

I Did For My Summer Holidays” writing assignment, and it stays with her. Descriptions are appropriate to an 8-to-12 year old’s vocabulary, and the dialogue is fresh and lively.

Letter-writing is only one of the uncongenial rituals Fanny must submit to. She has to write the hated name “Famish Gut” at the top of every page in her scribbler. She has to play ball during breaks, and put up with being jeered at and called “Fatty” by Sarah Thorne. Feather makes the discomfort of these things real without making a fuss over them, and it is plain that nobody else expects Fanny to make a fuss over them either. Her grandmother advises her by gentle parable to change those things she can change, and accept the rest graciously.

Fanny does change. On her own initiative she learns to throw a ball properly. She learns to run. She learns to eat less, and she runs faster, grows slimmer, and looks better. She writes to the Prime Minister asking him to change the village’s name, and she carries a petition for this around the village. She sees that she is not alone in facing obstacles when her older brother needs help to make the hockey team. Their father coaches him, and coaches Fanny too when she shows interest. (One of the joys of this book is its complete lack of sexism. Another is its sense of community: Fanny invites half the village to listen to a hockey game on radio at her house; arriving there, she finds the other half of the village already installed.)

The story moves smoothly because it is well-plotted, and both internal and external conflicts are resolved. Fanny takes fine revenge on Sarah for years of tormenting: she lands a hockey puck squarely and deliberately in Sarah’s stomach. This is convincing. Fanny’s natural generosity and compassion drive her to visit Sarah the next day, and the squalor of her tormentor’s home makes its own point. Fanny learns that her judgement is often based upon incomplete information. This applies to the world beyond childhood, too, as she discovers that there are reasons to be proud of her own name and the name of her village. These points are never forced; they slip into place as gently and inevitably as Fanny grows. The effect is very satisfying.

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## JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

**The secret of Sunset House**, Sharon Siamon. Gage Educational Publishers, 1987. 160 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-6870-3. **Fishing for trouble**,

Sharon Siamon. Illus. Elaine Macpherson. James Lorimer, 1987. 136 pp. \$14.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55028-044-9, 1-55028-042-2.

SHARON SIAMON

THE SECRET OF  
SUNSET HOUSE



Although these two novels by Sharon Siamon are for different age groups and have different perspectives, they are both concerned with accepting responsibility and with not judging others too quickly.

*The secret of Sunset House* is a mystery story recounting the adventures of Mike and Abby Richardson when they return to Sunset House for a second summer visit. Their eager anticipation for a wonderful summer holiday is shattered when they discover that fire has destroyed much of the house. At the same time, however, Abby and Mike sense a mystery behind the fire. They discover a bedroll which suddenly disappears and a boot print by the window. Pearl Bodick appears as if from nowhere to help them repair the house, but shares none of her past with the Richardsons, and remains an enigma until the very end of the novel.

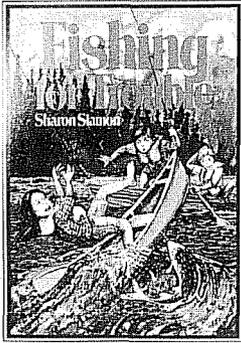
By contrast, *Fishing for trouble* recounts the humorous misadventures of Kiff Kokatow, whose father and mother run a fishing camp on Big Pickle Lake. Kiff tries to enhance his speech about fishing with a real worm ball and a real fish, but manages only to embarrass himself. He inadvertently sinks all the fishing boats when he forgets to put the plugs back in, and almost poisons his class when he accidentally adds "bug dope" to the meat loaf he prepares for the Young Authors' Lunch.

While solving the mystery of the fire provides the plot for *The secret of Sunset House*, the novel also provides some valuable lessons. When Abby and Mike act without thinking of the consequences, they become responsible for an accident to a third youngster. Abby and Mike accept responsibility, they develop through friendship, and consequently they reach a solution of the fire mystery.

One finds a similar message in *Fishing for trouble*, although the novel focuses on the rather less significant matter of winning a fishing derby. With difficulty, Kiff accepts wealthy Remington Wickers, and his electronic fish finder. Kiff's jealousy also extends to Josie Moon: not only does she win the speech contest, but her parents own a speed boat. When they all go after the same huge muskie, however, Kiff learns the value of co-operation, and when it comes to taking credit for landing the fish, all three children realize that no one person made a more important contribution than any other. Kiff discovers, moreover, that Josie is not just an aggressive girl who likes beating boys, that Remington is more that a sissy, and that both can make good

He wants to win  
the big derby.  
But will he  
lose Alton!

A REMINDER OF BLUE RIVER ADVENTURE



friends if he gives them a chance.

In some ways, *Fishing for trouble* is a more convincing novel because everything focuses on the fishing competition, and how children learn that helping one another is more important than winning. In comparison, the plot of *The secret of Sunset House* seems contrived. When it is discovered that city pollutants cause Mike's asthma, the Richardson family has a reason to remain at Sunset House for good. Suddenly there is a job at the local school for Mrs. Richardson, and Mr. Richardson manages to find employment at the local lumber yard. There is nothing wrong, however,

with happy endings, as Siamon teaches some valuable lessons without letting reality's dark side obtrude too far into the idyllic surroundings of Sunset House.

*Fishing for trouble* is written for 10 to 12-year-olds while *The secret of Sunset House* will challenge the junior high reader. Both have illustrations, although those of *Secret of Sunset House* are clearly superior. They are books appealing to both boys and girls.

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## UNE CARICATURE PARFOIS EXASPÉRANTE

**En montant à Low**, Brian Doyle. Traduit de l'anglais par Claude Aubry en collaboration avec Danielle Aubry, Collection des deux solitudes, jeunesse, Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre. 1986. 98 pp. 9,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89051-303-3.

Un curieux roman que celui-ci, avec ce mélange pas toujours très heureux de gros comique, de sentimentalité souvent trop pleurnicharde et de fantastique teinté de morale.

Le narrateur (il faut bien l'appeler ainsi : on ne connaîtra jamais son prénom) nous raconte ses vacances dans un petit village des collines de la Gatineau en compagnie de son père et de l'ami Frank, ivrogne invétéré. Le mauvais calembour du titre (*Up to Low* dans la version originale) donne le ton du début; le récit des frasques de ce pauvre Frank se veut hilarant. Le narrateur le pimente encore avec des remarques du genre: "il ya deux sortes de tramways: les longs et les courts. Je préfère les longs. A mon avis,