



Laugh with the Moon

Shana Burg

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Laugh with the Moon is on the Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List.

Thirteen-year-old Clare Silver is stuck. Stuck in denial about her mother's recent death. Stuck in the African jungle for sixty-four days without phone reception. Stuck with her father, a doctor who seems able to heal everyone but Clare.

Clare feels like a fish out of water at Mzanga Full Primary School, where she must learn a new language. Soon, though, she becomes immersed in her new surroundings and impressed with her fellow students, who are crowded into a tiny space, working on the floor among roosters and centipedes.

When Clare's new friends take her on an outing to see the country, the trip goes horribly wrong, and Clare must face another heartbreak head-on. Only an orphan named Memory, who knows about love and loss, can teach Clare how to laugh with the moon.

Told from an American girl's perspective, this story about how death teaches us to live and how love endures through our memories will capture the hearts of readers everywhere.

Laugh with the Moon Details

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Author : Shana Burg

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From Reader Review **Laugh with the Moon** for online ebook

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

From the Publisher:

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My Thoughts:

I had some reservations about this book when I first began reading it. It seemed like it was going to be about another spoiled girl taken away from her comfortable home and friends and pouting her way to the end of the story towards a Eureka moment when her beloved materialistic life is somehow forever changed.

Well, close, but not quite. Clare isn't as spoiled as she acts, but she is terribly alone and unhappy. She has been unable to come to terms with the fact of her mother's premature death, and is afraid of losing her in her memory as well. And she resents her father's seeming ability to just move on from her mother without even a look back.

But for all Clare is mad at her dad, a volunteer with the Global Health Project, and even gives him the silent treatment when she remembers to, she does begin to assimilate to her life in Malawi, and even makes a new best friend, a girl named Memory.

This is a wonderful story that deals with death, mourning and memory and the process that a 13 year old girl must go through when tragedy strikes her life. I thought Clare's journey through this process was so realistically portrayed, and I can say that from experience. My daughter lost her dad when she was that age and a lot of her feelings, thoughts and behavior were mirrored in Clare.

Actually the whole book has a realistic feel to it. Burg's interest in Malawi began while doing research on the Save the Children program there and much of what she discovered can be found in *Laugh with the Moon* through Clare's eyes. Clare's observations and descriptions of the problems and deprivations, including death, that Malawian kids must deal with every day have a somewhat teachy feel to them but they are also really informative.

One of the things I did like and I think the readers will relate to is that for all the poverty and lack of books, technology and supplies, school turns out to be not so very different from school anywhere. There is Memory, always friendly and easy going; Agnes, who thinks she is the school queen bee; and Saide, the good looking boy all the girls are crushing on. But what is different, and what Clare learns about, is the idea of making do, which many schools must do, even in this country nowadays. When the headmaster asks Clare to take over teaching English to the younger children, for instance, she is shown how to create alphabet

letters for the class by baking the mud from a termite hill.

This trip proves to be a pivotal trip for Clare in many ways. Not only does she experience the disparity between how the native Malawians and the azungu (white people) are treated, but most importantly she discovers how Memory is able to deal the losses of parents and siblings in her own life.

But will Clare ever be able to come to terms with her mother's death so that she can follow Memory's philosophy: "Even the mourner must stop and laugh with the moon."

This is a wonderful middle grade coming of age novel that deals with some serious topics for kids that age. It is an energetic, well-written and compelling novel and I highly recommend it.

This book is recommended for readers age 9-12.

This book was purchased for my personal library.

Sandra Stiles says

I can't imagine being thirteen and losing my mother. I have had many students who have had to go through this heart-rending situation. What made this story even more emotional was knowing that Clare's father pulled her from everything and everyone she knew and loved and moved her to Malawi for six months. Her father was excited to go back to a country he had worked in before. Clare had decided to give her dad the silent treatment for the entire six months. It's funny how meeting someone who has lost more than you have, and learning that there is always a silver lining if you look for it hard enough can help you heal and grow.

