



## Jelly Bean Summer

*Joyce Magnin*

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Brian recently lost his brother, and the two instantly bond over their messed-up families. To help Brian repair his brother's truck, they concoct a scheme to build and sell tickets to a UFO display. Even Elaine agrees to help...until unexpected events test the limits of Joyce's family ties.

## **Jelly Bean Summer Details**

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Author : Joyce Magnin

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Genre : Childrens, Middle Grade, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Realistic Fiction

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## From Reader Review Jelly Bean Summer for online ebook

### Candy says

#### True story, true nostalgia

Joyce's writing is always delightful, and this story is especially good because it's based on her own weird and wonderful childhood. I laughed the best laugh I've had in months over a line in the chapter about the A-bomb and sobbed happy tears at the end. The whole way through, wave after wave of nostalgia washed over me as she sprinkled tidbits of my own 1950/60s childhood on the pages. Get this book for your kid or grandkid. Get it for yourself.

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### Briana says

Jelly Bean Summer by Joyce Magnin is a heartfelt, historical middle grade novel about the struggle to find home and belonging in emotionally challenging times. The book's young protagonist – named for the author, hinting at autobiographical inspirations – moves onto her roof and then contemplates running away to Arizona as tension boils in her home after her brother goes missing in Vietnam. This theme of dislocation prevails throughout the the novel as Joyce searches for belonging: sharing a room with her guinea pig and UFO-obsessed older sister, struggling to connect the stars in the night sky from her tent on the roof, and with her west-bound friend, Brian, who will soon leave for his new home in Arizona. Ultimately, Joyce must learn that she has to "live with" the pain and loss within her family, whether "here or in Arizona." She discovers that the home she's looking for isn't one she needs to find, but one she already has that needs a little bit of time and healing to feel right again.

The novel balances emotion and subtlety. While the characters emote openly (such as "crying buckets of tears" when Elaine's guinea pig, Jelly Bean, died) the details around Bud's disappearance are gradually unveiled throughout the narrative. There is no major exposition or gratuitous display of painful emotion in his absence. Instead, many emotional scenes are deflective. Joyce says her mom "ignores things" because "adding any more upset-ness into the air could ignite the whole house on fire." Her father hides in the basement, working on a secret project. And when Joyce craves her sister to forgive her for having a role in Jelly Bean's death, it's evident that the words she longs to hear – "it's OK" – are just as much about her missing brother as they are the deceased pet.

While Jelly Bean Summer doesn't offer a sugar-coated happy ending, its final pages ring with hope. Joyce's family is reunited, even if their dynamic is a bit damaged and not quite as it was before the war. Brian drives to his new home in Arizona and though his father will not move with him, he joins for the ride. Joyce cannot fill the void loss leaves in her heart; even when she buys her sister an adorable new kitten, she realizes nothing can undo the accident with Jelly Bean. But when Elaine finally assures her "it's OK," Joyce decides that's "good enough." She can "live with 'it's OK'" because no matter what she goes through, Joyce will find a way to remain put and simply live.

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### Janet Slipak says

3.5 stars

Living on the roof to escape her crazy family works...until reality pulls Joyce back to the ground

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#### MY THOUGHTS:

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for my honest review.

When you have 1st-person narrative and an eleven year old professing a deep inner philosophy far exceeding her years, third person should be used. This gives the reader a better perspective to read and feel the emotions instead of awkwardly having a child character appear unreal and one-dimensional. This is a common mistake many children's book authors make, they write from an adult perspective which takes so much away from a story being told by a child. The child doesn't sound convincing and real because the voice of the character is too old and portrayed incorrectly.

I think this story would have worked better if the character had been thirteen or fourteen. However, the very childish antics wouldn't have fit so well and would need to be changed. Unfortunately, this wouldn't work since the story seems to be written from the author's past.

The premise of the story is great and the author's voice is also very good. The plot moves along nicely paced well and not jumpy. The setting is the sixties and the author is the main character (both possessing the same name) so presumably this is an autobiography?

