



The Way He Lived

Emily Wing Smith

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"It's a testament to Smith's skills that although her central character speaks only through other people's recollections, his identity emerges distinctly by the end of the novel."

--*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

Winner of the 2009 Utah Book Award (young adult category)

Sometimes being true to yourself means sacrificing everything... Joel Espen could never be who he really was in the small town of Haven. Still, there was always something different about him. Sixteen years old. Green eyes that could see right into your heart. A selfless need to save people. Even the way he died reflected the way he lived: helping others. But how are you supposed to just go on living like normal after suddenly losing your brother . . . your best friend . . . your first love?

As the six teens who were closest to Joel try to find the meaning behind his death, they begin to realize that tragedy can sometimes set you free--by revealing who you truly are.

The Way He Lived Details

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Author : Emily Wing Smith

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From Reader Review The Way He Lived for online ebook

Katrina says

I think what I liked best about this book is how realistic the characters sounded (in my opinion). I felt as I read through each character's comments that I could honestly imagine someone saying or thinking these things, which works well in a realistic fiction book like this.

I wonder, though, if Joel was as amazing a person as each character described him to be. However, I think this is intentional as generally, when someone dies, especially one so young, people who remember him will tend to remember the best parts of the person.

I started this book during my lunch break at work and was finished with it by bed time (which includes breaks throughout this time frame), so clearly this was an easy and fast book. Even though it's more character than plot driven (the types of books I love most), the story still moves along quickly.

Beagle Lover (Avid Reader) says

This book was written in a manner that I did not expect and at first thoroughly confused me. I thought it would be written by explaining about who the main character was like before he died from his familys' perspective. It wasn't. And the people who the author did choose to describe his life seemed to be more tied up in their own lives than relating how they interacted with the main character. Overall, I was fairly disappointed with this book.

Cat says

It's been a while since I've read anything from the genre of young adult fiction, and this was the perfect return. Emily doesn't sugarcoat things or give you answers. In fact, several points are left hanging for the reader to fill in. This can frustrate some, but I personally enjoy the ambiguity throughout her work. An excellent first novel!

Heather says

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Synopsis From Goodreads Six stories. Six voices. One reality.

Monday's Child has just lost her brother, but that's not why she's crazy. Tuesday's Child is a star and wishes

she wasn't. Wednesday's Child is obsessed with getting revenge. Thursday's Child is on a quest to find herself. Friday's Child is in love with a dead guy, and Saturday's Child is in love with a guy in gray sweats—who isn't her boyfriend. And the child born on the Sabbath day is the one to set it all in m

When sixteen-year-old Joel Espen dies of thirst on a Boy Scout hiking trip, it shakes the small town of Haven, Utah to its socially conformist foundation. And the six teens who were closest to Joel start to view their community--and themselves--in a new light.

From Amazon

With his uncanny sensitivity and boundless heart, Joel made people love him. Now that he's gone, the ones he left behind are coping with their immense loss. His older, "crazy" sister pours her grief into a blog, while his younger sister runs away to New York. One friend is consumed by anger and revenge, while another discovers who she really is. Two learn to be true to their hearts--and all question who they are and what they've become.

Told from six heartbreaking perspectives on love, loss, and faith, this is the poignant story of how the life--and death--of one teen can have a profound effect on the lives of many.

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I first met Emily at the Beautiful Creatures release party and was struck by how outgoing and welcoming she was. A couple of days later we ran into each other at the local craft store. Since then it seems we run into each other a lot! She is part of a group of local writers called "The Six" who support each other's events and signings. After meeting Emily I really wanted to read her book. I bought a copy and had her sign it at last weekend's Authorpalooza, then sat down to finish it in 24 hours. What intrigued me about the story is that it is written from six different points of view. Emily leaves enough questions swirling in your head after reading bits and pieces of Joel's life told from others' perspectives, that the book seeps into your veins. I lost a couple of very close friends to accidents in High School so I related to the hole that someone leaves when they die, and the empty ache as well as the wondering. I give it four stars for handling a tough subject in a captivating manner.

<http://fireandicephoto.blogspot.com>

Nikki says

This book is gorgeous like a peek at someone's soul. Only six someones, since a different narrator tells each part. And each of them is so unique and real, troubled but hopeful, torn but finding ways to mend. I fell in love with each of them, and my admiration for the novel as a whole is tremendous. There are small resolutions noted quietly and questions debated but left for readers to conclude. Nothing big happens but little things matter in big ways. And we get to see Mormonism from the inside through six teens who are struggling to reconcile, as the author says, what they believe with what they feel, and I loved the genuineness of it, no one a stereotype.

