

Critics Review *Blow Out the Moon*

by Libby Koponen. Little, Brown and Company, 2004. 224 pages, ages 9-12, ISBN 0-316-61443-2.

(starred review) *Booklist*

The word ‘delightful’ is overused in reviews, but it’s difficult to find on that’s more appropriate for this novelized memoir – though warm and cozy would do in a pinch.

During the 1950s, Libby Koponen’s family moves to London. Leaving is difficult, and life is no easier there. A fan of boarding school stories, Libby jumps at the chance to go away to Sibton House in the English countryside, where she does make friends, learns to ride a horse, and is noticed for her writing talent. **This seems to be a book that first-time author Koponen has waited a lifetime to write. Almost every page is dotted with photos or souvenirs, but more intriguing than the visuals are the word images she offers of herself: a bit of a swaggerer who proudly informs the Brits about the Boston Tea party, but can appreciate the silvery light of the English countryside.** Today’s readers, especially Harry Potter fans, will love the Brit bits and the details of boarding school life. One thing will surprise them. Having read about Libby’s taking the tube alone and going off to school by herself, they’ll assume she’s 11 or so. When she matter of factly states she was eight during her time in England, they’ll more clearly grasp the idea of a simpler time. – Ilene Cooper

Children's Literature - Cindy L. Carolan

A step back in time, this book reads much like a journal, is found in the fiction section and is based upon the author's experience as an eight year old. Set in the 1950's, young Libby's family must move from the United States to England for a year and a half due to her father's employment. Saddened to have left her friends and after a less than stellar experience at their local London school, **Libby spends the remainder of her time in England on the 88 acre estate of boarding school Sibton Park. Her experiences before, during and after this period of her life are documented in a fictionalized fashion that is entirely refreshing! Pictures of things and people (family members, schoolgirls wearing uniforms from the period, coins, table settings, the school, letters, stories and letters the author wrote, games such as cats cradle and jacks) are dispersed amply throughout the book. These black and white representations pleasantly augment the recantation of her story, as do gray fact boxes that are found sporadically, discussing seemingly unfamiliar topics such as Guy Fawkes Day, prefects and song lyrics. An obscure note on the back cover mentions a companion Web site; a delightful compilation of the first six chapters of the book, color pictures, related fairy tales and the like. This is the author's first published book and she invites comments. She lives and writes in Boston. Recommended. 2004, Little Brown and Company, Ages 8 to 12.**

School Library Journal

Gr 3-6-In this novel based on the author's childhood in the 1950s, Libby, an engaging and feisty girl, moves from New York to London with her parents and three younger siblings. Her first school in London is a less-than-positive experience-the children tease her, and even the teacher is unkind. But things look up when she is sent to Sibton Park, a boarding school in the countryside, where everyone is nicer. **Koponen is a gifted writer whose distinctive style has a**

conversational rhythm from frequent use of colons, dashes, and the like. She is especially good at describing what to modern children will seem like a very different time, with adults thoroughly in charge and children expected to sit quietly while the grown-ups talk. **The author is very good at a kind of straightforward subtlety, an asset in a quiet book whose main focus is on emotions. The book's visuals are another asset, with small photos placed throughout, showing the author's childhood letters, pictures from her favorite fairy tales, the ship her family sailed on to England, and more.** As a novel, the story lacks dramatic tension, especially after Libby leaves her first English school, but overall this is a thoughtful and interesting book.

-Lauralyn Persson, Wilmette Public Library, IL Copyright 2004 Reed Business Information.

Saturday, September 04, 2004 - Page updated at 12:00 A.M.

Young Readers

See kids read with Dick and Jane

By Kari Wergeland

Special to The Seattle Times

Libby Koponen recounts her recollections of an English boarding school in her debut novel, **Blow Out the Moon** (*Little, Brown, 209 pp., \$16.95, ages 8-10*). Young Libby, an all-American girl, is eager to accompany her family on a special trip to London for six months. Yet school turns out to be miserable when the other kids tease her mercilessly for being a Yank.

