



The Mailbox

Audrey Shafer

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Vernon Culligan had been dead to the town of Draydon, Virginia, so long that when the crusty Vietnam vet finally died, only one person noticed. Twelve-year-old Gabe grew up in the foster care system until a social worker located his Uncle Vernon two years before. When he comes home to discover that his uncle has died of a heart attack, he's terrified of going back into the system--so he tells no one. The next day, he discovers a strange note in his mailbox: I HAVE A SECRET. DO NOT BE AFRAID. And his uncle's body is gone.

Thus begins a unique correspondence destined to save the two people that depended on Vernon for everything. Through flashbacks, we learn about Gabe and Vernon's relationship, and how finding each other saved them both from lives of suffering. But eventually, Vernon's death will be discovered, and how will Gabe and the mystery note writer learn to move forward? THE MAILBOX is not a story about death--though it begins with a death. It's also not a story about Vietnam vets, although the author works with Vietnam veterans and wrote this novel, in part, to illuminate their sacrifices and suffering. THE MAILBOX is a story about connections--about how two people in need can save each other.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Mailbox Details

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Author : Audrey Shafer

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Camden says

I finished this book in less than 2 hours? It's a really quick read. Unfortunately, I also chose to read in a public coffee shop which was a huge mistake as I cried through about two-thirds of it. I don't think it was just me being sentimental, at least not entirely - there were some genuinely moving moments between Gabe and Smitty and, even more emotional, Gabe and his memories of Uncle Vernon. Shafer does a fantastic job at winding the two (three if you count Vernon and Smitty) relationships together without getting them confused or losing one voice to the other. She also knows how to wield a wonderful set of characters with grace and I was very impressed by that. Diverse cast, too! I was so pleased that not everyone was white. I do think the ending was rather rosy given the (sort of sweet, child-like) darkness of the rest of the novel. But I still cried through it too and it's a middle grade novel, so I'm not sure what else Shafer would have/could have done done. Really a minor complaint. Overall, a great book.

Jessica says

This wonderful story of Gabe, his uncle Vernon, and his friends had me laughing and crying! The book itself appears to have been written for a younger audience, but don't judge the book by its cover. It deals with a lot of heavier things - PTSD, grief, coming of age, and love. Oh, and I don't mean romantic love - I mean real Love. Love that, when shown, spoken, and felt freely and from the heart, truly defines humanity.

Riley says

I honestly loved "The Mailbox", I gave it 5 Stars. When it comes to this book, it is a very heartfelt book but also interesting and a fast read(for a person who likes to read of course). I would 100% recommend this book

Bethany says

Love it. have read it three times. Not sure who the intended audience is though (is this really a kid's book?). But I love it.

Cindy says

This book was on my Goodreads recommendations list; thanks for that feature! The book is intended for the upper elementary grades, but I was so moved by the story and wondered how a young person could understand the depth of Gabe's pain. But then I realized it would be a perfect book for the child of a veteran. Gabe's Uncle Vernon and his friend Smitty have PTSD, but it's from the Viet Nam war, maybe giving a little breathing room for a parent and child.

Have a tissue handy!

Tristan Goding says

A rather contemporarily reminiscent YA period piece with some rather desolate themes, which may or may not appeal to all. I personally found much of it to be quite stunning. Many parts were quite surprising and I adored the main protagonist. I wasn't the biggest fan of the ending, at first, but, the more I thought about it, the more I really began to fall quite in love with how it all unweaved itself. I really appreciated the sophisticated approach as well. May not be for all, but I really appreciated the journey it took me on.

K Gover says

Gabe (a foster kid) moves in with his Uncle Vernon (3 years ago) then ends up finding his Uncle dead in their home that is located far off the beaten path. Gabe hides the death only to come home from school to a note in the mailbox that says "I know your secret. Don't be afraid." Uncle Vernon's body is gone. Gabe corresponds with the letter writer for several weeks, which result in Guppy a black lab being sent to him from Smitty- the mystery writer. Suspenseful and a page turner. - Flashbacks tell of Gabe and Vernon's life together.