Jed L says

I originally picked up this book because it was written by my friend's sister. Normally I don't read books categorized as "Young Adult" but this one doesn't really fit that mold which is probably why I liked it.

It is written similarly to that of Pablo D'Stair, an author who uses multiple stories from multiple perspectives, each lacking a definite beginning or a solid ending. In this book the story is told by six teens each of whom were related to or friends of Joel, a bright and happy boy who dies on a Boy Scout Trip. Each of the six teens are affected differently by his death and not all in a positive way, much like real life.

Perhaps the main reason I enjoyed the book was because I was able to very well relate to the scenes and environment described. I went to the same high school as Wing-Smith, albeit a few years later, and experienced many of the same frustrations and problems the characters in this book did, many of which I think Wing-Smith experienced and drew upon to write this book. She accurately--sometimes painfully so--describes the frustrations, despair and difficulties of living in an ultra-conservative community while being an open-minded student. I know I often felt my creativity, thought process and ideas were impeded upon by those around me, much like the characters in this book.

I plan on reading more of Wing-Smith's work. I wish I had this kind of "Young Adult" book to read while I was a young adult, but I suppose in many ways I still am.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Sally Kruger aka "Readingjunk" for TeensReadToo.com

THE WAY HE LIVED is about Joel, only Joel isn't around anymore. He died in a tragic camping accident. Those left behind are trying to make sense of it all and decide how to continue on without him.

Written from six different points of view, it reveals Joel piece by piece. His sisters, Tabbatha and Claire, tell what life is like for them since his death. Both are confused that their parents chose this difficult time to move the remaining family from the house where they grew up to a luxurious seven bedroom home in the high-end part of town. Their father throws himself into his work, and their mother, who always had her "bad days," seems to only find solace by locking herself away in her room and letting the family muddle on without her.

Emotionally sensitive Tabbatha gradually finds a reason to slowly move on toward a possible college life, and Claire has to run away before she is ready to come back and face what is left behind.

The other voices of the novel belong to Joel's friends and acquaintances. They include Adlen, Miles, Norah, and Lissa. Their stories link to Joel through direct personal relationships or by way of others connected to him. Each person has their version of this respected but slightly mysterious individual.

Much like our own lives, each person presents a unique picture to each different person with whom we connect. Can a true picture ever be created of anyone after they are gone? It seems only you might know the real you.

Emily Wing Smith is able to capture each personality. The flow and tone of each chapter is unique to the individual. She presents their pain and their fear of moving on without this missing person who so touched their lives. There is a feeling of true loss and sadness, but it is coupled with hope and the human desire to carry on.

Angela Corbett says

I LOVED this book! It was so well written and I applaud Emily Wing Smith for writing about an issue that makes people think. I grew up in a small Utah town where 95% of the people in the community were members of the Mormon religion. Emily's version of a small Mormon town and the judgment that happens there is spot on. I also liked how it showed different narrators, their perspectives, and how Joel (the deceased character in the book) affected all of their lives.

Mild Spoiler Alert

It's no secret that the book is about a Mormon boy who is gay and struggling with his feelings. The answer the reader has to figure out is whether the boy's death was an accident, or if he chose to die because he knew he couldn't fit into the culture and religion he had been raised in. Above all, I think Emily did a great job at starting a discussion. I believe it's important to understand both sides before making a decision about a topic. I think *The Way He Lived* is very accurate at highlighting how people can feel alienated for being different, especially in a place like Utah. My only complaint is that I wish some of the stories would have been longer.

The book is funny, poignant, thought-provoking, and haunting. I think everyone should read this book.

Jaszmin says

I did not like this book. The synopsis was completely misleading. Some of the P.O.V's were unnecessary in my opinion. Like Adlen's. This book did not grab me. I didn't get the point of it and in the end I still thought Joel was still a Nice Guy which again makes the synopsis very misleading. I've never regretted reading a book so much. It carried no purpose and half the time I didn't know which time period I was in: before Joel's death or after?

Jessica says

Wow. I wanted more of each of these characters! This reminded me quite a bit of *Everything I Never Told You*, which I read earlier this year.

Taylor says

I loved this book. Told from different perspective and it fit together perfectly. I came to love Joel and each character. It was hard to let him go.

