

Summer Battles

Ann R. Blakeslee

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Small for her age, eleven-year-old Kath is tired of being treated like a little

kid. She resents being sent with a younger sister to visit her preacher grandfather, "Grando," in Peaceable, Illinois, instead of taking what appears to be a more interesting trip with the rest of her family. Kath immediately is plunged into a frightening situation in the town where the bishop has sent her grandfather.

It is 1926 and the northern town, like many others, is experiencing the terror of the Ku Klux Klan. The elderly Grando, who has a "colored" housekeeper, Serena, has taken a stand in his church and in the community against the secretive hate group. The Klan disrupts his church services and tries to frighten him, Serena and the children. Grando and a handful of townspeople set the example for standing up for what is right, even if it means his death, says Grando.

As Kath observes the Klan, she wants to help Grando stop its activities. "Fighting the Klan is no game for children," he tells her. Finally, however, he begins to treat her with the respect she longs for and asks her to report what she hears about the identity of the Black Riders-five particularly dangerous members. After Grando's house is egged and the Klan is prepared to tar and feather her grandfather, Kath proves that, like Grando, she is capable of quick thinking and courage in the face of evil.

There are other lessons to be learned about tolerance in this fast-paced fiction. The author introduces characters that are discriminated against because they are different: a neighbor boy who is tormented by an older brother for wanting to learn to play the piano; a German pig farmer who is badgered because he is foreign.

The lessons of the book do not get in the way of the lively story; they make it more realistic. Summer Battles should challenge young people to think about prejudices and how they might react to hatred and intimidation in their own lives. It plants hope that children can help make good triumph over evil.

LINDA SALISBURY (March / April 2000)

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