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Mary Downing Hahn

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Sensitive and idealistic fifteen-year-old Kelly McAllister feels at odds with everyone around her. Her best friend has suddenly turned boy crazy. Her talented mother creates greeting card designs instead of real art, and her father never talks to her about anything except working hard and getting ahead.

That's why Kelly becomes so involved in the plight of a homeless Vietnam vet who takes refuge in the library each day. Interviewing him began as a Social Studies project, but it takes on new meaning after her offers of food and friendship backfire into a real disaster. What had the war done to destroy this man? And what had it done to her own father, who had been to the same war... and refuses to speak of it?

December Stillness Details

Date : Published September 1st 1990 by HarperTeen (first published September 1st 1988)

ISBN : 9780380707645

Author : Mary Downing Hahn

Format : Paperback 192 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Academic, Read For School, Childrens, Juvenile, Realistic Fiction

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From Reader Review December Stillness for online ebook

Ruthie says

It was pretty good but I would change a few details

Cara says

I was expecting to like this book much more. It deals with a 14 year old girl named Kelly (who supposedly I think the author was trying to make interesting, but unfortunately she didn't grab my attention as much as she should have), and her encounter with a homeless man who is a veteran of the Vietnam War.

The basic concept of the novel was good but it felt like it lacked a certain something to it. It did give a clear view on people's opinions about the war and the veterans. You could tell the author was pushing you to see that we should feel more obligated to help these men that had been through so much, and that was one of the only redeeming qualities of this book.

The main annoyance I had with the book is that the characters weren't very well developed, and many things still left hanging in the air. Kelly's friends were more like props in the story and in reality weren't really needed to make the author's point. I guess I can't be too hard on the book though since it is set in the eighties. The one part I did like about the book, which made me feel like I should at least give the book two stars, was how the relationship between Kelly and her father changes for the better. Her father carries some of the memories of going to Vietnam and Kelly realizes how much she really doesn't know about her dad and the man he really is. But sadly I don't think that's enough of a reason to read this.

Rlis82 says

This book irritated me. Hahn essentially rehashed the premise from "Daphne's Book" which told the story of a sensitive and insecure girl who tries to befriend a female classmate living in poverty while completing a school assignment. In "December Stillness" we get all that and so much more that renders the novel a hopeless mess.

Kelly McAllister is a typical eighth-grader. She doesn't like school, her friendships are complicated, and she has a very distant relationship with her father. This much was believable if not tiring. She's in the verge of failing a social studies class unless she gets an A on her final paper for which she decides to write about homelessness. To give her paper just the right punch, she tries to interview a homeless man who hangs around the public library to stay warm when the weather is cold. The homeless man, Mr. Weems, tells Kelly he just wants to be left alone. From there, Hahn devotes more than 100 pages to Kelly's multiple attempts to try speaking to Mr. Wrens all the while learning from the library's staff that he was a Vietnam vet (just like Kelly's father), may have been a heroin user, and may even be living with PTSD. The latter two may only be hearsay, but Vietnam ultimately removes the story (and Kelly) so far from the theme of homelessness that I can't help but wonder if Hahn herself was lost in her own messy little book. I can only assume so for Kelly ultimately divides her time between stalking (yes, stalking) a man who wants nothing to do with her and arguing with her father who prefers not to speak of his own days in Vietnam. The book's brevity is a small comfort, but leaves too many questions such as if Kelly wanted to write about homelessness, why doesn't she interview a person who wants to speak to her; why doesn't Kelly just write about Vietnam instead of

pestering Mr. Weems; or (more importantly) how did Kelly manage to crank out so much as a paragraph for her paper when her actions in the book wouldn't qualify as research.

I must hand it to Hahn that her prose is readable and Kelly is as believable as any naive and idealistic young adult would be, but the story itself has no real direction.

Eden says

14-year-old Kelly feels out of place everywhere nowadays. She doesn't fit in with her friends, she and her father don't get along. And she really wishes her mother would use her talent on real art instead of greeting card designs.

Kelly is changing, trying to find her place, find her own path in life and make a real difference. That's why when she decides to interview a local homeless Vietnam vet for school, it becomes more than just getting a good grade to her. Kelly wants to be his friend, to help him. No matter what she does, she can't seem to gain his trust. What had happened to him?

I wasn't sure if I'd enjoy this book, but it ended up being very touching and even made me tear up a few times.

