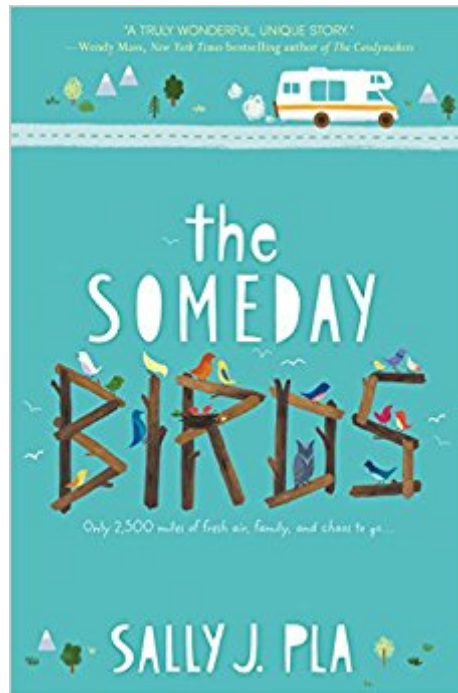




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The Someday Birds



Synopsis

TWO STARRED REVIEWS!"Offering a mixture of suspense, mystery, tragedy and humor, Pla's story captures both the literal and figurative meanings of journey." —Publishers Weekly (starred review)"Pla gives us a memorable hero in this lyrical and funny book." —Shelf Awareness (starred review)The Someday Birds is a debut middle grade novel perfect for fans of Counting by 7s and Fish in a Tree, filled with humor, heart, and chicken nuggets.Charlie's perfectly ordinary life has been unraveling ever since his war journalist father was injured in Afghanistan. When his father heads from California to Virginia for medical treatment, Charlie reluctantly travels cross-country with his boy-crazy sister, unruly brothers, and a mysterious new family friend. He decides that if he can spot all the birds that he and his father were hoping to see someday along the way, then everything might just turn out okay.Debut author Sally J. Pla has written a tale that is equal parts madcap road trip, coming-of-age story for an autistic boy who feels he doesn't understand the world, and an uplifting portrait of a family overcoming a crisis.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 700 (What's this?)

Hardcover: 336 pages

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Language: English

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Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 71 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #37,548 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life > Babysitting #33 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Travel #81 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Special Needs

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

"Sally J. Pla does a wonderful job of weaving humor and humanity into this tale of one

boy's triumph. (Cammie McGovern, author of JUST MY LUCK and SAY WHAT YOU WILL) "Sally J. Pla's heartwarming debut novel zings with humor, spot-on characters, and a poignant exploration of the effects of war. (Edith Hope Fine, author of UNDER THE LEMON MOON) "A truly wonderful, unique story. This celebration of family, individuality, and nature will remind you to always be on the lookout for wonder. (Wendy Mass, New York Times best-selling author of THE CANDYMAKERS) "Achingly real...Charlie's unique voice and his quest to understand the world around him will resonate with readers dealing with their own pain. Hopeful, authentic, and oddly endearing. (Kirkus Reviews) "Offering a mixture of suspense, mystery, tragedy and humor, Pla's story captures both the literal and figurative meanings of journey. (Publishers Weekly (starred review)) "A delight from beginning to end. (Booklist) "Readers will genuinely be captivated and touched by Charlie's soft and sensitive demeanor and amused by his ponderous exploits across the country. A strong addition to most middle grade collections. (School Library Journal) "This has all of the possible/impossible elements of successful middle-grade fiction...Readers who enjoyed Sloan's Counting by 7s (BCCB 9/13) will be the ideal audience for this. (Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books) "The Someday Birds is a raw, funny road trip story that reminds us that even the most literal-minded people can occasionally be sucker-punched by a miracle. (BookPage.com) "A triumphant debut with the resonance and depth of an instant classic. (Nerdy Book Club) "Pla gives us a memorable hero in this lyrical and funny book. (Shelf Awareness (starred review)) "[A] colorful adventure with a lot of heart...Like a harbinger of spring flitting through a gray sky, The Someday Birds is a welcome arrival. (Common Sense Media)