I think the author had a story from her childhood that she wanted to share but wasn't sure about how to go about it. With all this said, I still found the story enjoyable. It's filled with a young girl's thoughts, feelings and experiences remembered of a time when her country was engaged in a war. There will be those who read this book that will suffer from waves of nostalgia, and find many references and prose hysterical and reminiscent of their own childhood.

This author can weave a tale of fun, laughter and silly antics using her own past experiences as a foundation to create great adventures such as Jelly Bean (the guinea pig that looks like a little cow) Summer.

I recommend this book to both middle-grade readers and especially to adults who love reading stories depicted in the sixties and seventies.

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#### Hannah Greendale says

It is 1968 in Westbrook, Pennsylvania and eleven-year-old Joyce Anne Magnin has the entire summer before her. There's no way she can spend the next three months sharing a room with her older sister Elaine. Joyce

needs a space all her own, a quiet place where she can work through her feelings about her older brother's status as MIA in Vietnam, so she retreats to the roof to spend her summer reading books and stargazing. By fortuitous accident, Joyce meets another rooftop dweller and, by going out of her way to make his acquaintance, sets in motion an unforgettable summer.

*Jelly Bean Summer* has all the charm of the average middle grade novel about a child navigating a summer of new friendships and sibling rivalry but, given that the protagonist must also contend with a brother having gone missing while fighting in Vietnam, the book stands to be of greater interest to young readers with a sibling or relative serving in the military. Also, given the time in which the story takes place and the subsequent references to pop culture, Joyce's summer adventure will likely prove a nostalgic read for anyone who was a child in the '60s.

No matter the decade, a child spending the summer in a tent is nothing new, but those tents are typically pitched in the backyard, not atop the roof. Joyce could have spent the summer living in her brother's room, but instead she is drawn to the flat roof of her parents' "*boring, redbrick house*" because of its proximity to the stars.

*[My brother] and I used to go up and sit on the wide, flat roof and look at the stars sometimes. He taught me about the constellations. I think about them for a minute, and I think about Bud until I feel a tear form in my left eye. I swipe it away, and that's when it hits me with all the gravitational pull the moon can muster.*

*The roof.*

*I will move to the roof.*

Joyce's reasons for spending her summer atop the roof demonstrate the kind of logic one might expect from a high-spirited eleven-year-old. Sometimes her voice suits her age, blending her youthful outlook with the onset of the more mature thinking of a burgeoning preteen, such as her statement that blurting out the wrong thing is akin to being "*a balloon and someone popped me with a pin and all the air whooshed out*" or her assertion that the deep sadness she experiences with every breath over her brother's absence "*tastes like butterscotch*".

*I know butterscotch isn't supposed to be a bad taste, but that's just it. Everything that's supposed to be good isn't anymore.*

However, Joyce's first-person narrative voice occasionally exceeds that of the average eleven-year-old to ill effect. Some of her references will make sense to adults but will likely go right over the heads of young readers, such as her mention of rubber checks and Red Skelton. Sometimes her narrative voice comes across as too adult because of phrases like "*a clear indication*" or "*according to dad*." One would expect a typical eleven-year-old to say "*that means*" or "*dad says*." When she first sees, through her binoculars, a boy on a nearby rooftop looking at her through his own pair of binoculars, Joyce's comment that he "*stays peeled on me in kind of a Mexican-binocular roof standoff*," which makes reference to the cinematic trope of several characters holding each other at gunpoint, feels inappropriate for a middle grade novel. Further, Joyce demonstrates wisdom that belies her age. "*Sometimes it's possible to have too much worry under one roof*," she says, for example, when explaining why she doesn't tell her dad how much she misses her brother.

Joyce's concern for her missing brother is often the source of her most sophisticated declarations. It's in the moments when Joyce explains to readers how her brother's absence is affecting her family that Magnin makes the unfortunate decision to spoon-feed her audience:

*But I figure sometimes Dad likes to fume – not so much about what is happening at the moment but because*

*underneath, he's fuming about other things – [ . . . ] like his only son is missing.  
He is really mad at the world, not me.*

Emotional depth might have been achieved had Magnin allowed readers to unearth the weighty subtext for themselves. These moments of frank explanation give the overall narrative a shallow feel, one that's made more awkward by the words of wisdom being imparted by an eleven-year-old. Had the story been written from a third person omniscient perspective, the narration might not have felt so incongruous.

