacher, I have been pondering ways I might bring this book into my classroom. It cries out to be heard as well as read. I have already recommended it to my colleagues.

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