



The Secrets of Tree Taylor

Dandi Daley Mackall

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Thirteen-year-old Tree Taylor has two goals for the summer of '63:

1. Experience her first real kiss. A kiss delivered by a boy. A boy who is not related to her. A kiss worth writing about.
2. Become a famous writer. (Or, at least, write an investigative article that will land her the freshman spot on the Blue and Gold staff.)

So when a gunshot is fired right across the street, Tree knows this is the big story she's been waiting for. But the more she goes digging, the more secrets she uncovers, and soon she begins to wonder: When is it important to expose the truth? And when is it right to keep a secret?

The Secrets of Tree Taylor Details

Date : Published May 13th 2014 by Knopf Books for Young Readers (first published January 1st 2014)

ISBN : 9780375968976

Author : Dandi Daley Mackall

Format : Library Binding 288 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Childrens, Middle Grade, Mystery

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From Reader Review The Secrets of Tree Taylor for online ebook

Liz Friend says

The story: Tree Taylor isn't really looking for secrets--it's more like the secrets are looking for her. She knows that Butch is two-timing her sister Eileen. She knows there's something creepy about the way Chuck treats his step-sister Penny. And worst of all, she knows there's more to the story about Mr. Kinney being shot with his own rifle than other people in their small town might think. Tree's determined to get all the information and write a story about the Kinney shooting that will earn her a spot on the school paper...but as she finds out more and more, it gets harder and harder to tell the truth about the Kinneys (and about Penny and even Butch) when she knows how much trouble the truth can cause. When is someone else's secret yours to tell?

June Cleaver's ratings: Language PG; Violence PG; Sexual content PG; Nudity G; Substance abuse PG; Magic & the occult G; GLBT content G; adult themes (implied spousal abuse; implied sexual abuse between step-siblings) PG; overall rating PG.

Liz's comments: Tree's small-town experiences during the summer of 1963 contrast nicely with the tumult of what's going on in the larger world. Tree, a truth hunter, finds out that sometimes knowing what really happened can be harder than not knowing, and that figuring out what to do about what you know can be the hardest thing of all.

Stephanie Tiner says

?In the summer of 1963, Tree Taylor has two goals she wished to achieve; 1) write an article that will grant her the freshman journalist position at the school newspaper, Blue and Gold, and 2) experience her first real kiss, the kind worth writing about. At thirteen-years-old, Tree already knows that she wants to be a writer, she only needs a story to write about.

One morning while Tree is sitting on her porch trying to come up with an idea for her article, the sound of a gunshot echoes through the early morning air. Tree instantly knows what her article is going to be about. The more she digs into the Kinney incident, however, the more she wonders whether the secrets she is uncovering are the ones that she should write about.

This was an interesting novel, though I neither liked nor disliked it.

The characters in this novel are very well written, constructed and thought out; their personalities are highly realistic and, despite the differences in the times, easy to connect to.

The small town setting is cute and quaint. It reminds me, in some ways, of the small town that I grew up in. It is the kind of town where everyone knows everyone and a secret is never really a secret. Of course, when you are a child, things are not always as clear or apparent to you as they are when you are an adult. I think that is why Mrs. Kinney's secret was such a big thing for Tree.

Of course, since Tree is thirteen and I am not, I was able to discern Mrs. Kinney's secret almost from the beginning, as well as Penny's secret. Despite the title of the book, Tree didn't have a lot of secrets of her own.

I really did not like the ending of this novel. For me, it was as though it never ended, especially with regard to her friend Jack. The mysteries behind Mrs. Kinney's secret and Penny's fear were cleared up rather nicely,

there was both an answer and a resolution. But with regard to Jack, and a select few other characters, there wasn't any resolution, no way for the reader to walk away satisfied.

I would recommend this novel to young readers who enjoy historical coming-of-age novels.

I bought my copy of this novel from my local Dollar Tree. I have been denied permission to use an image of the cover artwork above because my review is less than positive.

stephanietiner.weebly.com

John Clark says

Tree Taylor is sitting on the front step one Sunday morning in her PJ's, trying to come up with something to write about, when she hears a gunshot down the street. Her dad, the town doctor, hustles past her and tells her to stay put as he heads to where the shot was fired. Tree follows and from her hiding place, watches as their reclusive neighbor, Mrs. Kinney comes out of the house carrying a rifle. Her dad's behavior is curious. He turns away from Mrs. Kinney and sits on the step. When she lowers the rifle, he takes it. He tells the sheriff that the shooting of Mr. Kinney in the shoulder, was accidentally self-inflicted.