Then again, the protagonist is Joyce Anne Magnin, and *Jelly Bean Summer* was written by Joyce Magnin, so the book is – presumably – autobiographical. Since the author is recounting her own childhood, it's difficult to say with certainty that she *wasn't* such an eloquent, intuitive child. Whether the book is *inspired* by Magnin's childhood or gives an exact account of what happened to the author in the summer of 1968 is indeterminate. Either way, Joyce is a likable protagonist. She enjoys books, makes lists, and thinks her sister's pet guinea pig, Jelly Bean, is weird because "*she thinks she's a dog or a very tiny cow.*"

And then there's Brian, the boy who lives down the street whose family has also suffered hardship because of the Vietnam War. Brian is hard at work on rebuilding his older brother's truck, but he needs money to buy a carburetor from the junkyard. It is there, in Brian's need to buy a carburetor, that Joyce finds a sense of purpose for her summer. She's been looking for a way to pass the time, for something to keep her mind off her missing brother, and finding a way to help Brian earn \$15.00 is just the ticket.

*Before Brian, I felt like I didn't have anything that mattered. Mom has her hems to sew, Elaine has [Jelly Bean] and her drawings and her fancy pencils and paper and erasers. Dad has his secret projects. Bud has the war – maybe not in a great way, but still, he's there because it's supposed to be helping the country, protecting freedom. And now I have something too. I have Brian. I have Brian and a carburetor to buy.*

Joyce has yet to enact her plan to help Brian when unforeseen incidences cause a rift between her and Elaine. Now, not only does Joyce wish to help Brian, she's desperate to make amends with her sister. The lessons she learns while striving to accomplish both tasks portray how much she grows over the course of the book.

Growth remains a running theme throughout the book, first hinted at through Joyce's mother who is always snipping, potting, and nurturing African violets on the kitchen windowsill. But the most significant representation of life, growth, and death is the peach tree Joyce's mom planted in the side yard. Joyce must pass the peach tree on her way up the ladder to the roof, so she remains constantly aware of its young green buds, which bloom into flowers that die and fall from the tree. Joyce expresses dismay at the fallen buds, and her mother explains:

*"The only way for peaches to grow is if the buds fall off. It's nature's way. Some things need to die before other things can grow."*

Despite its overtly wise child narrator and the simplistic approach to conveying emotions, *Jelly Bean Summer* is a touching autobiographical story that explores the ramifications of war and the concepts of life and death in ways that are accessible to young readers.

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## **Bookworm LLC says**

Loved this book! Gave it 4 stars only because it got too descriptive which made me confused. Other than

that it's a great read for older kids. There are real life events that take place in the book that some might find too mature for kids. I, however, feel it's beneficial for the readers to experience these mishaps right along with the main character, Joyce. Some families have gone through missing soldiers and the death of a pet, or moving because a parent passed away. Teaching empathy to kids through reading is excellent.

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## **Cat says**

Trip down memory lane for those of us old enough to experienced the 60's and Veit Nam, but I'm not sure todays kids are going to get all the references unless a grandparent is around to explain them to them. Not a bad story, just one I think might lose the kids reading it...

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## **Moon Shine Art Spot ~ Lisa says**

### **REVIEW**

BY Aunt Meanie

This is overall, a happy story told from the point of view of 11 year old Joyce Anne. Set in Westbrook, Pennsylvania 1968. It is full of childhood mysteries, concerns, childhood hopes and dreams.

The story begins when 11 year old Joyce Anne moves to the roof to get away from her older sister, Elaine, who keeps her awake because she sees UFOs every night. Oh, Elaine also has an annoying pet guinea pig named Jelly Bean who squeals a lot.

The story has happy times and sad moments. Just like real life.

