



Talent

B. Lynn Goodwin

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Fifteen-and-a-half-year-old Sandee Mason wants to find her talent, get her driver's license, and stop living in the shadow of her big brother, Bri, who disappeared while serving in Afghanistan.

Talent is a timely story about a girl who learns her brother is MIA in Afghanistan. What does she do? How does she cope while trying to be part of the drama department and attempting to live normally? Lynn Goodwin has captured the angst and the pathos of this situation and created a character who will appeal to many teens. All she wants to do is fit in and live her life, but events keep happening that don't allow her to do this. I highly recommend this book as a way for young people to understand the effects of war on the people left behind and the kinds of problems teens face today.

Talent Details

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Author : B. Lynn Goodwin

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From Reader Review Talent for online ebook

Mary Jo Doig says

Sandee Mason struggles, as do all her peers, with her own set of teenage anxieties, except that she has an extra huge worry: her big brother, Brian, is missing in action in Afghanistan. Bri, as she calls him, has been MIA for seven months when the story opens. The emotional upheaval of the situation has caused her parents so much angst, they have become largely unavailable to support Sandee. Without her always-reliable big brother to seek advice from, Sandee tries hard to cope on her own.

She is waiting to audition for a part in her school's spring production of the musical *Oklahoma* when we meet her. When Sandee is nervous she eats M&Ms, two at a time, and she is popping them in her mouth as she watches her other classmates mill around as they wait to audition, also. She'd like the lead part of *Ado Annie*, but would settle for a lesser part, just as long as it has lines. Sandee yearns to be part of the close-knit, successful drama family.

Yet, when the cast list is posted, Sandee's name is absent. Mrs. G, the director, invites Sandee to be Production Assistant instead, which, with disappointment Sandee accepts. This confirms she is a loser, though, which she suspected earlier and now firmly believes.

We fully enter into the two worlds of adolescence and theater. As we turn pages, then chapters, we find words of an author who obviously well-knows both of these worlds. Goodwin has crafted the peer relationships, the parent, teacher, and other adult relationships with a layered depth and richness which I found both mesmerizing and uncommon. Sandee and her friends are all good kids, struggling with tough challenges in their lives, making some mistakes yet are trying to do their best. Even when parents may not be able to help, Goodwin superbly shows us what can happen when other caring people—a teacher, a police officer, or a friend—take on positive roles of respectful help and support.

Talent is a wonderful YA book that I highly recommend. There's more good news about this book: a sequel is in the works.

Alfred Garrotto says

Sandee Mason wants to find her talent, get her driver's license, and stop living in the shadow of her big brother. That's a lot for an adult to handle. For this fifteen-and-half-year-old, it's nearly overwhelming. But handle it Sandee does, in her own way and despite a number of detours that threaten to send her careening off the road to adulthood. Against the backdrop of a high school production of *Oklahoma!*, she makes her way through a morass of trauma—a beloved older brother, Brian, who disappeared while serving in Afghanistan, finding her niche among the drama nerds, rescuing her brother's best friend who is sinking into alcoholism, discovering things about her brother's secret romance with an Afghani girl.

On the side there's a mystery involving guns that disappear from the show props that are Sandee's responsibility. Then there's Diego, a steady guy-friend who would like to be more than that to her. Author B. Lynn Goodwin knows what makes teenager's tick. She paints a vivid portrait of her protagonist. And she surrounds Sandee with a supporting cast comprised of believable, flesh-and-blood characters. Talent is an absorbing read that keeps the reader turning pages from beginning to end.

denise kay jacobs says

The coming-of-age story is fast-paced and full of interesting twists.

Ms. Goodwin knows her way around a drama club. The book should appeal to a wide-range of students, as it deals with navigating loss, family relationships, and school dynamics as well as living up to expectations and arriving at our own conclusions. It also includes a cast of realistic characters.

If you choose TALENT for your own classroom, you will appreciate the review questions at the end of the book.

BethLee says

Talent by B. Lynn Goodwin is a cute romantic coming of age about serious issues.

Summary From Goodreads:

Fifteen-and-a-half-year-old Sandee Mason wants to find her talent, get her driver's license, and stop living in the shadow of her big brother, Bri, who disappeared while serving in Afghanistan.

Talent is a timely story about a girl who learns her brother is MIA in Afghanistan. What does she do? How does she cope while trying to be part of the drama department and attempting to live normally? Lynn Goodwin has captured the angst and the pathos of this situation and created a character who will appeal to many teens.