Clare is stubborn, intelligent, artistic and very loving. She has let the pain of losing her mother guide her for too long. In Malawi she learns she has much to offer others as well as watching as others who have lost so much more give everything. This was not an easy book to read. It is a book I will put at the front of my class on the first day of school and recommend to all of my students. I am trying to create global minded students. My students may not be able to travel to Malawi or any other country less fortunate than we are here in the USA. Through books like this one they will learn so much about what it takes to truly give of yourself. They can learn that the simplest gesture can make a difference. The fact that the book is full of information and facts because the author has been to Malawi holds great weight with me. I loved the vocabulary throughout the book. It is something else my students will love.

The book was so wonderfully written I could envision Clare's first encounter with a hippo and her shock at the school compared to her school back home. The author did a wonderful job of bringing the reader along with her to Malawi. I felt like I was a character walking beside Clare, Memory and Agnes. I will definitely read more by this author. I look for great books to recommend to my students and my parents for their children. This book is not just for middle schoolers or young adults. This is a book that even adults will enjoy. If you read no other book this year, this is the one you must read.

Melanie Swider Wenz says

Powerful book that fills us with an important level of awareness about life in other countries. Taken place in current day life with smart boards, cell phones, and state testing, the character's life is uplifted to Africa with

her father who is a doctor. Although she absolutely dreaded going to Africa in the beginning, her thinking, beliefs, and mindset transformed through her experiences with the people living in the villages.

A must read book!

Cindy Hudson says

The last place thirteen-year-old Clare wants to be is on an airplane with her dad heading to a village in Malawi, Africa for two months. She's still grieving over her mother's unexpected death nearly a year ago, and she's angry that her dad seems to be moving on with his life. She's determined not to like anything about Africa once she gets there.

But the more Clare gets to know the people in the village and learn about their lives, the more she wants to know. And in her friend, Memory, Clare may have finally found someone who can understand her grief.

Laugh With the Moon by Shana Burg is a compelling story of a girl who is trying to find her way forward after a tragic loss. Clare feels as though she is betraying her mother if she's happy. But Africa is such a change from what she knows that she is forced to think differently.

In Malawi, she finds a people who face loss regularly from illnesses that are easily preventable. She wonders about the differences between her school at home with its abundance of supplies and the meager materials she works with at school in Malawi. She wants to find ways to help, but she also knows that just because she has enough money to fix a problem temporarily, it's not enough to make a long-term impact.

What Clare learns about honoring loss while celebrating life is sure to generate lots of discussion in mother-daughter book clubs with girls aged 10 to 14. There's also a lot to explore about schools in Africa, especially if a club is motivated to take on a service project after reading the book. There's an excellent educator's guide on Burg's website (shanaburg.com/educators) where club members can find discussion topics as well as Internet resources, such as a map of Malawi and information about Save the Children International and the World Health Organization. I highly recommend it.

The author provided me with a copy of this book in exchange for my honest opinion in this review.

Elizabeth says

Clare Silver lost her mother recently. So now she is yanked out of her town etc. to go with her father on a trip to Malawi and into the jungle from there. She can't keep in touch with her friends because there aren't any towers close enough to make international calls. Once there she meets Memory and she knew right off that they would be friends. Clare attended school at Mzanga Full Primary School and was struggling to learn the language. In the school they sat on the floor so she tried to sit close to Memory. As they talked, they learned about each other but Clare still wasn't happy. When the teacher from the lower grades leaves, Clare is asked to fill in to help the students learn English until a replacement is hired. The first day she went to teach she found out there were 120 students in that group! But she learned to teach them some games and then some songs. Clare also gets to know Innocent, Memory's little brother, and Saidi, a classmate. At one point a storm hits the school and she is separated from her friends during it. These same friends decide to take her on a

special trip to the ocean to ride in a boat. It is just a one-day trip but things go horribly wrong. As they are out on the boat, Innocent becomes ill. They race for shore and Clare ends up "borrowing" two motorbikes to try and get Innocent to the hospital where her father works. Through everything they do get him there but he doesn't survive. Clare knew that Memory had lost her mother but didn't know that Innocent was all she had left of her family. She watched and talked to Memory about it so she could learn how to 'Laugh with the moon'. Memory helped her learn how to deal with death. Clare still remembered things her mother had said and taught her and even saw her at times but she finally adjusted to the death of her mother and the memories she would always carry of happy times with her. Clare and her father became much closer as Clare accepted her mother's death.

