ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

JUVENILE FICTION

Discovering Koinonia
Dan Anderson
Xlibris
978-1-4500-3213-1
Four Stars (out of Five)

Star is a confused twelve-year-old girl. Her parents recently split up and she spends a great deal of time moving between her mother's house and her grandparents' farm. She loves the farm and she is very close to her grandfather, whom she calls "Sir."

One day, when she is at the farm, her grandfather leaves to attend to a problem and Star is left alone to do her homework. When she searches the living room for a dictionary, she finds much more than expected: A secret elevator hidden behind the fireplace reveals her grandfather and a whole research complex she didn't know existed. Soon, Star is deeply involved in a dangerous situation. Mount Vesuvius is going to erupt and it is up to her grandfather and the other members of the complex to stop it. Star is whisked away to Italy, where she and the others work around the clock to vent the mountain and keep it from erupting.

Dan Anderson's *Discovering Koinonia*, the first of a series, is a fun book that attempts to encourage young girls to take an interest in science. The author has created an exciting setting and plot. Star is able to participate in a very significant project, even playing an important role in preventing the volcano from erupting. However, there are several small problems that detract from the story. Star is struggling with her place in her family. Rather than allowing the actions of others to help Star realize that she is not the reason for her parents' split, the author stops the narrative to show a discussion between Sir and Star in which he convinces her that she is loved. The author writes: "'Bitterness sets in, and when it comes out, it's not very pretty. Their fighting is not your fault, and you should never forget that.' Sir said this with a lot of conviction so Star would know he was telling the truth."

Generally, children cannot be convinced of their importance through words alone, and the story would have been better served if the author had allowed Star to discover her value through the important role she plays in the plot. Additionally, the author writes that Star is quite popular at school, but he also indicates that she has no close friends—a contradiction that takes away from the character's believability. Though the book does not present itself as Christian

fiction, Sir is deeply religious, and the book is filled with quotes from the Bible, moments of prayer, and discussions of faith. Though this subject matter is not really a problem, it does limit the appeal of *Discovering Koinonia*, and it is something parents should be aware of before sharing the book with a child.

Ultimately, the book is an enjoyable and exciting adventure. Readers will finish the last page curious about what Star's next adventure will be.

Catherine Reed-Thureson