Tree knows something doesn't add up, but her father won't tell her what really happened and she needs the details in order to write an article that will get her the lone freshman spot on the high school newspaper.

What follows the events on this Sunday in 1963, is a wonderfully sad coming of age story. Tree begins the summer with two goals: Get on the newspaper staff and experience her first real kiss, preferably with Ray who has amazing blue eyes.

Tree faces plenty of obstacles that summer. Her best friend, Sara, has terrible news for her, her poem gets published on the front page of the town newspaper, she learns, first hand, not once, but twice, how the Vietnam War can tear families and communities apart, she learns that sometimes you have to speak out, even if it means you might lose a friend, she achieves her goals, but in unexpected ways and she learns that no matter how close families are, there will always be secrets.

Dandi has written a stellar book that younger teens will really love. There's so much, done so well, it's difficult to know where to start in praising it.

Cara says

This was another book that I wanted to like more than I did. I didn't feel like the story flowed very well, and the ending felt really rushed. It was just meh.

Frezanda says

This book throws a question about truth. Are all truth needed to be revealed to public? Or are there some truths that are better to be kept as secrets? Tree had ambition to join the school newspaper as reporters. To achieve that, she believed she had to write an explosive news, but there seems to be nothing happening in her peaceful town. Then, something happened. Something worth reporting.

In the middle of the night, her neighborhood was shocked by a sound of gunshot. Everybody wanted to close this case as accident. Even Tree's father insisted on it. But, Tree wants to get to the bottom of the story. The more she investigated and the more she realized the consequences of revealing the truth.

At what point, truth must be fought and when it must be hidden?

The story is based on the author's childhood. You can feel the way the description just bring you back to 60s, the start of Vietnam war. As you know that this story is based on reality, I will warn you that there is no easy happy ever after ending. I cried buckets at the last chapter.

Kenya says

I hated it because the ending sucked (it mad me cry)! But... at the same time, it was a necessary ending, I wish it wasn't, but that was the best ending it could have. Arghhhh.

And honestly, the truth behind the gun shooting (the main plot I guess), really didn't seem very hard to figure out, and it was somewhat annoying that the issue kept being dragged when it really was quite straightforward. So that part was a bit draggy, like the writer was beating about the bush, and had already beaten out all the leaves in the bush, but just refused to go to the center of the bush so that she could insert in more subplots before reaching the conclusion.

But if you ignore how it beats all over the bush, I like the rest of the story. Its narrative of a girl growing up in the time of rock-and-roll music, growing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the occasional reports of the 'conflict' in Vietnam, is simple and cogent. I liked how the author managed to weave the changes in the world into the narration, providing some insight as to what the 1960s were like. But more than that, I loved how realistic the book was, because not every thing has a happily ever after, and we are only too human.

And the quotes that peppered the book were thoroughly enjoyable as well :)

Brittany says

Okay, this is probably an unfair assessment because I'm both a 1960's geek and a book geek, but this book had it all for me.

Tree Taylor wants to be a writer and she wants a spot on the school paper. It's 1963 and the nation is changing and she's witnessing it all as a person on the brink of independence.

This book is both a great mystery and a lovely family drama. I love all the quotes worked in to the chapters (my favorite is the Willa Cather one on page 237)...Willa knows her stuff.

What a great glimpse into the period for kids, but a lovely mix of story and historical allusions for us adults too. Well done.

Rachel says

I don't really have words for this book. It's perfection and I highly recommend it. For parents, I'd say read it beforehand (it won't take that long) as it does lightly touch on some heavy topics, but it's an incredible book!

Margaux says

If you're into this kind of thing you'll love this book. Historical, takes place against the backdrop of the Vietnam war, Tree Taylor wants to do two things this summer: kiss her first (non-related) boy and write enough to get accepted on the school paper. However, when she witnesses a crime in her own seemingly safe neighborhood, she might find she's bitten off more than she can chew.

I don't like historical fiction. So that's why it got a three. My coworker Rebecca is going to read this and then report back to me on whether or not it's actually good.