Definitely a girl's book for dealing with a very real issue.

Anna says

This book was amazing! I loved it from the start. I could not put it down once I started. I just recently traveled to Tanzania and so many memories were brought back while I was reading this book. It is a wonderful story about a girl named Clare who is made to move with her dad to Malawi for three months while he works as a missionary doctor. She is completely opposed to it in the beginning and is trying to fight the reality of being there as she is also dealing with the loss of her mother. The story continues with her life and journey in her time in Malawi as she learns more about herself, life in Malawi and how to deal with the loss of her mother. This book gives you a true picture of what life is really like in Africa. It made me happy and laugh, but it also made me sad and cry a few times. It is a must read for everyone!

Monica Giese says

I was looking for a book to read and I saw this one, *Laugh With the Moon*, by Shana Burg. Like a lot of the other books that I have read, I checked it out at my school library. Immediately, I started reading this book. Clare Silver is a thirteen-year-old girl whose mother recently died of a heart attack. Clare and her father move to Malawi, Africa, for sixty-four days, where her father is a volunteer doctor. Clare is enrolled in Mzanga Full Primary School, where Clare helps as an assistant teacher for one of the younger grades. One of her students, Innocent, who is a close friend, passes away from malaria, leaving his older, orphaned, sister, Memory, all alone. Memory helps Clare learn the Chichewa language and the ways to do things such as cooking and ways to improve her teachings, by using stems of plants to write. At the end of the story, Clare moves back home, missing her new friends.

I really liked this book because it showed the importance of family and friendship. I thought that this book was really interesting and I enjoyed reading it.

Destinee Sutton says

I described this book to a co-worker as "Bummer, bummer, bummer, sappy, sappy, sappy," but that's probably too harsh. Author Shana Burg is a decent writer and the story has some interesting parts. I liked the pidgin English spoken by the Malawian characters (when I was in Namibia we called their version of English "Namblish"), the details of life in the Malawi bush, and the friendship that forms between Clare, a 13-year-

old American girl and Memory, a her new classmate in Malawi.

But the bummers are piled high in this book. Clare's mom is recently deceased and Clare aches from the loss. Both of Memory's parents have died. And that's just the deaths you get up front. There are more in the story. We are often in Clare's head and she struggles to overcome the pain of her mother's absence. Harsh. Angsty. Emo.

And then the conclusion. It wasn't overly contrived or convenient, but it was heavy with lessons learned and feel-good-ness.

So, if you're in the mood for a quiet read about a sad white girl discovering Africa, this will fit the bill. Not especially recommended otherwise.

Lorena says

Slow. Couldn't get into it.

Kellie Cruz says

This author is visiting our school next week. Excited to hear her speak about the book and her experiences.

Michelle says

Shana Burg's *Laugh with the Moon* is such a complex yet simple book that packs a hefty emotional punch. (I cried while reading the last fourth of the book; and, a month later, I still get emotional just thinking about writing this review.) Before I write what may sound like criticisms (but are not!) I want to put what I will say into context. Have you ever had someone tell you a story about a "friend?" A story about something so bad or sad or hard that the insulation of the "friend" was required, even though you both knew the story was really about them? *Laugh with the Moon* is a little like that story. You see, it isn't really fiction at all. Burg tackles some very harsh realities about Malawi. She spent years learning about these realities, and then even more crafting a story in which she could communicate them. Burg has some very specific issues that she wants to discuss, and it leaves her characters feeling less like actual people and more like symbolic representations of groups of people. She manipulates them to tell her story, but they never feel like puppets; she uses them to speak with her voice, but they never become her megaphone. They have nuance even while feeling a little flat. The insulation was needed to tell this story in a middle grade novel. (I am a 28 year old woman and I needed it!)