I felt Kelly was a very believable main character. Some may say she is just a typical teenager. I've even had that people say that to me when relating my own teenage experiences. I feel that is dismissive, though. Yes, how she feels and her experiences may be similar to yours or what other teens are going through, but I don't feel saying typical is right. Similar or not, everyone's experiences are unique to them.

That being said, I did like Kelly. She wasn't perfect and made mistakes, but I felt I could relate to her. I remember feeling lost and that I didn't belong.

I'd say the only thing that bothered me was the view of other characters. How they viewed the homeless, or more specific, the local homeless vet. I know this was written in the 80s, but this view held by some of the characters, I feel really relates to even our time. Some people still hold a negative view of those who are homeless. They look down on them, think they are lazy and they just aren't trying.

Kelly's relationship with her father isn't the best. She's growing and changing, finding her path in life. He wants a different path for her. Both don't understand each other. I really liked to see how their relationship changed at the end.

I thought this was a really good book and I'd recommend giving it a read if you get the chance.

Lily says

This is one of the only books that I have cried for. I will never forget this book and how much Kelly tried to help Mr. Weems.

Kayla says

Boring story line. Had to read for school.

Pam says

This is another book that isn't a 3, but not quite a 4. Through much of the book, I had to fight the sigh of resignation that comes from reading the typical teen book where the protagonist is mad at the world, spends much of the book feeling sorry for herself, and rationalizing why it's OK to shrug off school. The end of the book found me with tears running down my face.

December Stillness is another book where the author uses fiction to address the societal ills of the world. In this case the protagonist deals with immature, giggly friends, a distant father, an artist mother who has sold out her talent to the greeting card world, and who is personally frustrated with the futility of her life.

In the process of finding a topic for a research paper, our 9th grade protagonist chooses to focus on the life of a homeless Viet Nam vet. She comes up against the normal stereotypes and reactions towards the homeless and in the process of trying to get to know the vet learns about post traumatic stress disorder. She learns many life lessons, but I loved the lesson she learns about her father the most.

December Stillness starts out superficial, but ends with an emotional tug that made the story worth the read.

Kris - My Novelesque Life says

2.5 STARS

"Sensitive and idealistic fifteen-year-old Kelly McAllister feels at odds with everyone around her. Her best friend has suddenly turned boy crazy. Her talented mother creates greeting card designs instead of real art, and her father never talks to her about anything except working hard and getting ahead. That's why Kelly becomes so involved in the plight of a homeless Vietnam vet who takes refuge in the library each day. Interviewing him began as a Social Studies project, but it takes on new meaning after her offers of food and friendship backfire into a real disaster. What had the war done to destroy this man? And what had it done to her own father, who had been to the same war ... and refuses to speak of it?" (From Amazon)

A teen adult by Downing Hahn about a teen being confronted with Vietnam war.

Shivani solanki says

Kelly finds herself at odds with everyone: her best friend has turned into a giggling shopper; Keith "can't" be her friend anymore because he's male; she is ashamed of her mother's career as a greeting card artist; and she's estranged from her combative lawyer father. Kelly wants to be a real artist and go to art school, but she won't even graduate from high school unless she completes a social studies paper. After seeing Mr. Weems, a strange bagman in the library, Kelly decides to tackle the issue of the homeless by interviewing him. Read

the whole book to know more

Jess says

I apologize in advance for this rant but...

This book was actually the book with the most annoying main character of all time. I have never wanted to chuck a book at a wall this much ever. I had to read this for school so I had to push through this book and it was terrible. This book had great potential. It had a serious tone to it- the trauma that soldiers go through during war. It's not something to kid about. Throughout the book the main character pressures her dad to talk about the war even though it's very clear that he's uncomfortable and wants to broach the subject much more gently. But she doesn't care, she wants answers and it's so annoying and rude. Also, aside from that, throughout the book she's bashing people for liking the suburbs. Like what did the suburbs ever do to you!!! She thinks she's so above other people like "how can you people like the suburbs nothing ever happens you're all so lame" like stoppppp. At one point she like yells at her mom and I'm like could you not!!!!?? This main character was so annoying that it took away from the overall message about what the war did to young soldiers. I couldn't really think about how meaningful the message was when the narrator made me want to scream.

Ok I'm done my rant. Srry if I'm a bit harsh ?????

Melissa says

Mostly exposition until the grisly climax and satisfying denouement, December Stillness may be my least favorite book by MDH. THE interesting thing for me, having grown up in Elkridge, MD, was the realization that she had set the book in a factionalized version of her hometown of Columbia, a planned community. I almost spent more time being nostalgic for places I knew and recognized from my childhood even though she changed about 50% of the names. Even down to the description of the anchor stores in the mall, the accuracy was just so uncanny. Perhaps a fresh perspective would have read the story more objectively.

