

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

vivid accounts of Toronto landmarks — such as Centre Island — and the daily big-city bustle — such as on the subway — are plausibly presented. Al's experience as a new girl in a large, multicultural school is also well described. Ms. Pickles, the teacher, starts out as a caricature — which Al secretly sketches — with orange hair and huge round glasses at the top of a tall skinny body. Yet she proves to be observant and supportive, instantaneously interpreting Al's rather tortured drawings as an art therapist would. Given her important role, the subsequent description of her hair turning green seems extraneous and the humour crude.

At school, Al meets two important children who illustrate the theme of divorce: her young book buddy Roberto, and an unusual girl of her own age, Kim. Both emerging relationships are well depicted over the school-year and it is emotionally wrenching when Roberto is abducted by his father over a custody battle. Kim, who becomes Al's best friend, lives in an alternative family household consisting of her mother and her woman partner. In Al's own life, her father has a woman-friend who is divorced with a daughter who lives equally with both parents. In this way, several postmodern families are unobtrusively presented.

Importantly, Al develops a social conscience towards the poor and homeless. This dimension is sensitively described: in the course of the year Al finds a way to benefit some of the homeless she sees regularly, and she ultimately becomes an advocate of the rights of the poor. She does so despite her father's lack of support; yet she maturely finds a solution that allows her to perform her small acts of charity (giving food) while not engaging in conflict with her father.

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Scary and Serious Reads for Girls

The Body in the Basement. Norah McClintock. Scholastic, 1997. 208 pp. \$4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-24983-5. *Grave Danger.* Gisela Tobien Sherman. Scholastic, 1997. 194 pp. \$4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12383-1.

In the current trend towards creepy reading for young people, it's nice to know that interesting story lines and solid writing haven't fallen by the wayside. While neither of these books qualifies as great literature, both are great reads, which is probably what a young teenage girl prefers anyway. There are some surprising parallels between the two books. Both feature heroines about sixteen years old, who have to draw on resources they didn't