



# **To Stand On My Own: The Polio Epidemic Diary of Noreen Robertson, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1937**

*Barbara Haworth-Attard*

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In the summer of 1937, life on the Prairies is not easy. The Great Depression has brought great hardship, and young Noreen's family must scrimp to make ends meet.

In a horrible twist of fate, Noreen, like hundreds of other young Canadians, contracts polio and is placed in an isolation ward, unable to move her legs. After a few weeks she gains partial recovery, but her family makes the painful decision to send her to a hospital far away for further treatment.

To Stand On My Own is Noreen's diary account of her journey through recovery: her treatment; life in the ward; the other patients, some of them far worse off than her; adjustment to life in a wheelchair and on crutches; and ultimately, the emotional and physical hurdles she must face when she returns home.

In this moving addition to the Dear Canada series, award-winning author Barbara Haworth-Attard recreates a desolate time in Canadian history, and one girl's brave fight against a deadly disease.

## **To Stand On My Own: The Polio Epidemic Diary of Noreen Robertson, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1937 Details**

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Author : Barbara Haworth-Attard

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# From Reader Review To Stand On My Own: The Polio Epidemic Diary of Noreen Robertson, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1937 for online ebook

## Young Adult Historical Vault says

I loved this one--fantastic entry in the Dear America series! I loved that it touched on the aftermath of the polio epidemic, rather than the anticipation and fear of a disease outbreak like so many stories tend to do. It was intense and scary and well-written, but completely age-appropriate both in tone and in audience. It seems really genuine as a young girl's experience with disease, but without ever venturing into gross or horrifying. A well-written, important book, and one I'd love to see get more acclaim.

For my full review, check out Young Adult Historical Vault <https://yahistoricalvault.com/2016/07...>

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## Manybooks says

Maybe I should be reading those *Dear Canada* series books I have not already read (or I should review the ones I have read and not yet reviewed), but last night I felt only like rereading To Stand On My Own, as it is one of my favourites of this series, and I needed to reread a favourite book.

The *Dear Canada* series has without a doubt become one of my favourite series of Canadian children's historical fiction, period. Conceptualised and presented as "historical" diaries, these books not only present and portray interesting, often thought-provoking historical episodes and facts pertaining to Canada's past, they generally also feature both charming and believable, historically authentic characters (both the narrators themselves, the diarists, but also the individuals described by the former).

I have, to date, read a goodly number of these fictionalised diaries (and I am kind of obsessive about collecting the entire series), and while there are certainly some that I have enjoyed more than others, I can honestly say that of the books in the *Dear Canada* series I have read so far, I would not hesitate to strongly recommend the majority of them. The series manages to be both historically interesting and informative, while at the same time showing the observations, joys, tragedies and triumphs of the young "diarists" in an engaging, emotionally realistic and believable fashion; these are not dry historical documents, but engaging and emotional stories of hope and despair, of triumph and tragedy. An added bonus of this series are the historical notes, documents and photographs that are included at the back of each of the diaries, making this series not only a wonderful reading experience (and in my opinion for both children and adults), but also providing interesting and valuable historical documentation and facts. This makes *Dear Canada* not only a wonderful series for anyone interested in Canadian history and/or historical fiction, it also makes this series a wonderful and informative teaching resource for both homeschooling as well as elementary and middle grade history or social studies classes.

Barbara Haworth-Attard's To Stand On My Own is one of the more recent publications in the *Dear Canada* series and has rapidly become one of my very favourites. An engaging, at times emotionally wrenching, but in the end triumphant account of twelve-year-old Noreen Robertson's struggle with polio, this diary-novel also provides valuable historical background information on both the polio epidemic of 1937 and the devastating effects of the Great Depression, especially the devastation caused by the "Dust-Bowl" droughts

on a primarily agricultural province like Saskatchewan (a province hit worse than other provinces, because farming was the main livelihood for most).

Now mreally, the author has managed to totally and engagingly capture the voice of Noreen, of a young girl struggling with a disease that she cannot fully understand, but all the same realising that polio might prove fatal, knowing it could well leave her with permanent physical challenges. And with this in mind, Noreen's diary account truly reads like the diary of a child; one never has the impression as though one is simply reading Barbara Haworth-Attard's attempt to appear and/or sound like a twelve-year-old girl (Noreen's narrative feels and reads as one hundred percent authentic). I was, and still am, completely immersed in this story, personally feeling Noreen's emotions, her pain, her fears, her doubts, her anger, her frustrations, and finally, her triumphs and joys (as well as those of many of the other characters described by Noreen in her diary). To Stand On My Own will make you cry, laugh, cheery wildly, as well as exclaim in anger and frustration. You will fall in love with the characters and care immensely about Noreen and her friends at the Regina hospital (you will scream happily when Edna is finally able to move her fingers and arms, you will simply hate the fact that Thelma's parents abandoned her when she became ill, you will feel as proud as Noreen when she is finally able to walk down the hall using her crutches). And finally, To Stand On My Own will also make readers appreciate how fortunate most of the world is today, how because of the devastating polio epidemics of the early and middle 20th Century, we now have the ways and means to prevent this dread disease, we now have vaccinations and better treatment options.

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## **Westcoast\_girl says**

In 'To Stand on my Own' Noreen becomes stricken by Polio. This is during the late 1930s when the polio outbreak first started.