School personnel- Mr. Baim, Mrs. Pickering- His BFF Webber, Miss Rodriguez- social worker all get involved in Gabe's life when Sheriff Hewitt eventually discovers Uncle Vernon's body in a local funeral home.

SPOILER- Smitty was an embalmer and was friends with Vernon in the Vietnam War. At the funeral in Arlington National Cemetery, many vets return and tell stories about Vernon. This is very heartwarming. Dramatic ending where Mr. Baim (who has adopted Gabe) and Gabe go to return Guppy to Smitty (who has a deformed face from trying to shoot himself-suffers from PTSD- and they have NEVER met face to face)- but Smitty sends Guppy back across the ravine of the river they met at.

Katie Cat Books says

Boy. Dog. Vietnam.

Story: 12 year old Gabe Culligan has been in and out of the foster system for years. Then his uncle is found and he goes to live with him in a valley in Virginia. Uncle Vernon is rough and gruff but a good uncle to Gabe. One day Gabe returns home from school to find his uncle dead on the floor. He doesn't know what to do so he does nothing. Then a note appears in the mailbox addressed to him. Mystery after mystery unfold in this middle grade novel.

Characters: Gabe is young and polite and also very ingenious. After his uncle dies, he has to come up with ways to keep his teachers and social worker and townsfolk from knowing that he is living alone without a parent or guardian. While the uncle is found dead in chapter 1, he is a main character in the whole book, brought up in flashbacks and dialogues. In this way we get to know him, his life experiences and his effect on Gabe.

Language: I really liked the first 75% of this book. It was an easy and light read, great for middle grade.

Then the climax of the novel and the ending happened so fast, that events were not as well clear or developed. Perhaps this book should also have had a section on the end with resources on foster care and the Vietnam War and PTSD.

It was good. I wish the author would write more books because this book shows real potential.

Cindy says

This is a book for young and teenage readers, but I was completely moved by this book. It is amazing and I found myself teary-eyed more than once. The main character is great, but it's amazing how important the uncle is to the book even though he is dead at the very beginning. Thumbs up!

Lisa says

A 6th grade boy finds his uncle and guardian dead, then the body disappears and he tries to keep the secret and avoid foster homes again. When it is revealed, he finds he has more friends than he thought and that his uneducated, somewhat gruff uncle, was a war hero, admired by many. He is adopted by a teacher. In summary it sounds very unlikely, yet the characters all worked together to make a community that I found believable. Okay, believable in a Christmas story way, but it was very moving. The love they shared. The fears of angering people and staying quiet that came in out repeated but appropriately quiet ways. The psychology felt true, but positive. I cried like a baby. Maybe I was played, but I enjoyed it.

Christina says

A heart-breaking story of Gabe, a boy who finds a home with his "crusty" Uncle Vernon, a Vietnam vet, after years of being shuttled around from one foster home to another. Gabe arrives home one day to find his uncle dead on the floor. Confused by this turn of events and not ready to say "good-bye," he crawls under a blanket and spends the night with his uncle's body. When he arrives home from school the next day, he finds a mysterious note in his mailbox and his uncle's body gone. Despite this unlikely chain of events, Gabe is a completely believable character who behaves exactly like a shy, confused sixth-grade boy might. It's hard to peg the best audience for this book. The Mailbox is a thin book marked as having a fifth-grade reading level. On the other hand, the realistic depiction of post traumatic stress syndrome in war veterans -- and its causes - - will be hard for many fifth-graders and even some sixth-graders to confront.

Ryan says

This was an unexpected find.

Were it not for Landen's book club, I'd never have picked it up, and were it not for a Thanksgiving away I'd never have read it.

The story is about Gabe, a ward of the state, who goes to live with his Uncle Vernon, a distinguished veteran,

who is about as crusty as they get, and doesn't like to toot his own horn. One day Gabe returns home to find Uncle Vernon dead, and that's where I was hooked.