Note: I was privileged to hear the first chapter of this novel when it was finished at a Hedgebrook residency (we all cheered), and this particular review is based on an advance copy of the book, where I finally got to find out what happened to Charlie and his family. :) Someday Birds is a charming, bird-laden adventure tale that explores both family trip dynamics and the progress of a young boy in facing what makes him most anxious, and what makes him most himself. Charlie is the middle brother in a family of four – 2 10-year-old twin brothers, and teenaged elder sister – and the narrator of this tale. His father, a journalist injured in Afghanistan, is transferred for medical care to the other side of the country. The only other caregiver, Grandma, goes with the father and then adventures ensue as the kids determine they will

not be left behind in the hands of mysterious pink-haired Ludmila. What makes this book so powerful from the get-go is Charlie's engaging voice and the lens with which he views the world consistently, perfectly, and always a bit askew. We understand that he is fascinated by birds, and his bird guru, Tiberius Shaw, will maintain a central current running through the group (after all *Someday Birds* is the title). But it's the little things Charlie notices – from the idiosyncracies of bad rest stops to the perfection of the perfect chicken nuggets to the way that even translated emotions don't stay translated – that make this book a marvel. Charlie's voice is perfect to the task of leading us cross-country with his siblings, and it's not really the destination (Dad's hospital bed) that makes this book, it's the journey we take with Charlie as our guide that makes the experience. Another aspect of the book that gives it deeper complexity and warmth is the development of Ludmila's character and the unveiling of why she seems so fascinated with Charlie's father and willing to help the children make the cross-country trip. Her network of friends in different places, and the aptly told opening dynamics between her and the children as they compete for the father's attention in the hospital set the stage for interesting revelations. I highly recommend *Someday Birds* for middle grade readers and the adults that care about them.

I finished the last pages of *THE SOMEDAY BIRDS* with a lump in my throat. What a heartfelt debut. I loved every moment I spent on this zany, cross-country journey with Charlie and his family in a clunky camper called "Old Bess". This book touches on so much, I'm not even sure where to start – history, geography, neurodiversity, war, family, and the handling of nature with the utmost care. And while some parts are yes, heavy, Pla never leaves her readers feeling hopeless. She treats every topic with grace and respect. I loved Charlie's voice, his deadpan wit, and his literal view of the world. But the real gem I gleamed from birding with Charlie is that life is hard, but there is always hope.

A compelling, poignant and funny tale as appealing to adults as to the middle school children to whom the book is targeted. I bought this book for my 10 year old nephew but read it myself before giving it to him. I fell in love with Charlie -- and the book -- from the first pages. All the characters are finely drawn but Charlie ... well, Charlie is the most touching character since Oskar in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Both boys are on a journey, far outside their comfort zone, and find that it's by reaching out and forming relationships that they unfurl their inner

selves, find their wings and begin to soar. There is lots of warmth and humor as Charlie and his slightly kooky family embark on a cross-country journey and come together to bond, heal and grow. For children who feel a little bit different from others, for jumbled-up families who care about each other but don't know how to show it, for parents and grandparents who ache for the child they love and understand that it's our differences that enrich us all, this book is a treasure.

I know this book is aimed for younger audiences, but my Book Club read it and it was a lovely story and inspiring, too. We had a great discussion about Charlie's journey both across the country and his journey as a more mature individual. Charlie is a boy on the Autism Spectrum and lives with a family where you grow to love each character. Pla is a gifted writer and paints a picture of their family's life. I loved how Charlie made a list of "Someday Birds" he wanted to see and share with his dad who was injured and hospitalized on the east coast. His journey finding these birds makes you cheer for every one he finds. My only disappointment was that he did not stop at the Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin, one of the greatest birding sites in the world. This is a book of hope and I would strongly recommend it.

I was initially drawn to this book because the main character is a birder not to be confused with a bird watcher! This birder also happens to be an autistic boy who has lost his mother in a car accident and is struggling to come to terms with his father's health. In an amazing road trip he learns about himself and is able to push himself out of his comfort zone. I fell in love with Gram and Ludmila and would pick either of them to be one of my 7 point contacts...read the book and pick your own seven!

I was thrown off a bit initially by what I perceived as a disconnect between the narrator's description of himself, his thoughts, and past events, all of which suggest that he has OCD and might be slightly autistic and the language and writing used by the author for the narrator. Another way of saying that is that the narrator does not speak to us the way we think he would speak to others. It reminds me a bit of books and movies who put words in the mouths of young children that are too advanced. Once I got past that, the book was enjoyable and somewhat thought-provoking. So, I would advise to start out assuming that the narrator is an eloquent youth with OCD issues and ignore any part of the book that would suggest to you that he has any issues communicating. The book works much better that way.

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