Laugh with the Moon deals with death, dying, illness, and grief, but it is always full of life. Burg not only shows how different cultures celebrate life and death, but also how people within those cultures deal with it differently. It is a frank look at loss, but it remains ever hopeful. (I didn't read the Author's Note until I finished, which just elevated my already very high opinion of her. Three different people who were her friends and helped make this book possible died before it was published; also before they were 40 years old. Shana Burg is an amazingly hopeful and optimistic woman.)

Burg also very subtly but effectively takes on the idea of privilege. *Laugh with the Moon* begins with Clare donning her mantle of privilege as carelessly and obviously as one slips into flip-flops on the beach: Throwing an anti-Malaria pill away because it has fell to the floor, regularly chugging bottled water in front of people who have only had it once or twice in their lives, or causally using - then giving away - pens in front of students who have never had formal school supplies. As the story progresses, though, she becomes more aware of her privilege, and how unjust that privilege really is. Each one of her friends is instrumental in different ways to her achievement of this awareness. I particularly like how Burg uses Memory and Agnes as foils - the extremes of how Malawians might react to an American such as Clare. Memory loves and accepts Clare as she is, overlooking Clare's thoughtless acts because she knows they are unintentional. Agnes, however, calls her out at every turn - forces her to face it. It would be easy - and is often done - to make Agnes the 'mean' or 'bad' character, but she isn't. Agnes, too, becomes a friend, once Clare sees why Agnes treats her the way she does. Innocent shows her the value of the pills she so casually took; a child who dies for lack of a medicine that costs .28 USD per pediatric dose* or a mosquito net that costs \$3.00 USD.** Saidi shows her the value of the education she took for granted; he cannot move into high school for lack of the less than \$1.00 USD*** a year it would cost, and leaves primary school early because he cannot afford a suitable uniform.

These two issues, then, are the soul of why Shana Burg wrote *Laugh with the Moon*: access to adequate medical attention and access to an adequate education. It is hard to pull these issues out of the book because they are so deeply woven into the fabric of every single scene. The reality of what Malawians face is right there under the surface of the story; the fabric on which it is constructed. And, much like her characters Memory and Agnes, Burg by turns coaxes the reader and forces the reader to confront our privilege. The stark contrast between the private schools that children of white missionaries and doctors attend from that of the local village children is heartbreaking. The unutterable decadence of the fully equipped hospital Clare receives treatment in compared to the hot cave of a room that Innocent dies in is tragic. It is impossible to read *Laugh with the Moon* and remain unmoved. But it is a movement into action; a feeling of hope rather than despair. We can, and *should*, do something to change this.

*For a list of ways you can help stop Malaria, check out the review on my blog *Chronicles of a Book Evangelist*; a review copy was provided by the publisher.*

*<http://www.malariajournal.com/content...>

** <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/m...>

*** From *Laugh with the Moon*

Margo Tanenbaum says

Having recently returned from my first trip to Africa, I was eager to read this new novel by author Shana Burg which takes place in Malawi. Thirteen-year old Clare has just suffered one of the worst losses a child can imagine--her mother has died, leaving her family consisting of just her and her father, a doctor who seems to care about everyone else more than Clare. At least that's the way she feels when he up and moves the two of them to rural Malawi for several months, where he will be working at the local hospital and she will attend the local village school.

But this novel is more than a "fish out of water" story as Clare struggles to adapt to a completely foreign environment and lifestyle, where she has no cell phone coverage, must wear a totally unfashionable school uniform, and live literally in the middle of the jungle, with no condos, buses, or restaurants. She's so angry with her dad that she's giving him the silent treatment. But eventually the people of Malawi break through her broken heart, helping her to heal.

