

Book Review *by Ginny Walsh*

Catching Forever, by Laurel Dee Gugler
(James Lorimer & Co. Ltd.)

She wears long dresses that cause her to stumble when she tries to play baseball. She feels like the doll that her mother has bought her for Christmas. And she so desperately yearned for a softball mitt! “What do you think of being shut up in this box when there is a whole, big world out there?” she asks of the doll. “Waaah!” is the response she gets and tries to stifle, so Mamma won’t know she has been poking in the hiding place.

As a Mennonite who is “different”, Rose seems to face unique challenges. However, this book is for all children making choices in the process of growing up. Any child who has feared bullying, rejection, or humiliation; who ponders what is right and wrong, or who yearns to be something that seems beyond his/her reach, will relate to her experiences.

With candor and imagination, Rose engages us in her struggles. Mamma is not the “tell-your-tribbles-to sort of mamma”. But in the branches of Grandmother Oak, her ‘thinking tree’, Rose finds comfort and strength. With Aunt Bette, who “doesn’t believe in coloring books where you have to color inside the lines”, she is free to explore possibilities, like the idea that maybe it is a sin *not* to dance! Other endearing characters, especially brother Daniel who loves all creepy crawly critters, play a part; but ultimately Rose’s transformation relies on finding the “spunk” she didn’t know she had.

Catching Forever is recommended for children ages 6-10. Six year-olds could enjoy the playful dialogue, humor, and suspenseful narrative if the book were read aloud. But the depth of insight and the subtlety of the poetry make it more appropriate for children eight or more, and that includes adults. Anyone would be inspired by Rose, but I think that young Friends especially will relate to this girl who works to find peace and courage to overcome life’s conflicts in a loving way. Like Anne of Green Gables, Rose works her way into the readers’ hearts, and will have them wanting to read the sequel, *A Piece of Forever*.

Laurel Dee Gugler, a popular storyteller and author, participates in the spiritual life and work of Toronto MM

Ginny Walsh, Toronto Monthly Meeting

Book Review *by Carol Leigh Wehking*

A Piece of Forever by Laurel Dee Gugler

How can we invite the children of western society to consider the possibility of looking at conflicts and their solutions in some other terms than war? Such a difficult issue, fraught with so many layers of history, emotion, family values, and societal imperatives. It is difficult to imagine a way to approach the topic in terms accessible to young readers. Thank goodness for Laurel Dee Gugler who has tackled exactly that. In her latest book, *A Piece of Forever*, Laurel draws on her own background to create Rose, a child of the fifties in Kansas, and a Mennonite.

Rose has one friend who is also Mennonite, but she’s largely surrounded by schoolmates and teachers who are heavily invested in the aftermath of the recent wars. The issues that arise around school projects and preparations to celebrate Veterans Day (known now in Canada as Remembrance Day) create both internal and external conflicts for young Rose, as she struggles to sort out her own tangled thoughts. Rose wants to be friends with her classmates. Rose does not wish to betray her family and religious values. Rose wants to keep her one Mennonite buddy. Rose loves her younger brother, himself struggling to understand life and death and the customs and attitudes that surround both, and wants to gently offer him the degree of wisdom she has gained. She is surrounded by conflicts and must find a way to reconcile her own conflicting thoughts, as well as find a way to participate in Veterans Day while preserving her integrity.

It is a perilous route to navigate, but Rose, who found her “spunk” in the previous book, *Catching Forever*, manages, not without trouble, to do so. The book is peopled by characters who are interesting and have depth, and who illuminate and enrich the facets of the plot. Both the children and the adults offer various challenges and supports to Rose, as she makes her way through the confusion (and sometimes anguish) to assert herself. Laurel doesn’t hold back on the tough questions, and uses the story of Sadako Sasaki and her 1,000 paper cranes to give Rose something to grapple with, and to find insight into the meaning of war to ordinary people. I hope this book will be read widely by children everywhere, as well as studied in schools to open important questions and offer alternative ways of thinking.

Carole Leigh Wehking, Hamilton Monthly Meeting