Ms. Yingling says

Tree's father is a doctor in their small 1960s Missouri town where everyone knows everyone else's business, so when their neighbor, Mr. Kinney, has an accident with a rifle, Dr. Taylor is the first one on the scene. Tree thinks that the shooting is suspicious and wants to find out what really happened, even though Mrs. Kinney seems quite happy that her husband isn't coming home. Tree wants to use her investigation as the basis for a story for her high school newspaper, so that she can beat out a classmate for a position on the Blue and Gold, since her fondest dream is to be a news reporter. Of course, her other fondest dream is to be kissed by Ray, a boy with beautiful blue eyes, and over the course of the summer, she at least gets to speak to him. She also spends time with her best friend, Jack, dances to rock and roll music, and gets involved a bit in the politics of the time.

Strengths: This describes the 1960s very well, and is worth buying for that alone. The feeling of change is palpable and sad, and there's a tiny bit of mystery to keep the reader turning the pages. The romance will be the draw for most readers, however. I liked how Tree got to know Mrs. Kinney and came to like her during the course of her investigation. Very sad at the end. For some reason, this put me in mind of Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* even though I don't think the two have any similarities at all!

Weaknesses: It's apparent from the very first that Mrs. Kinney shot her husband, and it's hard to believe that Tree is really SO naive that she thinks anything else at all.

Sarah says

Advanced Readers Copy

It sounds like a possibly typical and easy read and technically it was, but at the same time there was a depth to the story that left me totally satisfied and content at the end. This is a coming of age story about Teresa "Tree" Taylor, trying to understand the whole concept of truth. When is it yours to tell, who to share it with, how others react to it etc. and while these are pretty basic themes, they are meaningful, and add a level of maturity to the book, which allows you to connect and be empathetic to her character and the story. This was an unexpected enjoyable read that I would recommend to anyone looking to go back to basics and back to their childhood times and life lessons or anyone looking for something simple, yet gratifying.

Mandy says

I thought this book was great. If I had to sum up what I thought about it in one word, I'd pick 'honest.' I say honest because nothing felt like a caricature or parody of events. The entire book felt like a peek into what life was like that summer for a number of people Tree interacted with rather than being solely about her. You would think that the gunshot going off would drive the book in a particular direction and consume the book but it actually goes in another direction entirely, taking the reader on quite the ride by the end. I liked that the story involved a number of people in the town and what they were experiencing; the manner in which the townspeople were introduced didn't clash with who I felt the main characters were. It painted a very full picture of Hamilton that I liked. Tree had to learn some important lessons about a few things--herself, her idea of honesty and justice, and the often gray area between those two things. The events of that summer likely changed Tree's mentality by exposing her to the truth outside of the idyllic childhood that she probably hadn't yet realized she'd had. Some people didn't quite have it as good as she did, and anyone, even those we trust, can keep secrets. Sometimes doing the right thing isn't always easy, and life can change at the drop of a hat, and not always favorably. Tree needed to make those observations for herself and I think that was the true coming-of-age part of the story, as it planted the seeds for her to become a true journalist later.

Historically, the book was accurate and while I first wondered, "Why 1963?" by the end of the book I was glad that was the year chosen. Secrets feels like the quiet before the storm for America in so many ways, and a teenage girl having her eyes opened to the ugly truths of life shortly beforehand I'm sure helped to usher in the painful years following it. I'd never thought of what life must have been like in the early days of the Vietnam war and this gave me a really good look into how war shapes a country, down to the smallest, quietest towns. The Secrets of Tree Taylor goes much more in-depth than it initially sounds, through the eyes of a girl taking her first steps into womanhood during what becomes a very conflicted, scary period of time. I loved it and recommend it to you if you like the mysteries in a small town, or you're into coming-of-age stories that go against what the synopsis suggests they'll be about. If you're looking for a fast-paced whodunnit, however, this isn't the book for you.

A full review of this book is up on my blog.

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Brittaina says

I kinda wish I read it when I was younger because Tree's 13 and writes like it. But i've only recently become interested in journalism, so it's a trade-off. It had lots of sub plots that didn't quite bind into the main story, except when it gives a too obvious moral.

Aoife says

It's a good light read for middle grades. I think it is a little bit plotless, but overall it was good.
