

reconciliation with her logger father. For Nickie, self-discovery is at the same time discovery of others and of other points of view and, perhaps most important of all, the discovery that it is part of the human condition to hold conflicting points of view at the same time. The Nickie who takes the risk of offending her father by warning the environmentalists about the logging company's plans is the same Nickie who defends the loggers against those who want to save the trees but use the wood and paper products that they produce.

This story is filled with food for thought. Its only disappointment is that the author found it necessary to attach a postscript (moral) about logging the old-growth forest. She ought to have left her story to make the point — which it does exceedingly well.

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Cross-Cultural Understanding

My Blue Country. O.R. Melling. Penguin, 1996. 196 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-86642-3.

In *My Blue Country* Jesse McKinnock, a seventeen-year-old girl from Calabogie, Ontario, participates in a Canadian cross cultural work project in Malaysia in 1973. Her fictional journal powerfully conveys how the search for harmony between people begins within the individual.

In the first half of her journal, Jesse describes training for the project in two camps in the Canadian wilderness, and right away, the divisions between the disparate groups of young people become apparent. As she records how the French and English speaking participants fail to communicate effectively and meetings are loaded with hostility and fighting, she asks: "Why is it so hard for people just to be people and to respect each other?" She wonders at the irony that if the Canadians cannot resolve their differences at home, how will they ever succeed in building bridges in Malaysia. Yet Lise, the project leader, reminds her, "It's only when we stop trying that all will be lost."

In their effort to make the project succeed, Jesse learns that attitude is the decisive factor. Like other teenagers, Jesse's confidence is susceptible to moments of doubt: "For some reason, I always figure I'm the odd one out, the one without the information or the experience, the one who doesn't know everything." She admits that she is a "small-town girl, in every sense of the word, [but she is] out to learn about the world." For example, Jesse views speaking French as an opportunity "to practise la langue!" and not only do she and the other participants become proficient in French, but they master Malay, as well as bits and pieces of Haida and Polish too. In time, she and her colleagues discover that language, "the greatest barrier" to a community, may become "the greatest bridge."

In the second half of the book, as Jesse records her experiences in Malaysia, language is one of the many challenges she and the other Canadians encounter. Initially, they are frustrated, but in time they overcome the difficult steps of assimilating. The ultimate test occurs when Jesse falls in love with a Malaysian youth, a devout Muslim and true patriot of Malaysia.

Mature themes and the earnest tone of Jesse's journals are diffused by a generous measure of humour, Jesse's zest for life and the special people she meets in Canada and Malaysia. As she recounts many positive exchanges between individuals, the conversations, exuberant laughter and singing, dancing and sharing food, she discovers how ultimately in spite of all the differences, harmony between people may be achieved.

Rumi, the Eastern poet, says: "Beyond the world of right-doings and wrong-doings, there is a field. I will meet you there." In *My Blue Country*, Jesse and the readers who share in her experiences meet in the "field" of universal harmony.

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Fenians and Feisty Females in Canada West

The Stone Orchard. Susan E. Merritt. Vanwell Publishing, 1996. 192 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55125-030-6.

This is a novel packed with strong female characters. There is "Dutch" Bramwell, a vagrant woman with a secret past and a penchant for fortune-telling; Juba, a former slave and the veteran of many journeys along the secret routes of the famous Underground Railroad; Grandmother Fraser, always calm and practical under pressure; and the heroine herself, fourteen-year-old Maud Fraser, whose world changes so dramatically in the course of the story. The male characters, by contrast, are much less interesting, apart perhaps from the Frasers' hired boy Will, Maud's ally in adventure, and the Fenian captain O'Sullivan. It is the early summer of 1866, and the Fenians (Irish nationalists) are massing in Buffalo ready to raid Canadian territory. Across the Niagara River, in Ridgeway, the family at the Fraser Inn will soon find itself caught up in the action — the battle of Ridgeway, an unequal engagement fought between Canadian militiamen and a Fenian army composed mainly of Irish veterans of the American Civil War.

Maud makes a feisty heroine, tending the wounded from both sides and saving her home from destruction. Whether she is running *towards* the battle in the hope of getting a good view of the fighting, or attacking a drunken Fenian with a crock of pickled eggs, she displays courage and determination. The reader is carried along by the pace of the story and mightily relieved when, at the end of the novel, the Fenians retreat and Maud's personal problems regarding the nature of her little brother's death, her father's apparently hostile