The characters developed very well throughout the story and are very realistic. The author does an excellent job of writing this in the point of view of an 11 year old girl, making sure to include all the things a child that age would deem important. You know, riding a bike, playing with friends and CANDY.

Well written and a great story. The age listed is for 8 year old and up. The book is 224 pages, that seems a bit too long for an 8 year old. Probably better suited for 11 year old and up. I received this ARC eBook free in exchange for an honest review. That does not effect my opinion or rating of the book.

### **~ BOOK DESCRIPTION ~**

Living on the roof to escape her crazy family works...until reality pulls Joyce back to the ground

Joyce has had it with her family (especially with UFO-sighting Elaine who loves her guinea pig more than her own sister). Her solution? Move out of the house and pitch a tent on the roof for the summer. But when she spots a boy watching her from a neighboring roof she's stunned—and intrigued.

Brian recently lost his brother, and the two instantly bond over their messed-up families. To help Brian repair his brother's truck, they concoct a scheme to build and sell tickets to a UFO display. Even Elaine agrees to help...until unexpected events test the limits of Joyce's family ties.

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### **Lulu says**

This is a heartfelt story about family, loss, and wanting to do something for someone else. Joyce's family is having a hard time so to get some space and a little peace Joyce moves to the roof for the summer. From her perch on the roof, Joyce meets Brian and together they come up with a plan honor their brothers. The pace starts a little slow but this book is well written and really nails the voice of Joyce Anne. The cover is super cute too.

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review

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by Joyce Magnin

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My review is also posted on [moonshineartspot.blogspot.com](http://moonshineartspot.blogspot.com)

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### **Jill Jemmett says**

Joyce Anne is an eleven-year-old girl who shares a bedroom with her older sister Elaine and Elaine's pet guinea pig, Jelly Bean. Her older brother is missing in the Vietnam War. Her missing brother causes a lot of tension in her house. Elaine constantly claims to see UFOs in the sky. One day, Joyce gets sick of hearing about her sister's UFO sightings and she decides to move to the roof. She brings a tent up along with some books and binoculars to keep an eye on the neighbours. As she watches the other houses, she sees a teenage boy standing on another roof, also looking through binoculars. They write on papers and hold them up to each other to communicate. When Joyce goes over to meet the boy, Brian, she learns that his brother died in the war. His mother also died long ago so he just lives with his father. But his father doesn't want to take care of him anymore. He thinks Brian would be better off living with his aunt in Arizona. Brian is currently working on a car so that he can drive it to Arizona, but he needs money to finish the job. Joyce has the idea to create a miniature UFO and sell tickets for people to see it. The problem is that Joyce will need her sister's help to build it. Can they put aside their differences to help the cute boy from down the street?

I liked the way this story demonstrated the effects of the Vietnam war on the families of the soldiers. It changed the way that Brian's family and Joyce's family lived. It also gave Joyce and Brian something in common (both having brothers who fought in the war), despite their age difference.

I didn't feel a strong connection with the characters. They all seemed a little one-dimensional, including Joyce who is the main character and the narrator. She has a one-track mind, and only focuses on helping Brian get his car working.

I also struggled with the title of the book. I don't think it is descriptive of what actually happens. Jelly Bean, the guinea pig, is only a small part of the story. I think the title could have told more about the plot of the novel.

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### **Sophia Luo says**

Oh man. Ok. At the start of the book, Joyce just seemed really really babyish and spoiled. I was just about to give up on this book because it was getting REALLY boring but then about halfway through it started picking up and it got really interesting. It could have a better storyline and the end is nice but I was kinda hoping Bud would die but unfortunately he didn't. Don't read this book, it's not really worth it.

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### **Victoria Zieger says**

I received this book from a Goodreads giveaway. There is a significant amount of literature about the Vietnam War, but not much that is from a perspective quite like this. The fact that this is YA or juvenile fiction is extremely impressive in the fact that it deals with such a hard topic and it is done so well. A young person's view of the effects of Vietnam while the war is happening is such a different perspective and really

impressive.