Burg, who has worked in Malawi herself with Save the Children, manages to capture the many wonders of Africa--the spirit of the people, the beauties of the landscape and animals, and the crushing poverty. Young girls will identify with Clare trying to fit in with the local girls--gossiping about boys and who likes whom seems to be a universally popular occupation--as well as her sorrows and achievements during her trip. And they'll be amazed at how the children in the local school manage with hardly any textbooks (which must be taken for safekeeping from school every day so they won't be stolen), paper, desks, or other ordinary school supplies that we take for granted, even sculpting letters out of termite mounds. Clare, like everyone else who visits Africa, I suspect, is not the same person when she leaves.

This novel manages to combine humor (naughty monkeys and pet chickens, in particular) with the poignancy of loss in a way which is appealing to the target audience. Burg also manages to teach many lessons about Africa in a subtle manner, without seeming didactic

An author's note explains about the author's trip to Africa to investigate conditions in schools in Malawi and also discusses the challenges of medical care in this very poor country. She also includes a recipe for a Malawi treat and a glossary of Chichewa words that appear in the text. I would have liked to see a map of Africa which would have situated Malawi for the young readers, and possibly a list of nonprofits that accept contributions for medical or school projects, in the case that young people are inspired to help out for these very worthy causes as part of the back matter.

This would be a great book to add to school and public library collections--it's a contemporary story in an exotic setting that should definitely appeal to tween readers.

Sarah says

Laugh with the Moon is a realistic, fictional book about a young teenager who is forced to go to Malawi, Africa with her dad, a volunteer doctor. Clare is mourning the death of her mother and is mad at her father because she doesn't want to leave her friends and her life in Boston.

When Clare gets to Africa, she is upset because she misses lots of things she had owned or had access to that don't exist in Malawi such as cell phone service and hot, long showers. What she didn't realize was that what she had was much more than what the kids in Malawi have. She didn't like how her room was so drab with a mosquito net over her bed and she didn't appreciate that she actually had a car when other kids had to walk everywhere they went.

Clare's dad drags her to a ceremony celebrating his return to Malawi. Clare gets bored and begins to wander off. That's when she meets Memory. Memory is a girl who lives with her brother and her grandmother, Clare is wondering if she has a mom. She doesn't want to ask since they just met. Memory told Clare that they would be at the same school.

Clare and Memory and Memory's little brother, Innocent, went to school in what Clare thought were the ugliest outfits ever. Memory walks into her room with Clare. When it's time for English Clare has to learn Malawian. Later Clare is asked to be the English teacher for Innocent's grade. Clare doesn't want to. Her friends tell her they'll take her on a surprise trip. She finds out how much fun it is teaching them. She uses things like termite towers to make letters for the children.

Memory and Clare go on many adventures together. They run into a hippo and an elephant. Clare finds out how much fun Malawi is and how tragic it is at the same time. She also comes to appreciate all the things she once took for granted in her own life.

Sidney says

This is a lovely book - with themes that really touch the heart. While it does move very quickly through the story (probably a little too fast to be believable at times), that fact actually helped keep my attention. While this certainly isn't for every young adult reader (definitely more for female readers who like realistic fiction), it's refreshing and thoughtful.

Amy says

I would give this 2.5 stars. I approached this book with a little bit of lethargy because I get sick of books about Americans going to foreign countries and realizing how wonderful they are and how spoiled we are. This might be true, to some degree, but it is tiresome and predictable.

This book follows Clare, a 13 year old girl, and her father who spend some time in Malawi after the tragic death of Clare's mother. He is a doctor and works at a clinic and she attends school. Initially Clare is furious with her dad for dragging her to this country while she is still grieving for her mom.

The character development of the Malawi children and teachers are quite good and I found myself, despite my initial misgivings, enjoying the tale. There is a death of a student in the book that is very horrifying and moving and I think would make a big impact on children that read it.

The book tends to drag a bit towards the middle. There are only so many "animal scares" that one can read about and Clare's visions of her mother feel contrived.

For children who like reading about travel and foreign adventures, this would be an easy sell. Definitely more girl appeal than boy and could be a hit as a read-aloud in the classroom.
