ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

Close-Up
Szabinka Dudevszky
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Sad circumstances are the essence of this book. There are fifteen first person stories drawn from interviews with teenagers of various nationalities living in the Netherlands, away from their families, due to one unfortunate circumstance or another.

Whether it's abuse, alcoholism or ignorance, these teens have experienced it all, and are struggling through betrayal, grief and fear, which usually begins with their parents. Dudeveszky doesn't say she's writing the antithesis to Benjamin Spock, but a reader can't help but notice the common thread through all the stories.

For example, Joey's drug-addicted mother lost his two triplet brothers when they were born three months premature. Released after nine months in the hospital, she takes Joey and runs away from his overbearing father. They live in abandoned buildings, with friends, on the streets. She takes Joey back to his father when he is three. The father turns him over to friends, who take him to a children's home. After moving from home to home and overcoming a drug addiction himself, Joey is matter-of-fact: "You can't point the finger of blame. I just had bad luck." Maybe so, but his parents didn't do much to improve his odds.

Oran, seventeen, lives in a reform school. He grew up committing gradually more and more serious crimes, from shoplifting to arson to stealing a tour bus. His father, when he returns from court about the bus incident, laughs about it. "I teach you how to drive a car and you go and steal a whole bus…" His father dies, and Oran's crimes continue. He finally commits what he will only describe as a "very serious, violent offense," which lands him in the reform school. While he says, "It's my own fault. My parents didn't do anything," readers are likely to agree with only the second half of that statement.

Beyond the text, Close-Up's black-and-white photography by Dutchman Pieter Kers, is outstanding. Even the photographs of the teens that wished to be anonymous are revealing, as Oran's is. In the opening sentence of his story "I Could Do Anything," he states his desire to "stand outside this place first" the day he is freed. Oran's portrait features a person in the foreground, clad in jeans, hand in pocket, in front of a forbidding black fence wrapped around a

windowless building.

Close-Up tends to tax the readers? sympathies when continuously read. If read at a leisurely pace, however, and taking a break in between stories, readers will enjoy Close-Up more, and instead of remembering the teens as a blur of misfortune, remember them as individuals.

Cari Noga