Mahie says

This amazing book was written by Mary D Hahn, where a fifteen year old girl tries to help get her normal friend back after he turns crazy. I really liked this book, however the beginning of the book was a bit boring and once I carried on further it got better. it was an amazing book, and i would like to read it again.

Shaundell says

Kelly McAllister is 15 years old and attend high school. Her best friend suddenly is boy crazy; her mother is constantly drawing the magical creatures for greeting cards rather than doing "real art"; her father is extremely busy being a corporate lawyer; and her teachers always seem to be on her case to do better in school.

For a school research project, she must choose a topic which is controversial and must have a first person resource. While at the library one day with her friends, she approaches a homeless man, with whom she tries to humiliate him by striking up a conversation. As she learns the truth about him, that he is a Vietnam Vet who is struggling trying to overcome the past, he realizes that she is one who is humiliated. She tries to become his friend and wants to help him. One day she offers him food and warm clothing; another time she brings him a plate of Thanksgiving Dinner; and yet another time she finds an article for him about dealing with the war. He becomes very agitated, yells at her, and both Kelly and the man are kicked out of the library. Due to many complaints, the man isn't allowed in the library, his one true place of shelter, on a daily basis anymore. He ends up walking out in front of a car on a busy road and is killed.

Kelly must deal with his death, thinking that she is the main cause. She asks her father to take her to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. Her father has a few of his own issues, resulting from the war, that he must deal with as well.

Ellen Lim says

"December Stillness," is written by a librarian Mary Downing Hahn. Hahn does a good job narrating a teenage girl named Kelly McAllister or "Mad Dog Kelly," coined by her long-time male friend Keith, goes through what teenagers go through - angst, identity formation, confusion, rebellion. Parents do not have fun once their kids reach teenage years; it becomes more challenging.

The female character Kelly comes across a homeless man who visits the library on a daily basis. She becomes curious about him after she decides to write a paper on war veterans. The homeless man carries a large garbage bag for his belongings and sits at the library and just reads. She talks to him as a dare challenged by one of her friends. She makes a scene and the librarian warns her. Despite her friend's warnings of Mr. Weems' weird disposition, she approaches him again at the library. She provokes him next time and Mr. Weems, the homeless man throws something at her. She does not see that Mr. Weems is dangerous. She is a teenager. Next time she visits the library she finds out from the librarian that people in the community reported complaints of Mr. Weems and he is no longer allowed to stay at the library. She feels guilty. There is a small scene in the book where she finally talks to Mr. Weems in a conversation at the park. This is the highlight of the book. All the book has been leading up to this moment. There is not much said. There is not much connection between Kelly and Mr. Weems; Mr. Weems is a Vietnam war veteran who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. While Kelly is different from typical girls or her friend

Julie who likes to shop and dress up, she is not that crazy or odd.

Hahn does a good job depicting some of the feelings teenage girls may experience - their distant relationship with their father as they are no longer small and cute, individuality vs. conformity to what is popular and acceptable, witnessing her parents' relationship with each other, not knowing how to relate to their parents. Her mother is an artist who illustrate holiday cards and she is disappointed at her mother for not pursuing her dreams. Kelly tells herself she "shall never ever give up," a good tenacious attitude for someone who has not found herself yet. Her father only cares about money which she cannot relate to. Her mother assures her that her father was once a hipster who could not care for stocks and making money. Life does that to us. We change because our lives change.

I first read this book as a teenager, most likely fifteen or sixteen years old and I can relate to the main female

character Kelly. If I as a teenager was able to connect and relate to Kelly McAllister, than the author did a good job voicing a young teenager. I would have liked to have seen Kelly develop more of a relationship with Keith, the guy who calls her "Mad Dog McAllister," because she bit him when they were young. Kelly seemed to have feelings for Keith but the author does not explore their relationship. Keith may have not seen Kelly that way, he calls her "Mad Dog," not a compliment.

The book focuses more on Kelly's interest in Mr. Weems, and her inner thoughts. There is not much action that happens. Even when Kelly did mean well, bad consequences result from Kelly's provocation. She is not experienced and trained in dealing with someone who has a serious problem. The ending is appropriate and it gives light to repercussions of the war. Not every soldier died at war, but their life's energy, their thirst and joy for life died at the war front. Mr. Weems is one of the soldiers that survived the war, but his being changed.

Jimbo Pantas says

A reread! Never fails to break my heart.
