

EVERYDAY HEROES

Absolutely invincible. William Bell. General Paperbacks, 1991. 198 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-7736-7291-5.

This novel, originally titled *The Cripples' Club* defines the plight of four young people of mixed cultural backgrounds who also have some severe disabilities. In a reversal of Franz Kafka's classic *Metamorphosis*, Bell lets his readers see that handicaps can be more perceived than real, and that the truly "crippled" may not be who we think they are.

The story is told through the eyes of George, the only one of four central characters, all disabled teenagers, who has no physical handicap. But George, a young Asian refugee, has experienced so many horrors that his mind is virtually blank; he can't remember anything, and he is branded as slow. His life turns around, however, when he saves the life of a crippled schoolmate being terrorized by bullies. Their friendship grows to include two girls, one deaf, the other blind.

Bell, an Orillia, Ontario high-school teacher, writes with the assuredness of someone who knows his teen-and pre-teen audience, and his characters, well. He has evidently listened with a perpetually sympathetic but admiring ear to his students' most secret conversations; he knows their hopes and fears – and how to express and exorcise them.

Although there is too much emphasis on motorcycles and martial arts, in general, this is a well-balanced, thought-provoking novel. The essential story remains one of exuberant "outward bound" style adventure, and of overcoming personal limitations. *Absolutely invincible* should be required reading for young people in about grades seven and eight, given rising evidence of racially-motivated violence and prejudice in our high schools.

Leslie Smith Dow is an Ottawa freelance writer and author. Her first book, *Anna Leonowens: A life beyond the King and I*, was published in 1991 by Pottersfield Press. She is currently working on a second historical biography, called *Adèle Hugo: La misérable*.

PICK-UP STICKS AND THE POLITICS OF DIRT

Pick-up sticks. Sarah Ellis. Greenwood, 1991. 160 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-146-0.

Pick-up sticks, the third novel by Vancouver author Sarah Ellis, is an important book. It won a 1991 Governor General's award, a tangible sign of the status she deserves. Besides being a novelist, Sarah Ellis is a librarian and critic.