

Perhaps the greatest strength, however, is Halvorson's intimate knowledge of horses and horse psychology. The description of the training of the horses for wagon racing — particularly the use of one steady and reliable horse to train the others — is fascinating, as are the background details of the Calgary Stampede chuckwagon races.

Interest builds steadily with one rapidly-paced action scene following another. Halvorson undoubtedly has an ear for a realistic teen "voice," though there are times during the first few chapters when the self-absorbed, glib, world-weary tone is in danger of being overdone. Fortunately, as soon as the action starts to build Steve's true voice emerges, and he becomes a realistic and likeable protagonist.

Another possible weakness comes in the ending. E.M. Forster once remarked that the ending of a novel was often the weakest part. This is true of *Strangers on the Line*. Having pulled for Steve through crisis after crisis, one wishes he might have been allowed to effect closure on at least one of his problems — either his relationship with Lynne or the threat from Romero. The fact that the book ends with both issues unresolved leaves the reader feeling vaguely unsatisfied. However, this is a minor criticism of an immensely enjoyable and fast-paced YA adventure novel.

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### Hippie Child "Imprisoned" in Rosedale!

*The Private Journal of Day Applepenny, Prisoner.* Sheree Haughian. Monolith, 1997. 136 pp. \$7.50 paper. ISBN 0-9682397-0-6.

Day Applepenny, the twelve-year-old protagonist of this recent novel for eleven- to thirteen-year olds, moves through the world of her readers' parents: this book is set during the 1974-1975 school year. Day, the child of a Rosedale woman who had escaped an oppressive wealthy family to join a hippie colony on Gabriola Island, is celebrating her twelfth birthday on an airplane to Toronto, where she will move in with her maternal grandmother and go to school for a year. The references to places, styles and events of 1974 seem just right, but this verisimilitude is likely lost on contemporary young readers, who will be looking for a story that speaks to their own situation.

They won't be entirely disappointed, either, until they reach the end of the book. Day's adventures in Toronto coalesce around her plans to earn enough money to fly back home to her mother, and young readers will be

amused by her UNICEF scam and her pencil-renting schemes. However, as the book draws to a close, the tone of the narrative shifts. Day returns home successfully, and rescues her bruised and starving mother from the hippie community leader who has turned the Camp Eden commune into an abusive drug cult. The happily-ever-after abruptly puts Day and her recovering mother into a women's community in Vancouver, and young readers may wonder about the abandonment of Day's comic adventures for self-sufficiency.

Haughian links Day's "imprisonment" in the comfort of Rosedale and a private girls' school with her mother's imprisonment by a cult leader, and Day says, after her adventures, that female solidarity will enable grandmother, mother, and daughter to "talk about the many walls that have been built around girls and women." This came as news to me after reading about Day's schemes to make money by pawning a family heirloom watch and selling an expensive sweater she had received for Christmas, both gifts from her grandmother. It was hard to see how all the sneaking around Day had done behind her grandmother's back could be resolved by this new-found feminist realization that her grandmother, an afternoon alcoholic, was imprisoned too. Ultimately, Haughian puts too much verbal energy into Day's sneaky persona to abandon her at the end. Young readers, therefore, will enjoy Day's resistance to the rules, but may find her story's resolution a bit unsatisfying.

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### Al's Momentous Year

*one year commencing*. Kathy Stinson. Thistledown, 1997. 148 pp. \$13.95 paper. ISBN 1-895449-65-0.

In *one year commencing* Kathy Stinson successfully combines the problem novel with a social issues slant, and addresses readers at the younger end of the Young Adult spectrum. The novel's dilemma is made even more compelling because it is based on a true situation in which a young person was forced to decide which parent to live with. The pain of the parent who "loses" the child is only briefly but powerfully suggested.

The close rendering, month-by-month, of the momentous year in which Al goes from being a girl of twelve to a young woman of thirteen is nicely evoked through a well-sustained first person account. The interspersed letters from Al to her mother and to her friend at home in rural Alberta also effectively reproduce the culture of girlhood. Since Al is a budding artist, the