I won this book in a giveaway from a fellow blogger. Just recently, I decided to pick it up and read it.

I thought this story was very timely. It is about a girl worrying about her brother who went missing in Afghanistan. This is a very less talked about topic than most ya topics.

Sandee was a bit of a whiny and unrealatable character. She seemed a bit full of herself, and she thought she was better than she really was.

I also thought the whole thing with a psychic was really strange. It was the worst part of the book, and made me postpone finishing it. I thought something like that didn't fit into a book like this one.

The whole play aspect was cute. It was a little overused, but it still blended into the book perfectly. I liked learning about acting.

Overall, this was a cute book about a good topic.

Just Commonly says

Talent by B. Lynn Goodwin was not what I'd expected from looking at the cover. True, we can derive that it's a young adult novel, and with the title of Talent and glimmering lights behind red velvety curtains, it's about stage talent. But after reading on, there's a certain level of emotional growth that will appeal to a

sophisticated audience.

We have the typical teenage drama going on, from getting your driver's license to boys and fitting in. Our main character, Sandee have wanted to dive into the world of stage (school play) for her own interest, as well as to put her mind at ease after the disappearance of her brother while serving in Afghanistan. The author's talent is surely her way with dialogue between the characters, as well as within the characters. The letters Sandee "wrote" to her brother reads authentic and may even spark an emotional thought of the young teens in your life. The plot moves swiftly and provides readers with characters and story line to enjoy. I must also say that this cover hits home and I just love how it "shines", just like Sandee!

Interested, scroll down for your chance to win your own copy! Winner's choice of ebook or print.

This review was first seen on Just Commonly Blog.

NOTE: I received a complimentary copy of this book through WOW, Women on Writing for an honest review. All opinions expressed are my own. For my review policy, please see my Disclosure page.

Sarah says

I was asked to read and review this book by the author. This in no way affected my rating or review of this book

Talent is one of those stories that can move you. It was emotionally driven by the main character in the book, Sandee.

Sandee is a very strong willed and relatable teenager who is trying to cope with hearing that her brother has gone missing from Afghanistan. But along with this she is coping with all the norms and pressures that all teenage girls go through, fitting in, and most importantly to Sandee getting a part in a theatre play / production.

I loved Sandee as a character and connected with her quickly. The ups and downs that she had to go through in this book as she learns to cope were inspirational.

And I equally really enjoyed this story. I don't know what else to really say without giving any spoilers away, but yes as I said I enjoyed this book.

It did take me a good while to read unfortunately but that is due to reading off an electronic device. Me and e-readers or ebooks in general just don't agree, but I looked past that to read this book.

I must say well done to this author for writing such a well written, interesting and captivating novel.

Renee Roberson says

My curiosity about the book Talent was piqued as soon as I read the press materials from the WOW! Women on Writing blog tour. First off, contemporary young adult novels are one of my favorite genres to read.

Second, I participated in musicals during my high school years and loved the idea of the stage as a main setting.

Talent hooks the reader from the opening pages, as fifteen-year-old Sandee Mason anxiously awaits her audition for her school's production of *Oklahoma!* (I loved this part--I was in the ensemble *Oklahoma!* in my teens and couldn't get the songs out of my head while reading.) It's clear from the beginning that Sandee is searching for something of her own, after living in the shadow of her older brother Brian for so long. With Bri M.I.A. in Afghanistan, she is certain landing a part in the show will be her chance to shine in the spotlight.

Unfortunately (or fortunately, maybe!) Sandee ends up taking on a role she never imagined, and it bolsters her confidence and helps her forge new friendships while strengthening old ones. Goodwin definitely writes teenagers well—there is a well-rounded cast of characters that keeps you guessing at every turn. There's the obnoxious diva classmate that has you rolling your eyes (Jenn), the boy-next-door/seventh grade boyfriend of Sandee's that looks more attractive in each chapter (Diego), the moody stage manager and best friend of Bri (Rob), who also has his eye on Sandee, and several others. The character of Sandee was well written; there are times she displays an emotional maturity beyond her years and other times when her decisions made me cringe, just as any authentic teenager would actually behave. I also enjoyed reading about all the behind-the-scenes workings of the theater, too, as it brought back some great memories for me.

