



## Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers

*Lois-Ann Yamanaka*

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Her name is Lovey Nariyoshi, and her Hawai'i is not the one of leis, pineapple, and *Magnum P.I.* In the blue collar town of Hilo, on the Big Island, Lovey and her eccentric Japanese-American family are at the margins of poverty, in the midst of a tropical paradise. With her endearing, effeminate best friend Jerry, Lovey suffers schoolyard bullies, class warfare, Singer sewing classes, and the surprisingly painful work of picking on a macadamia nut plantation, all while trying to find an identity of her own. At once a bitingly funny satire of *haole* happiness and a moving meditation on what is real, if ugly at times, but true, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* crackles with the language of pidgin--Hawai'i Creole English--distinguishing one of the most vibrant voices in contemporary culture.

Stories from this enduring novel have been adapted into the film *Fishbowl*, by groundbreaking director Kayo Hatta.

## Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers Details

Date : Published January 24th 2006 by Picador (first published 1996)

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Author : Lois-Ann Yamanaka

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## **From Reader Review Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers for online ebook**

### **Kirei says**

I give myself a pat on the back for finishing this book. It's like being forced to read someone's diary, with the author eagerly waiting for you to finish as she sits and drinks coffee right in front of you. You bleed through the pages and ask yourself, "Why do I do this to myself?" When I finally got to the final two chapters, I was surprised to find myself actually laughing at that Grad Dance bit. Okay, Ms. Yamanaka, it's okay. I'm sorry I got bored with your book. It's obviously not for me since a lot of people seem to love it.

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### **Marie Hvding says**

It is hard to imagine how anyone could depict a truer picture of growing up in Hawaii in the 70s. As a haole girl growing up on Oahu's North Shore, my reaction to Yamanaka's book is extremely personal. I connected with everything Lovey thought, albeit in a skewed way at times (I longed for long straight black hair like all the other little girls I knew, as opposed to Lovey's desire for long blond hair). And this is perhaps the book's major flaw. Yamanaka is so skilled at evoking this particular moment with such clarity that she shuts out those who are not of that moment already. But that seems a petty criticism to me. As a Hawaiian far from home, I'm always looking for a goodread about the islands. Many people attempt to use pidgin in their writing, few are successful. Yamanaka's novel took me home and made yearn for the islands with an even greater intensity than I thought possible.

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### **nimrodiel says**

I had an interesting time reading this book. I usually don't have a hard time with accents, but the pidgin and slang used through the book really threw me.

There were some good parts that had me rolling on the floor laughing. I could commiserate with events such as having your barbies hair cut off in a mohawk, and drawn on by older brothers(in my case it was a neighborhood boy), and being teased for not having any female friends - just one boy who also gets teased. But other parts of the book were just hard for me to get into.

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### **Abigail Rotholz says**

Engaging novel, brought me back to my days in Hilotown!

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## **Betsey says**

I enjoyed the book, but it read more like a collection of stories than a novel. The only reason it was a novel is because the title says so. The short stories only cross-linked a few times. I liked the use of the Hawaiian pidgin/creole, and it was fun to read while visiting the islands. I'd definitely recommend it to anyone, but especially folks going over for a visit. nice perspective that you can't get on vacation.

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## **Cheryl Klein says**

I started reading this book shortly before visiting the Big Island of Hawaii for the first time. It really captures the wildness of the island--the junior-high protagonist is always scooping fish from a pond or raising rabbits or hunting for birds. It can be brutal--like when her dad describes a herd of goats trapped in a lava flow--and life isn't much kinder to the humans in the story. The writing is beautiful in a visceral way (like Cynthia Kadohata's and Lynda Barry's), even if the book could have benefited from more of a plot.

