

If readers are looking for books which stretch imaginations with well-rounded characters, having tightly woven and challenging plots, they must look elsewhere. The value in these books is that they have a lot going on which leaves little time for readers to become bored. They also convey a zany sense of awkward situations and the absurdity of overblown characters, which most young people should enjoy. Even though the plots tend to be simplistic, with conflicts resolved in the end, they will be popular with the not-quite-teens for their simple language, humour, and fast-moving action.

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Finding You, Finding me

Sins of the Father. Norah McClintock. Scholastic, 1998. 190 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12488-9. *Janey's Girl*. Gayle Friesen. Kids Can, 1998. 222 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-461-5. *Drowning in Secrets*. Brenda Bellingham. Scholastic, 1998. 180 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12487-0.

The need to know our origins bears heavily on the human psyche. Parents in particular play a vital role in our development of a sense of self. For the protagonists of these young adult novels, the path to an independent adult identity has been blocked by unresolved questions about an absent mother or father. In McClintock's capably written mystery, fifteen-year-old Mick turns sleuth to prove that his father, incarcerated for most of Mick's childhood, was wrongly convicted of murder. The seemingly irrefutable evidence poses a tough puzzle and Mick's journey to the solution is sufficiently fraught to keep readers glued to the trail. What the author shows us about Mick himself is equally engrossing. His self-worth is defined by his father's reputation. His belief in his father's innocence is merely an uninformed legacy from his mother. He is the pawn of adults in his life, first his father who abruptly dumps him on an embittered, unwelcoming grandfather and disappears, and then a deceitful uncle. In a strange town where people hate his father and look unsmilingly at him, Mick is resentfully aware of being disenfranchised by his ignorance of the past; when he learns something which seems to confirm his father's guilt, it is a personal blow. So, when he stumbles on an inconsistency in the evidence, it is for his own sake as much as his father's that he is compelled to unearth the real murderer. In the end, with his father vindicated and a closer relationship growing between them, a newly confident Mick faces his forbidding grandfather.

Bellingham's tale is a delicious modern Gothic thriller in which the heroine's search for the past becomes a lethal threat to her future. Sixteen-

year-old Chloe endures panic attacks as the result of suppressed memories relating to the sudden loss of her mother when Chloe was five. Bellingham ably builds an atmosphere of creepiness and the dramatic tension escalates through a series of frightening events designed to drive Chloe away before she can uncover the truth. Chloe is well written as the traditional ineffectual heroine beset by forces beyond her control, but in this case a large part of her inability to act in her own defence stems not from external threats, about which she is fairly brave, but from the psychically crippling fear that she may have caused her mother's death and may also have inherited her mental illness. She meets a boy who cares about her, but she can only cling to him, childlike, for support. Eventually her pursuit of the truth catapults Chloe into a terrifying encounter with the architect of her nightmares, and the past is finally laid bare. As the story closes, Chloe, emerging from her mother's shadow, can at last express her anger and grief to her father, and even assume the more adult role in her relationship with Danny. Some may find that the author telegraphs the central plot twist too early, but most will find this a gripping read.

In part because of her tempestuous dealings with her own father, Friesen's Janey has remained resolutely close-mouthed about the man with whom, at eighteen, she made a daughter. Now, after raising Claire alone on the other side of the country, she has returned home on vacation so that Claire can visit her grandmother, secure in the knowledge that her lover has long since left the area. She is dismayed to learn that he is back and, moreover, that he has a young son, Claire's half-brother. When Claire chances on father and brother, an emotional tug-of-war begins. What ensues is fourteen-year-old Claire's evolution into a young woman determined to make her own decisions and forge her own relationships. At the end of the novel, she is not just her mother's girl. She has found a father and in doing so learned to be her own person. The power of the story is in Chloe's learning how a proclamation of adult independence can bring tribulation as well as joy. In loving her father, she nearly drives away the mother who has found strength to build a life for them by burying the past. When she defies her mother and allies herself with her newly-found brother, giving him bone marrow to battle his leukaemia, she makes a commitment of the heart which may end devastatingly. The interplay of Friesen's characters is deft; the juxtaposed perspectives of three female generations in one family — grandmother, mother, daughter — is particularly affecting. She has written a deeply satisfying first novel through which readers will learn with Claire that growing up is a bumpy process wherein people can make mistakes, learn from them, and go forward.

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