

Book Review: We Are All Welcome Here

By Elizabeth Berg

By chance I stumbled across the writer Elizabeth Berg. I went to the library to get a couple of CDs to listen to while on a road trip. One of those CDs was We Are All Welcome Here. I fell in love with her writing. I have since listened to Dream When You're Feeling Blue (loved the ending).

We Are All Welcome Here is a historical fiction book, one of my favorite book genres. The book was written at the request of one of the author's readers. The reader wanted her mother's story to be told. The author and the reader agreed that the story would be told as a fiction story even though it was based on her life. Its mix of fiction and nonfiction is a treat. Its setting is in the South during the summer of 1964, a very tumultuous time for this country. The summers are hot in the South. Each month gets hotter. The story follows that pattern getting more intense as the summer unfolds. The lives of the characters are intertwined by the civil right events of that summer.

The author's character development is unique in that she covers black, white, young, old, male, female, foreign and a disabled character. The main character Paige Dunn is disabled. Her character is so inspiring. It's worth it to read or listen to the book just because of her. She lives with her limitations with dignity and resiliency. The main core of her persona never gets lost in her disabilities. Besides the challenges of her health, she also faces the task of raising a teenage daughter, keeping the peace between her daughter & her caretaker and financial woes.

The story also includes a coming of age story for the daughter of the main character, Diana. The book is written from her perspective. The other major characters are Peacie, LaRue, Suralee and Brooks. Peacie is Paige's caretaker and she is an African-American. LaRue is her boyfriend. Suralee is a friend of Diana's who lives on the same street. Brooks is enamored by Paige's beauty. By far my favorite character is Peacie. She says exactly what's on her mind but she is so dedicated to caring for Paige and Diana. She sees right through Diana and reads her like a book and Diana can't stand her for it.

The most difficult part of reading the book is the discussions over the differences in black and white people. There's a few stereotypical statements in the book that are difficult to digest. It's another instance where some white people think they know us and can speak for us.

This a wonderful book for a book club. The author leaves many unanswered questions and therefore lots for discussion. What is really fiction and what is nonfiction about the story is what I would really love to know.