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## **Kara says**

3.5 stars. I was born in Hawaii, and although I'm not Hawaiian myself, I think it's important to learn about the places that you come from. So in 2017, I set myself a goal to read at least one book a month that is either written by a Hawaiian author, or about Hawaiian history and culture. *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, my book for January, is a coming-of-age story about a Japanese-American middle school girl named Lovey growing up in Hawaii. Despite the protagonist's young age, the book is definitely for adult readers, as it explicitly touches on a lot of heavy themes such as suicide. There isn't really a plot per se; instead, the book is composed of various anecdotes and impressions from Lovey's life, with each section of stories loosely grouped around a theme. This arrangement made the book a bit choppy at times, and while it allows you get into Lovey's thoughts and feelings, at times it could be hard to tell what I was supposed to make of all of it as a reader. The whole book is written in Hawaiian Pidgin English, and while it took me a few pages to get into the language (as it always does for me when an author writes in dialect), Yamanaka did an excellent job of rendering the dialect so that it was readable and yet not a caricature of Hawaiian Pidgin.

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## **Travis says**

Oh, I loved this so much. This is maybe my favorite type of fiction ever, short stories about being a kid/growing up, but not for kids. I like children's lit/YA okay (some books I really love), but I prefer stuff about childhood and adolescence that is written for adults. I like the nostalgia of it. This is set in the early '70s, so it's a little before my time, but I can still recognise the pop culture references (of which there are many) and I can relate to it much better than stories about Kids Today.

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## **Abby Howell says**

A solid coming of age story set in Hawaii in the 1960's. I liked it because it gave a sense of what Hawaii is

really like to live there, beyond the mass media. And what it is like to be a Hawaiian.

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## **Paul Jr. says**

Anyone who knows me knows that I have a strong connection to the Hawaiian Islands and a strong curiosity to read the stories by Hawaiian authors. I'm not so much interested in the exoticism of the islands as I am the real, true life stories. So when author Lavina Ludlow (novel forthcoming from Casperian Books) suggested the work of Lois-Ann Yamanaka, I was more than willing to dive in.

Now, when authors are new to me, I do not search out any reviews or biographical information before hand as I don't want to color my perception of their work, positively or negatively. So when I looked at the list of Yamanaka's work, this novel was the first listed and so I went with it. And am I glad I did.

Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers is set in and about Hilo, Hawai'i (the big Island) in the 1970s. Our lead is the appealing Lovey (interestingly, one letter shy of Lovely), a relatively plain girl from a working class Hawai'i. As the blurb says, her Hawai'i is not the Hawai'i of picture post cards. Her family are barely surviving financially, unable to afford the comforts that the haole (white) islanders and many of those with whom Lovey goes to school have. This instills in Lovey a somewhat covetous personality. Like all children, she wants to fit in, be smart and popular and have the coolest things. And her attempts to fit in always seem to backfire, reminding her of her "place" in life.

While Lovey is our main character, most all of her interactions within the novel take place with her friend Jerry, a young man with a seemingly unending positive outlook and as much of an outcast as Lovey. Likewise, her father, a nisei (second generation Japanese American), is an important part of their life, their relationship at times wonderfully close and at other times strained by Lovey's desire to be more than who she is.

At its heart, this novel is a coming-of-age book, the journey of a young girl who is just beginning to grow up and realize what really is important in life. But what this story also is is the story of a young woman and the men in her life...Jerry and her father. While her mother, grandmother, aunty and sister are indeed in her life, the focus always returns to Jerry or her father. While I would have enjoyed seeing more of Lovey's relationship with the women in her life, the richness of her interactions with the men in her life is outstanding and full. One (especially one of the male gender) comes away with a strong understanding of the bond between father and daughter. And blessedly, Yamanaka makes that relationship utterly realistic.

Lovey's relationship with Jerry is wonderfully imbued with a strong sense of what friendship is. As in reality, sometimes the two can't stand one another. They fight and get jealous of one another, but in the end, they always end up together. Truly wonderful.