Natalie Phister says

ELECTIVE CATEGORY

Joel Espen is dead. A boy scouting trip through the Grand Canyon gone terribly wrong has lead to his death. Through the perspectives of six people who knew him, including his two sisters, and his best friend, we get to know what kind of person he was: always willing to serve, always inclusive of others, and always a little bit strange, especially with his seeming ability to penetrate others' thoughts. But we also see the different ways different people are handling his death. I really liked this one. I especially loved how all the different perspectives intertwined and added to one another's, and the casual inclusion of Mormon culture was refreshingly natural. It's hard to find a good YA book featuring Mormons.

Books and Literature for Teens says

I'm not really sure what to think of this book exactly. I can't really say I enjoyed it very much frankly because I am still trying to figure out what the point of the story was. Sure Joel's death did change some of people in the book, but there wasn't enough of plot to make the story very meaningful.

There are six different parts to the book in which six different characters talk about their lives before and after Joel's death. I think my favorite characters were Tabbatha and maybe Claire. Of course, those were the two characters who changed the most because they were Joel's sisters. The other characters were friends who knew Joel and their stories really didn't get anywhere. I guess--what it comes down to is that the book was just a collection of fictional memoirs about grief and a boy named Joel.

Like I said before, I am not 100% sure what I think about *The Way He Lived* other than it was pointless in way; what I do feel good about is the cover. Simple, sweet, and sad (Flux always does a great job). Another thing that kinda bothered me was that I kept getting the impression that Joel was gay but he wasn't.

Anyway, if you think you want to read this, be my guest you might like it, but to me it is not an absolute must-read.

|Age Group: YA, ages 13+||Buy or Borrow? Borrow|

|Content: Some language, sexuality, references to Mormonism|

Courtesy of booksandliteratureforteens.blogspot.com

Amy says

I don't know what to say about this book. It was terrible on so many levels. While the author clearly states in an interview at the end of the book that this was intended to be a book for young adults, I can't think of a single adult, much less young adult, that I would recommend this book to. The story deals with 6 latter day saint youth who have just lost a friend/brother in a scouting accident. The book explores how each of them are dealing with the tragedy through each of their different "voices" and perspectives. But throughout the book, they suddenly raise the question as to whether or not he was gay and if the "accident" was actually suicide because he felt desperate and didn't know how to cope. While they are clearly LDS youth, not one of them clings to the hopeful, beautiful message of the gospel. Matter of fact, most of them "shun" the gospel as being trite and unable to understand their feelings and needs. There is lots of swearing & language, and a scene where 2 of the youth blatantly (as stated in the book) throw out their standards in order to rip each

others shirts off and make out. There isn't one adult in the entire book who has any redeeming qualities or offers any positive support. Matter of fact, the adults are also made out to be insensitive, selfish, and incapable of relating to what a "real" teen is feeling and experiencing. It left me with the ickiest feeling. I am really disappointed that an LDS author would put this kind of writing out there. Skip it!

Gretchen says

The Way He Lived by Emily Wing Smith tells how people deal with death from six different points of view. Joel Espen has recently died and his six friends and family members have to decide what to do now, how to move on, why he isn't here, and if he died on purpose. Also, they are mormons.

This book is not at all what I thought it was going to be. I thought it was some action story about a boy without enough water on a camping trip, but really it's about the effects of that boy's death. Smith split the book into six different sections, each by a different narrator who was affected differently by Joel's death. But each character has a supreme sense of loss during their narrative, especially Joel's two sisters and the girl who was in love with him. They don't know how to move on. Each narrative ends with a bit of a cliffhanger, but then you see the character in the next person's story, and it's clear that they are going to be okay. The last narrative is by a girl who never really thought about Joel, but her's is meaningful because of how he affected her life.

The book is very powerful. Smith took the poem about children being born on the different days of the week (Monday's child is full of grace, Tuesday's child is full of grace, etc.) and assigned each line to one of the characters in the book. The main theme is dealing with loss, and the reader gets to see each character's method of coping.

But there is some confusion at the end. It's revealed that Joel was in love with his best friend- who is male, but it's not quite stated outright, so I was a tad confused. I wasn't sure what it had to do with the rest of the book, and it seemed almost like a different story.

Overall the book was wonderful. It was emotional and real, and it portrayed themes of loss and grief wonderfully. I'm not a Mormon, so some of that terminology was confusing. But the fact that they're Mormons doesn't change the loss they feel, or how wonderfully Smith portrays the themes. The book is very short, but very powerful, and I definitely recommend it.