The author also paints a vivid and heartbreakin picture of a family struggling with the knowledge that their son has gone missing shortly after joining the military. Sandee spends much of her time at school and rehearsals because her home life has become non-existent. But she soon learns that most people are dealing with their own personal demons, and there are a few underlying mysteries sprinkled throughout the book that made me want to keep reading. Bravo to B. Lynn Goodwin for a fast-paced, heartfelt story of love, loss, and finding your place in the world.

Kathleen Rodgers says

Hours after finishing *Talent*, I still have an ache in my throat.

Once author B. Lynn Goodwin hooked me with the line, "Bri went missing in Afghanistan seven months ago," I knew I had to keep reading because I had to know what happened. In this coming-of-age tale about high school sophomore Sandee Mason, who longs to make her mark in San Ramos High's spring production of *Oklahoma!*, we learn that a sister can ache for a big brother who's missing in war while at the same time yearn to get out from under his shadow. In clear, straightforward prose, Ms. Goodwin draws you into this authentic tale where there are no medals for those who wait, but that doesn't mean the characters in *Talent* give up hope.

Kathleen M. Rodgers, author of the novels *Johnnie Come Lately* and *The Final Salute*

Angela says

Talent is an emotional and sensitive story of loss, coming to terms with loss and your position and feeling

within the family unit. The storyline centres around a group of drama students putting on a professional style show of 'Oklahoma'. We run through the whole of the production from the auditions in which our protagonist, Sandee, flunks, through to the opening night on which Sandee is our hero and saves the day.

Sandee's brother, Brian, went to the same high school as her and has a circle of friends who all know Sandee and her family. Brian went missing in action in Afghanistan eight months earlier and the not knowing if he is coming back is heartbreaking for all. Sandee is a strong minded and strong willed young lady and has some adult challenges to overcome.

This is a very well written and thought out plot to give a satisfying yet sensitive and thoughtful story to a young adult / teenage audience. I am far beyond my teenage years and I thoroughly enjoyed the storyline, the rights and wrongs of war, family issues and alcohol dependency. The writing is skillful, flowing and well put together. The characters are well defined and likeable and is generally an easy to read and interesting book.

Suzanna Williams says

I found it hard to write this review and tell you all I liked about this book without giving away spoilers.
(Don't worry, I won't give anything away)

Talent is a thought-provoking read about a girl struggling with the usual teenage problems (school, boyfriends, trying to find her own identity) but with the added problem that her older brother is missing in service in Afghanistan. Ms Goodwin creates a wonderful cast of characters who are all affected by this disappearance and I totally believed the actions and reactions of Sandee, her mum and dad and all their friends.

Sandee imagines she can hear her brother Brian's voice giving her advice and some of my favourite parts of the book are the letters she writes to him.

But Sandee also has her own real-life problems and aspirations. She desperately wants to be in the school production of Oklahoma and the first chapter sees her auditioning. It is obvious that Talent is written by someone who knows and loves theatre. She knows the problems that can befall at production ... and, yes, Sandee is destined to have to cope with many problems before the end of the book. She also has a lot of tough choices to make regarding loyalty to her friends and doing the right thing and I was rooting for her all the way.

I loved the cover of this book and there are some discussion points at the end that will be useful for teachers or just to get the reader thinking.

A solid read about some real-life issues.

Story Circle Book Reviews says

Many of us who caught the theatre bug caught it early. I was one so infected, performing in all my high school and community youth theatre productions. I can attest that even among the drama geeks who share

the love of the bright lights and the thrill of performing live, cliques and clashes still exist. B. Lynn Goodwin, who clearly has greasepaint running through her veins, reveals what goes on backstage and under the footlights of a high school drama production in her new book *Talent*.

Almost-sixteen Sandee Mason is also afflicted with the theatre bug. Failing to get an acting role in her school's production of *Oklahoma!*, Sandee becomes both assistant stage manager and props mistress. But Sandee has more than finding props to occupy her extracurricular time: Sandee's brother, Brian, a soldier in Afghanistan, has been reported MIA. Sandee has always existed in Bri's shadow, but now the spotlight is on her because he is missing, and this isn't the type of spotlight she'd been hoping for. "I'll take my dramas onstage, thank you," Sandee says, but as luck would have it, that spotlight grows even more intense with the disappearance of some valuable—and potentially dangerous—props in Sandee's care.