Then Libby learns their stay will be extended another year, and she bursts into tears. Fortunately, her parents decide to send her to a boarding school, one with horses, run by a sensitive, albeit disciplined, head mistress. In time, she discovers the English aren't so bad after all. Koponen's tightly written prose is spiced with humor.

Books offer girl readers out-of-way material

By Lois Henderlong - Special to the *Journal-World*

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2004

With all their differences, these three novels for girls at slightly different age levels are all equally irresistible.

...On a much lighter note, "Blow Out the Moon" (\$16.95, Little, Brown and Company) by Libby Koponen is also set in London, but a very different London. Described by the publisher as a coming-of-age story, it deals with a preteen American girl's experiences at a British boarding school, which most readers will undoubtedly find strange and unusual, but riveting.

Many of the girl's adventures (learning to ride a horse "English style," eating with a knife and fork properly, and staging a midnight feast of "lemon squash" and bread and butter) read like every kid's fantasy. But it's not quite all fun. Early on, she has to deal with cliques, and one periodic problem won't go away: She can't bring herself to sing "God Save the Queen." But finally that gets played for laughs, and the whole thing ends on a not-surprisingly joyous note.

All of these books offer girls out-of-the way fare. In a world that sometimes seems ordinary, that's definitely a plus that will pay dividends for each reader.

http://www2.lawrence.com/news/2004/sep/19/books_offer/

Subject: RE: [ccbc-net] Transitions in Literature for Children and Teens
Date: Sat, 04 Sep 2004 13:37:25 +0000

The new novel BLOW OUT THE MOON by Libby Koponen (which I think was mentioned here several months ago--the reason I picked it up) is definitely a story of transition, and transformation. **I loved the heroine's voice, one of the truest child-centered voices I've read in a long time.** Libby (the novel is autobiographical) is an American tomboy whose family moves to England for a year. She is an adventurous sort, but encounters a wall of grey English indifference until she goes away to boarding school, where the adventure really begins.

What I loved about this novel was its theme of self-determination.

Once she begins to see herself through the eyes of her boarding school classmates, Libby decides she needs to make some changes to her brash impulsive personality. **The way she does it--without losing what she thinks of as her "Americanness" makes for a warm, funny, insightful story. Things do not just happen to Libby; she MAKES them happen--she goes out and seeks the world.**

There are also great scenes that depict a child's viewpoint on cultural differences. A great read!

Joyce Sidman
www.joycesidman.com

What Kids Write about *Blow Out the Moon*

From “Share What You Are Reading” on the Scholastic Web site

Reviews of Realistic Books
Blow Out the Moon by Libby Koponen

Review by: Alexis P.
New York, Grade 6

This book was about a girl named Libby who grows up in the USA with her friends and family. When she is about 7 her dad gets a new job in London. So he and her family move there. Libby goes to a school with her 3 siblings. The kids there pick on her so she decides to try and find a boarding school. She did. At her boarding school her room mates are very nice to her. They all get along and have fun together. For example, one night they stayed up until midnight and had a tea party. You have to read the book to find out if Libby decides to stay in London or move back!

This book was awesome! It never got boring! I never wanted to put it down. It was very interesting, and I would rate it a perfect 10!!

from **Just Books Youth Review** (online at www.justbooks.org)

This tale of a young girl’s voyage to England and the total difference in life styles is fascinating. Libby doesn’t want to move to England, she wants to stay with her friends, especially with Henry. Libby is fascinated by the long boat ride, but when she reaches England Libby isn’t happy. She longs for the sunshine and her American life. The people at school aren’t nice and Libby wants to leave, until she finds Sibton Park, an English boarding school for girls, and one boy. It offers horseback riding lessons, and to Libby’s horror, table manners. Libby’s joyous times at Sibton Park make you laugh out loud and her funny point of view is great. Sibton Park comes alive as you read this interesting, funny story of Libby Koponen’s childhood – (JUNE release, high 3 rd to low 7 th grade).