One of the things about Jerry that was missing for me is the implication that Jerry was gay. The blurb indicates that Jerry is effeminate, implying homosexuality. I didn't particularly see this to be true. Yes, he does play Barbies with Lovey, his interest are a bit off the beaten path compared to other boys, and both he and Lovey are constantly call derogatory names for gays by the "cool kids," but he never read as particularly effeminate or gay to me. In some respects, I would have like to have seen that dealt with more, but when I came away from the novel I realized that whether Jerry was or wasn't gay didn't matter. Because it didn't matter to Lovey. The only thing that mattered was their friendship. I walked away finding that refreshing.

In this novel, Yamanaka touches on a lot of issues. Classism. Racism. The loss of cultural heritage and homeland. But she deals with them subtly and always in context of the story. We absolutely feel for Lovey when she is made fun of. We get angry at her when she picks on others from a different cultural background. Our heart aches when her father tells how his own father never saw Japan again before he died. It is all beautifully done.

Yamanaka also captures the spirit of the island. She doesn't do this by describing details of the locales, but rather by the use of Hawaiian Creole (pidgin) in the dialog and the prose. The result is a vivid portrayal of time and place that feels like home for us non-Hawaiian readers, yet is different enough so that we know we aren't in our own home. Likewise, Yamanaka brings emotional truth to the story, a universality that draws us to each of the characters. In the end, while we know we aren't a teen Japanese American girl, we understand and can empathize with all she is going through.

For those readers who grew up in the 70s, there is a lot here that will let you take a stroll down memory lane and which helps to provide the emotional connection to the characters. Yamanaka gets all the details right, from Bobby Sherman to wax coke bottle candies.

Perhaps the best thing about this novel is that while Lovey is covetous of those around her, her life is allowing her to build something more precious than the right clothes or the right tape recorder...she's building memories that will last forever.

I can not imaging coming-of-age novels getting any better than this and I can not recommend this book more strongly.

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### **Jolynn says**

Poetic use of Pidgin and very nostalgic for me. It tasted like home.

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### **J says**

Sweet coming of age tale of a third generation Japanese Hawaiian girl growing up in the 1970's. Lovey's father who grew up on the plantation is always scheming to make money - from rabbits to collecting feathers for leis - and Lovey thinks she wants nothing more than to have a nice white picket fence, nothing second hand and have a haole name. When her dad is injured in a hunting accident, Lovey finally understands the messages her dad has been quietly teaching her - about being proud of where you come from and sacrifice for those you love. Told through a series of vignettes and with a fantastic ear of pigin, I'll be looking out the car window at the corrugated roofs a little differently after reading this book.

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### **Becky says**

The dialect made this a little hard to read. Very poetic. I thought it was sad but it does have some funny stories mixed in.

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### **Christina says**

I first read this book my senior year of high school. I chose it off my teacher's book shelf to read as an independent book study. I know I liked it, because when I saw it for sale at a book sale a few years ago I snatched it up. Re-reading this as an adult was a different experience though. The story of Lovey, and her constant desire to be something she isn't, is truly moving and heartbreaking.

#popsugar 2016, A book you haven't read since high school

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### **Joshua says**

Oh this book was so creative!! It is just vast in its immensity and scope! I put it on the bookshelf right between Herman Melville and Vladimir Nabokov even though that's not alphabetical order. I Don't care! It deserves its place amongst the great ones!! Maybe "Moby Dick", "A Tale of Two Cities"...and "Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers"!! Hmmmmmm. I love reading books written in Pidgin English about bratty young children going through adolescence. I also particularly love it when there is an older grandparent figure that seems to be the only one the adolescent can relate to. How creative!! I like the wonderful arguments the protagonist gets into with her teacher when she is asked to speak English properly in order to communicate effectively.

Wow that teacher sure was culturally insensitive. Who does she think she is....I mean Really.....a teacher?? Whats SHE ever done with HER life?

I also like how college professors can assign this book in order to meet the new multi-cultural requirements of our public education system, thereby presenting the appearance that they are culturally aware institutions.

This book helped me to finally realize that The Northern European Culture is evil and that I should kill myself (Being a white male) to rid the world of my presence. I'm going to jump off a cliff.....but not without my copy of Bully Burgers!!

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