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### **Sam says**

Set in 1968 Pennsylvania, *Jelly Bean Summer* is a bittersweet exploration of childhood and belonging. Joyce is (among other reasons) fed up with her UFO-seeing, guinea-pig-loving older sister and decides to sleep outside on the roof. She meets and bonds with Brian, a neighbourhood boy that shares Joyce's experience in mourning the loss (though, in different ways) of a brother to Vietnam.

To be honest, this was slow-going for me at first and I didn't get fully invested in the story until about halfway through when Joyce recruits her older sister, Elaine, to help her and Brian on the UFO project. That being said, I appreciate the overall realism in this story - particularly near the end with Magnin's depiction of Bud returning from Vietnam. Nothing is sugarcoated and it's clear that while the book ends on a hopeful note, each of the Magnin children do have a ways to go before they are better than just "OK." And that's all right.

The writing feels true to the voice and perspective of a young girl. It doesn't shy away from showing emotions ("These things take buckets of tears sometimes") and gets particularly impressive at parts when Joyce contemplates the nature of killing in this excellent passage:

Someone killed Brian's brother. I wonder if before he died, he killed someone else's brother who killed someone else's brother and it goes on forever. I wonder if Bud has killed people, not because he wanted to, but because that's what soldiers do.

Though the book is set in a particularly turbulent year in American history, outside of Vietnam, there's no mention of the political/cultural touchstone events. At times I feel like that's a hindrance, but really, I think that's probably true to life considering a child's insular concerns, particularly since Joyce only thinks about Vietnam in relation to her brother.

With that being said, this book comes in at 253 pages and is recommended for ages 8 and up. It feels a bit long for a child that age, but content-wise it seems right.

*An advanced copy of this title was provided via the publisher and Net Galley in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **Ms. Yingling says**

ARC from publisher at ALA

\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*

Joyce's brother is MIA during the Vietnam war, and her family is taking it hard. Her older sister Elaine is annoying, and in order to escape her as well as her guinea pig, Jelly Bean, Joyce moves to the roof of their building. She sees Brian on another roof, and when the two meet, she finds out that his brother was killed in Vietnam, and Brian is trying to restore his brother's truck to take to his aunt's, where his father is sending him to live because caring for Brian is too difficult, since his mother is dead. The two try to earn money to fix the truck, and have a variety of schemes going, and the book is fairly upbeat and amusing until Joyce doesn't latch a gate and Jelly Bean is killed in a gruesome fashion by a neighborhood dog. At least Joyce's brother makes it home. There was one historical anomaly as well. (Which may be changed in the finished version.) Strengths: This was a good story about one girl navigating her way through life during the Vietnam era, and readers would understand her difficulties with her family. The parents were sad, but managed to get through their days, as did the girls.

Weaknesses: The death of the guinea pig just pushed this right over the edge for me.

What I really think: I would have bought this if it hadn't been for the guinea pig incident.

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### **Rebecca says**

I usually try my best to avoid fiction aimed at teenagers; it can be kitschy, and often with gaping plot holes. However – *Jelly Bean Summer* is none of these things, it is to me, an exceptional example of what young adult fiction can, and should, be. It made me laugh out loud, and cry, in equal measure.

The book chronicles the summer of Joyce Anne, a young girl on the cusp of becoming a teenager in 1968 during the height of the Vietnam war, and tells the story of a friendship between two teenagers suffering the loss of a sibling. Joyce's brother, Bud, has been declared MIA, leaving a gaping hole in her life, as her, and the people around her struggle to express their grief. Joyce has a fractious relationship with her older sister Elaine, and following the accidental death of Elaine's guinea pig, Jelly Bean, the two sisters are further apart than ever. *Jelly Bean Summer* tells the story of 1960s America through the eyes of a child, and explores the complex emotions of loss, loneliness, and longing.

The book ends with the return of Bud, found in hospital, and returned to his family almost one year after he was declared missing in action. Joyce Anne the whole family is overcome by his return, and the cracks that had started to widen in his absence begin to close.

This book is teenage fiction at its best; comical, and deeply moving, with an underlying thread of social commentary.

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