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Review: The War That Saved My Life

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The War That Saved My Life

By Kimberly Brubaker Bradley

Dial Books for Young Readers, 2015

DESCRIPTION:

When children begin to be evacuated from London because of the bombing during World War II, young Jamie is on the list of those to go, but his sister Ada is not. Kept indoors and greatly abused by her mother because of a club foot, ten-year-old Ada is afraid the maltreatment will increase with her brother gone, and slips in among the evacuees. Reaching their destination in the country, the brother and sister are placed with Susan Smith a single woman who is in mourning from the death of a dear friend. Susan, resistant to the idea and claiming to know nothing about raising children, still determines to do the best for them. The children, physically and emotionally damaged, are not easy to handle. Ada especially has trouble trusting because of the way her mother has treated her, locking her in a cupboard, taking away her food, and constantly berating her. Gradually the three forge a close relationship, with Susan coming out of her grief and becoming their strong advocate. Ada who had never been out of their one room apartment shows real grit, teaching herself to ride a pony and eventually learning to read. Slowly she begins to believe that she is not slow-witted but has the ability to learn. She even wins over the community when she identifies a German spy who has landed on a nearby beach. Though not as badly abused, Jamie has endured his share of suffering and must also learn to trust. Just as the children are becoming acclimated to their new surroundings, learning what it is like to be cared for in a real home, the children's mother shows up demanding their return to London. The unexpected ending will keep readers engaged to the last word.

CRITIQUE:

There is much to love about this book. The abuse Ada endures from her mother is hard to read, but the way she develops throughout the story by meeting her challenges and slowly opening up to love, is inspiring as is her devotion to caring for her brother, Jamie. As the hardships of the war increase, all of the characters show that they can adapt and even thrive in adverse circumstances. In giving to each other, they experience healing from their own traumas. Though the focus is on the characters, a great deal of information about how the war affected the English population can be learned as well.

RELATED SUBJECTS:

Abuse, Brothers and sisters, England, Evacuees, Handicaps, London, Mother-daughter relationships, Physical disabilities, Success, Survival, War, Teamwork, World War II

CHARACTER THEMES:

Caring, Compassion, Cooperation, Coping, Courage, Determination, Endurance, Fairness, Fear, Greed, Hope, Ingenuity, Kindness, Maturity, Perseverance, Resilience, Resolve, Responsibility, Self-respect, Selflessness, Spunk, Strength, Survival (Emotional), Trustworthiness

AWARDS:

Beehive Book Award (UT), Best Children's Books of the Year (Bank Street), Best of the Best Books, Black-eyed Susan Book Award (MD), *Booklist* 50 Best Middle-Grade Novels of the 21st Century, California Young Reader Medal, Capitol Choices (DC), Charlie May

Simon Children's Book Award, Cybils Award, Delaware Diamonds, Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award (VT), E.B. White Read Aloud Award, Garden State Children's Book Award (NJ), Georgia Children's Book Award, Golden Archer Award (WI), Golden Sower Award (NE), Great Lakes Great Books Award (MI), Great Stone Face Book Award (NH), Heartland Books Recommendation for Life-Long Readers, *Horn Book* Fanfare, Indian Paintbrush Book Award (WY), Iowa's Children's Choice Award, Isinglass Teen Book Award (NH), Josette Frank Award, Judy Lopez Memorial Award for Children's Literature, Kentucky Bluegrass Award, Maine Student Book Award, Mark Twain Award (MO), Massachusetts Children's Book Award, Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award, Nene Award (HI), Newbery Medal, Nutmeg Book Award (CT), NYPL: 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing, Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People, Oregon Reader's Choice Award, Parents' Choice Award, Pennsylvania Young Readers' Book Award, *Publisher's Weekly* Best Children's Books of the Year, Quahog Book Award (ME), Sasquatch Reading Award (WA), Sequoyah Book Award (OK), Schneider Family Book Award, South Carolina Junior Book Award, Virginia Readers' Choice Award, Volunteer State Book Award (TN), West Australian Young Readers' Book Award, William Allen White Children's Book Award (KS), Young Hoosier Book Award (IN), Young Reader's Choice Award (Pacific Northwest Library Association)