

Dirt Road Home

Watt Key

Reviewed By: Rachel Johnson, 41

Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

Hal, who is 14 is sent to the Hellenweiler Boys' home where he must stay until he can prove he can stay out of trouble. His father must also prove he can stop drinking in order for Hal to return home. Hal and his father have good intentions but when Hal arrives at the boys' home he realizes that staying out of trouble is not going to be easy as he thought. There are two gangs at the home and they require all new arrivals to join one of the two or they will be targets. Hal has decided he will not join a gang because he is only concerned with getting back to a normal life with his father and his girlfriend. He becomes the target of gang violence. When he meets Paco one of the gang leaders Hal learns that gangs are not his biggest problem. He and Paco become friends and have many private conversations where Hal learns a lot about the place.

He finds out that the superintendent and the staff of the boys' homes are corrupt and allow the fights to happen. He also learns that boys are not getting the proper medical attention, medical records are being falsified and conduct reports were falsified. When Hal finds out that he won't be released because of a conduct report He hatches a plan to expose the corruption at the home. With the help of his new acquaintances Paco and an ex-gang member Caboose, he is able to retrieve medical records. He sends them to his lawyer who then notifies authorities. When authorities arrive at the boys' home the staff is arrested and taken into custody. In the end, Hal is reunited with his father. Hal's father helps Caboose who has been recently released and has no family with a place to stay and a job so he can get on his feet.

The Dirt Road Home is the sequel to Watt Key's book Alabama Moon. This story is very interesting and thought-provoking. It will grab your attention and keep you reading to the end. My favorite part of this story is how the boys worked together to fight against a corrupt system. The story brought light to the failures and the lack of rehabilitation efforts in the boys' home. The violence in the story is very descriptive with gang fights and injuries that required medical attention. The author does a wonderful job of showing courage through Hal's attempt to put his life back together. I would recommend this book to teen boys ages 13 to 17. This one is a definite buy, it would make a great gift.

Recommended Titles

Unbroken, by Laura Hillenbrand

Ironman, by Chris Crutcher

The battle of Jerrico, by Sharon Draper

