



Stepping on the Cracks

By Mary Downing Hahn

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In 1944, when her brother is overseas fighting in World War II, eleven-year-old Margaret changes her mind about the school bully, Gordy, after she discovers he is hiding his own brother, a deserter.

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Stepping on the Cracks By Mary Downing Hahn Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #220366 in eBooks
- Published on: 2009-03-23
- Released on: 2009-03-23
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Most WW II homefront novels are unambiguous in their approach to patriots and traitors, allies and enemies. Hahn's subtle, thought-provoking work, however, proposes the legitimacy of a variety of ethical responses to critical situations. Margaret's brother Jimmy is overseas fighting, and Margaret and her parents avidly follow news of Allied advances. She and best friend Elizabeth, united in their dislike of Gordy the bully, slowly uncover several ominous secrets: Gordy is helping his older brother Stuart, an Army deserter, hide in a weatherworn shack in the woods; and Gordy's father batters his mother, his siblings and Gordy himself. At first Margaret and Elizabeth see their discovery of Stuart's shack as a way to "blackmail" Gordy into treating them decently, but when Stuart falls dangerously ill, the girls feel obliged to help care for him. Soon they begin to reexamine the standard propaganda about the war. While some of her characters seem anachronistic and certain developments are unlikely, Hahn succeeds in raising questions as valuable as they are vexing. Ages 9-12.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 5-8-- The complex arguments for and against pacifism are woven into this involving story of a girl's experiences on the home front during World War II. Margaret, 11, and her boisterous friend Elizabeth hate the school bully, Gordy. They discover that a man living in the woods whom they had thought of as crazy is actually Gordy's gentle brother, who has deserted a war he feels he cannot morally fight. When Stuart nearly dies of pneumonia, the girls join forces with Gordy to get help and they gain insight into Gordy's difficult life with his alcoholic, abusive father. Well-drawn characters and a satisfying plot keep this from deteriorating into a message novel. The issues raised are presented from diverse points of view, and no easy answers are given. Margaret struggles with her feelings about her brother fighting (and ultimately dying) in a war that Stuart has deserted. She realizes, however, that Stuart's conscientious objection is not the black-and-white, coward vs. patriot matter her parents believe it to be. Although clearly set in the '40s with characters that are true to their time, their problems and feelings are not dated and should interest today's readers. There is plenty of action and page-turning suspense to please those who want a quick read, but there is much to ponder and reflect on as well. --Louise L. Sherman, Anna C. Scott School, Leonia, NJ

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Review

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Plenty of action and page-turning suspense.

School Library Journal, Starred

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Douglas Henry:

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