– **Emily Simons, 8th grader at Eastern Middle School**



from **NY Kids' Review of Books**

This author's first book is based on the story of her own life. It is about how Libby leaves America and has to move to London for a year because her dad got a job there. Libby hates everything about London, especially school. Her mother notices that Libby is unhappy and suggests that she go to boarding school in the country. I thought that was weird because she was only eight years old. Boarding school wasn't so great for Libby at first. She didn't know anybody at the start and the other kids teased her about her American accent. Libby, however,

came to love boarding school. She learns to ride horses, makes lots of new friends, and explores her desire to become an author. This book is interesting because you learn about what it was like to be an American going to an English school. What makes it fun is that the things in the book really happened to the author. She didn't just look stuff up in books and make it into a story but Koponen actually experienced the events that take place. Another fun thing about the book is that it is illustrated with photos and letters from the author's own childhood and time in boarding school. *Blow Out the Moon* is a funny and enjoyable light read. I would suggest it for girls aged nine and ten. – **Nina Dewees, Trinity School (age 10, grade 4).**

Staff Picks (from Books on the Square in Providence)

(Megan Tingley)

by Libby Koponen

Imagine going home after a fun day of play, and finding out you are moving to England for six months. First, you are excited. After all, who wouldn't want to go to a foreign country? Then, you suddenly realize that you will have to leave all your friends and familiar places. This is exactly what happened to Libby Koponen.

BLOW OUT THE MOON is an autobiography by Libby Koponen. In *BLOW OUT THE MOON* this book, she recalls the years of her life when she lived in England. At first, Libby is very excited about going to England, but when she actually arrives, she is very disappointed. Libby longs to be in America, and counts down every day until the six months have gone by. Unfortunately, Libby and her family have to stay in England for another year. Libby is miserable, until her father discovers Sibton Park, a boarding school in the English countryside. Libby leaves shortly after, to have one of the best years of her life. Libby learns how to be a proper, young woman, and changes greatly at Sibton Park. She is no longer the little tomboy she used to be.

BLOW OUT THE MOON shows that change can be good, and it explains that freedom is not just a word; it is being able to think and feel how you want to. Another cool thing about it is Libby Koponen puts in some real pictures of some of the places she visited in England, and pictures of real people at Sibton Park. It is a great book for preteen (10-15 years old) girls. I highly recommend it.

– Jessica Coon (8th grader)

A few emails from readers

Subj: Your book
Date: 10/26/2004 3:28:04 AM Eastern Daylight Time
From: piggereagle15@yahoo.com (Samantha Fontaine)
To: Libby@ifyoulovetoread.com

Hi! My name is Sam Fontaine and I LOVED your book. It made me really feel like I was at the school and in England. It was very discriptive. I had read about 2 chapters of the book and then stopped for about a week. I stayed home sick from school one day and read the rest of the book in one sitting. I couldn't put it down. When I came down stairs it was around 12:30 my mom asked me if i was sleeping the whole time. I was like "no way, I was reading and I finished my book" Your book brought me to a new world. Well, thats all that i wanted to say. E-Mail me back if you wish at PiggerEagle15@yahoo.com I would love to hear from you.

Sam Fontaine
Subj: Blow out the Moon
Date: 9/6/2004 11:43:00 AM Eastern Daylight Time
From: louisamay92@yahoo.com (Louisa Mounsey)
To: Libby@ifyoulovetoread.com

Ms. Koponen,

I really enjoyed your book, Blow Out the Moon. Recently I have been reading books about girls my age who have boyfriends who dump them and things like that. Then one day when my Mom and I were at the library she picked up your book and I told her I wouldn't like it. My Mom still brought the book home and I read it and LOVED it! However, I have a few questions. On your boat ride over to England you played around in the boat and explored it with Emmy, but on your boat ride back you stayed on the deck and wrote and read. How old were you on your way back to America? Do you think you changed a lot when you were at Sibton Hall? My other question is what happened do Veronica? My last question is that I was wondering what happened to your parents, Willy and Bubby after you came back from England. I would really like to know the answers of my questions but you are obviously very busy so don't feel obligated to answer them.

Louisa

AWARDS

100 Titles for Reading and Sharing 2004, the New York Public Library.

Massachusetts Book Award for “excellence in children’s literature” 2005, Honor Book (one of two).