The book starts when Noreen is well and best friends with Bessie. However, she soon contracts the disease and is hospitalized. There, she is diagnosed with polio and declared paralyzed from the waist down. Bessie abandons her, her friends and family are isolated from her, and soon Noreen begins to lose faith with herself. Gradually, through subsequent hospitalizations and new friendships, Noreen begins to recover and learns to live with her disease.

Throughout the book, Noreen makes many friendships in which she learns valuable lessons. When she meets Ann, she learns about the hardships of immigrants and the struggles of being poor. When she spends time with her Grandpa, she learns about politics and world news.

The book also explores other aspects of depression era such as the dust bowls, the immigrants on aid, and the shortages of things such as fresh fruit and gasoline.

I especially liked the end of the book that had historical notes and photos of the epidemic. I did not, however, like the epilogue. In trying to tie up all loose ends, they generalized Noreen's life and made me feel as if I didn't know her anymore. I think it was a bit much to complete the epilogue with her death.

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## **Rebecca says**

Noreen is just a young girl growing up during the depression in Saskatoon when she falls ill with Polio. Her

At first I found this book a bit slow-moving. A lot of it was just Noreen feeling sorry for herself, feeling guilty for not listening to her mother, wondering if she was being punished, etc. I suppose her self-pity was realistic since it would be awful to be twelve years old and be told you would probably never walk again. I did eventually enjoy the book and Noreen's character grew and matured and in the end she decided to focus on the good things that happened as a result of her experiences, rather than the bad, and how she could use what she had learned to help others like herself in the future.

## **Fire\_Dragon\_ says**

I went to the library a few days ago, and after a gander at the young adult section, I quickly came to realize i was sick of reading the same fantasy romance book, which feature the same hopeless love triangle. I needed a change. I decided that something new, bare, and 'out of my comfort zone' should do the job. So after heading to the childrens' section, I quickly came upon this book...and i loved it! I was a little skeptical at first, but went with it anyways in the end. I was acutally working on a major project, at that time, and still had made very little progress (i'm a helpless procrastinator, i know shame on me :( ), but after I finished the book (2 days), I realized that at the end, under the title 'Famous people who had polio', Arthur C. Clarke's name was printed at the very bottom. I nearly fell off my chair! I was doing a porject on that author, and needed to find some extras/ other interesting information. YAY! I'm going to include this book, and maybe bring it in for a class presentation! Yay! I'm going to encourgae others to read this, and get a good mark! Yay! This book is truly awesome!

(Excuse any mis-spelt words, I wrote this in a rush, and goodreads dosen't have spellcheck)

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## **Annie M says**

### **SLIGHT SPOILERS**

"To Stand On My Own" is the polio epidemic diary of Noreen Robertson. The diary begins with Noreen being told by her mother to start writing in the diary, as a start to be more lady-like, but Noreen soon becomes accustomed to writing in it. It also serves as a distraction further into the book as she is diagnosed with polio.

The book takes place during the Great Depression, I think that adds an interesting factor as it has tidbits about the depression in it.

Throughout the book Noreen gains new friendships with people she normally wouldn't have looked twice at. One friend she gains throughout her epidemic diary is a polish immigrant named Ann. Ann's family is on relief, which means that they are being supported by the government because they cannot make enough to support themselves.

I find that the Dear Canada books are a quick read packed with loads of information, although I do love thick books, I think that this series is wonderful, especially for some one who loves history as much as me.

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## **Karly says**

This diary was a historical fiction account of a young girl diagnosed with polio in Saskatoon in 1937. My Nanna was diagnosed with polio in Regina in the 1940s. The little girl in the book received treatment at the Regina hospital. It was really interesting to read about this girl's experience and compare it to what I knew of my Nanna's experience with the disease. This diary is part of the "Dear Canada" series and I definitely want to read more! A quick read, very realistic and very informative! I don't know which one to choose next!?

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## **Sasha says**

Amazing

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## **Brianna says**

My 10 year old self: Life is definatley not easy on the praries, at least in 1937. The Great Depression is a hard learning experience, and Noreen as well as her family must skimp in order to survive. It makes it even harder when Noreen, like many others at that time, catches polio. After long thought and dissction, it is agreed that Noreen was to be shipped off into another hospital. She longs to get better, so that her legs would work again, and so she could stand on her own. Borrow this book. It is at the edge of the four star to being a five.

(That spelling! #perf)

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## **Kristal says**

It's been years since I read this book, and I'm glad I revisited it. It's one of my favorite in the series. The author managed to really paint a picture of the day to day struggles of polio as well as growing up in the depression. She added in lessons about friendship, discussed fears of being discriminated against due to disabilities, and weaved in tidbits of historical happenings throughout the diary (like Hitler rising to power, Amelia Earhart, etc). She even touched on prejudice against immigrants. All in all, Noreen's diary felt like it could have been real. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

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## **Meaghan Steeves says**

This was an exceptionally GREAT diary; I thoroughly enjoyed it. Quite often I find that these girls are too goody-goody, or make maybe two mistakes total. I still love them as characters but I find them harder to relate to. In this story, Noreen is actually a bully a couple of times and finds it hard to apologize and in fact puts it off. I found her to be a much more realistic character in that respect as she has personal problems that she manages to work out, and as a result of the polio she actually becomes a better person and friend. That being said, I also found this diary particularly informative. I learned much more about polio and the history of past epidemics than I knew before. I would highly recommend this to anyone who enjoys a good historical stand-alone fiction.

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## **Shawn Bird says**

I have been supporting the elimination of Polio with Rotary the last few years. I really appreciated this perspective of what it was like in Canada before the disease was eradicated here. Very informative.

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## Andie M says

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