If all that weren't enough, Sandee also has to deal with typical teenager challenges—fitting in; trying to communicate, usually unsuccessfully, with parents; navigating the minefield that is the opposite sex; passing algebra. Whether she spends a lot of time with teenagers or she has a very keen memory of her own school days, Goodwin beautifully captures the angst, the joys, the embarrassments, the delights, and the insecurities of teenagers struggling to find their place in the indifferent halls of high school. Goodwin appreciates young people—she knows them, she understands them, she relates to them, and she makes readers relate to them, too. Sandee is likable, honest, funny, observant, and quick with a comeback. Readers who've acted on stage, worked behind the scenes, or never stepped foot in a theatre will relate to Sandee's view of her situation: "Sometimes faking it is a lot like acting, except I'm in real life and have no script to follow."

The true mark of a gifted writer is writing that feels effortless. Such is Goodwin's "talent." She doesn't spend a lot of time on unnecessary description, allowing readers to paint their own pictures of the characters, their homes, the school, and the theatre. The limited descriptions also place the focus on Goodwin's particular skill: dialogue. And, oh, how that dialogue sparkles. It is snappy, clever, natural, true to life, true to teenagers.

Unfortunately, Godwin has not been served well by her printer. To avoid becoming distracted by the typesetting and occasional editing errors, take turns reading the book aloud with your favorite teen and demonstrate your own talent.

Though the book is about loss, it is also about hope and friendship, loyalty and responsibility. Readers may find their throats tightening or their eyes welling up in certain passages, but the book is never maudlin or overwrought. Even Bri's letters to his family express inspiration and love, not despair, anger, or fear. Sandee thinks she hears her brother's voice encouraging her, but as the novel progresses, she finds her own voice, and it is a lovely, authentic voice. "Scenes end, but real life keeps going," Sandee says.

I found myself slowing down as I neared the final chapters, not wanting to reach the end and leave these characters, so I'm pleased that the author bio notes indicate that Goodwin is working on a second book featuring Sandee Mason. That's a performance I won't miss.

by Judy Plazyk
for Story Circle Book Reviews
reviewing books by, for, and about women

Cheryl says

The author's insight into the thought processes of teenagers is evident throughout 'Talent'. Wit and stark honesty make Talent an incredibly gripping novel. Complicated layered characters and compelling plot twists maintains the reader's interest. I wanted to know what would happen, but I didn't want the book to end. I want to know what happened after the story ended. I hope this is the introductory novel of a Coming of Age series about Sandee.

Her resolute courage made her my new hero in much the same way Katniss Everdeen did in the 'Hunger Games'. The target reading group for this novel is high schoolers. But don't let the age thing stop you; this book is for anyone who likes great writing and a powerful page turner.

Deborah says

I just finished reading Talent by Lynn Goodwin. My eyes are still moist from crying. Ms. Goodwin has created a memorable character in her heroine, Sandee Mason. Sandee's exploits made me cry with laughter, joy and empathy. I teach high school five days a week, but reading Talent brought me back to feelings I had when I was a high school student. Sandee experiences teenage angst and feelings of loss and frustration universal to the human experience. I tell my students that teenagers make mistakes. That's their job. The important thing is that they learn from their mistakes and move forward. Sandee makes lots of mistakes, but emerges as a role model for other students. She is the type of character, I want my students to emulate in their own individual ways. I look forward to sharing this book with my sophomore English classes. They will love the fact that the main character, Sandee, is a sophomore like them. As a teacher, I appreciate that there are already discussion questions in the back of the book to make my lesson planning easier. This is one high school book that I will not mind reading over and over again with my students.

Cinda Brooks says

Author Lynn Goodwin ushers the reader into the mind, emotions, and language of a teenager in her book Talent. Sandee Mason, 15 years old, works in her school's production of Oklahoma, where there is a script as she struggles in real life without a script--bringing life to the subtitle "Real live doesn't have a script." The author is a master at using dialogue to bring the reader into a teenage girl's world as she grapples with the death of her brother along with the more ordinary struggles of managing emotions and insecurities as she finds her identity, talent, and confidence. A superb read and journey into the teenage world.

Emily says

Talent was a great young adult read. During reading this book I cried, laughed and was in awe at just how realistic these characters were, I also enjoyed the setting since I often take Bart to San Francisco I felt at home reading this. I think everyone can find something they enjoy about this book either going back to high school, Or how you know your not alone .Now I just hope it either gets a movie or some sort of sequel.

