

Zebra Forest

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Reviewed by Rachel Johnson, 42

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Annie is eleven years old, and her brother Rew is nine. They lived with their Gran in the small town of Sunshine. There's a forest behind their house that they call the zebra forest. Annie and Rew do not remember their parents, but Gran says their mother left them and their father Andrew Snow died. They take care of themselves most of the time because Gran goes through bad spells, sometimes staying in her room for days. Annie goes to school only when she feels like it and she handles the bills and shopping. She has become accustomed to lying to Adele Parks, the social worker that checks on them from time to time. They do not have a television, so they read books and make up stories about their parents and play games.

One day there is a riot at the prison on the other side of zebra forest and a group of prisoners escape. One finds his way into Annie's house and holds them hostage. Annie soon learns that the prisoner is her father Andrew Snow. Over the next month Andrew Snow keeps them locked in the house only sending Annie out for groceries. Annie wants to know more about him, Gran isolates herself in her room, and Rew wants to turn him in. As secrets are exposed, will this family be able to face their past so they can have a future.

Zebra Forest is a dramatic take on a broken family. It's emotional with some deep subject matters including children not being properly cared for, prisoners rioting and escaping, hostage situations, and murder. It takes place at the same time as The Iran Hostage Crisis and Annie compares the two situations, but it really did not seem to fit in the story. The characters are well thought out. I enjoyed Annie and Rew, they were my favorites. Although their life is not perfect, they find peace and happiness with one another which was a nice touch. Reading Treasure Island is their favorite pastime, which could spark an interest in the book. Gran is a character I could not understand. Although she cared for the children, she condoned lying and missing school, and even bragged about how good of a liar she was, which was not appealing to me. Then there's Andrew Snow, who is mysterious, but seems to have changed his past ways. This is an easy read with an interesting storyline and no graphic details. There is a strong message of family, love, and forgiveness. The story is not what you expect but it is worth the read. It's an enjoyable book to pick up at the library. I recommend it for ages 12+

Recommended Titles

Midnight Without a Moon, by Linda Williams Jackson

Echo, by Pam Munoz Ryan

Treasure of the World, by Tara Sullivan