The young man does his best to keep that from those around him, working to establish his life - in respect of his Uncle's guidance - and to avoid losing his newly found home, to be put into "the system" again.

The writing and style are easy and technically adept. It was a quick read, and I often attribute that to the best writers, because even Dan Brown's book was hard to put down, BUT it was formulaic in its layout to be a series of short reads - which worked for his story.

I'll read it again, found myself overcome at times, so if you're a softy - it's not a book to read around little kids or on a company lunch break.

Pj says

. Twelve-year-old Gabe grew up in the foster care system until a social worker located his Uncle Vernon two years before. Uncle Vernon is a crusty old Viet Nam Veteran that no one in town really thinks much about. When Gabe comes home to discover that his uncle has died of a heart attack, he's terrified of going back into foster care so pretends everything is normal and continues on as usual. Except someone does know. They remove his Uncle's body, give him a dog as a companion, and leave notes in the mailbox. Short notes, just a line or two, and no identification as to who they are. How long Gabe exists in this manner is a journey that requires lots of tissues. You can not read it without tears. SO GOOD

Melanie says

When young Gabe (Gabe) finally finds a home with his Uncle Vernon, he settles into a not-so-ordinary routine for daily life. But that's what comes from living with a hardened Vietnam veteran. Both uncle and nephew quickly get used to each other, but peace is shattered when Vernon suddenly dies. Fearful that things will change for the worse (i.e. foster homes again), and consumed with grief for the uncle he barely had a chance to know, Gabe tells no one about his uncle's death.

But someone knows; and that someone has a secret. Gabe and the stranger begin an odd mailbox exchange communication. And the stranger gives Gabe the best friend a boy could ask for, especially when lonely: a dog. But who is this person? And what's his secret?

How long can Gabe keep the situation under wraps?

This book was beautiful! I was really disappointed that it wasn't even a Newbery honor the year Criss Cross won (which I hated!).

Nadia Flores says

SPOILER ALERT

Have you ever thought about living without your parents? Imagine what life would be like if you no one there to take care of you, what would you do? If you only had your teachers and your best friend. This is Gabe's story, it might not be a true story but the author sure does make it seem like one. This a realistic fiction book.

The setting of this book is mainly in a house where everything takes place in present day. Gabe is the main character he used to live in foster care from home to home and then his uncle was found and Gabe went to live with him. The type of conflict in this story is Person Vs.Society. When he goes to live with his uncle Gabe has started school and his first day of school coming home he finds his uncle dead on his desk chair and covers him with a blanket and goes to bed not knowing what to do. The next day Gabe thinks it has all gone away but when he sees his uncle not on the chair, not knowing where he is or what to do, he thought to himself that if he were to tell anyone that they would he killed his uncle which he died of a heart attack.

So far reading this book I think this story might of needed a lot of time to write it has many details and very descriptive writing. In the book when each of the characters talk or write letters which there's a lot of letter writing in this book. That's one of the reasons why I said this book is so descriptive. I also find this book very interesting because the amount of chores Gabe was given is actually is really crazy because most kids have simple little things like having to clean their rooms, taking out the trash or washing dishes. Now I know that his uncle was old but Gabe has to make bank deposits and took out money, shop for groceries, take out the garbage, and buy stamps at the post office.

My opinion on this book is I really liked it, mainly because of the mysterious card writer that went by the name of "Smitty". Smitty is my favorite character in this book because he/she helped Gabe get though everything just fine, and because he/she gave Gabe a big black dog named Guppy and even though Gabe doesn't really know who this person might be maybe his dad or maybe Mr. Boehm his teacher. Although I don't know if Smitty is a boy or girl I still think it might be a boy. When Smitty writes a letter to Gabe asked something about if Smitty was his/her real name and didn't have that much of an answer.

In conclusion Gabe has been very brave though his uncle's death and who knows what his life would have turned out like without Smitty and all the other support that he has had though the tough times like from his teacher Mr. Boehm and Ms. Pickering. This is one of the best books I have ever and I hope to read more books from Audrey Shafer.
