



Better to Wish

Ann M. Martin

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Four generations. Four girls. One family.

An amazing new four-book series from Ann M. Martin.

In 1930, Abby Nichols is eight, and can't imagine what her future holds. The best things today would be having a dime for the fair, keeping her Pops from being angry, and saving up eighty-seven cents to surprise her little sister with a tea set for Christmas.

But Abby's world is changing fast. Soon there will be new siblings to take care of, a new house to move into, and new friends to meet. But there will also be good-byes to say and hard choices to make. As Abby grows older, how will she decide what sort of life will fit her best?

In this incredible new series, bestselling author Ann M. Martin brings the past and the present together one girlhood at a time and shows readers the way a family grows.

Better to Wish Details

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Author : Ann M. Martin

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From Reader Review Better to Wish for online ebook

Becky says

I definitely enjoyed reading Ann M. Martin's Better To Wish. I connected with Abby almost from the start. I thought Abby was a very grounded character, there was depth and substance to her. I enjoyed reading her memories, the short vignettes of the moments through the years that changed or defined her. Some chapters were quite ordinary: the small moments, the ones that you almost never appreciate until much later. Other chapters were quite dramatic, the moments where you know that life will NEVER be the same again no matter how hard you wish or how big you dream. I liked the focus on family, friendship, and community. Readers meet Abby exactly as she is in her closest relationships. Loved seeing Abby's relationship with her sisters, her mother, and her best friend. All the characters felt authentic, felt human. Martin has done a great job in bringing this time period to life. I would definitely recommend this one. I look forward to the others in the series!

Manybooks says

An online New York Times review of Ann M. Martin's first instalment of her *Family Tree* series (titled Better to Wish) favourably compares (or rather, I should probably state that it attempts to favourably compare) this novel to such enduring and beloved American children's classics as Louisa May Alcott's brilliant and evocative Little Women. However, and this is a very massive and heavy-duty however, while Little Women is indeed a story containing and presenting both joy and sadness, both life and death, the most persistent and palpable sentiment displayed by Lousia May Alcott throughout Little Women is one of a loving, loyal and intensely supportive family (a family where each and every member is always and forever cherished, is nurtured, sustained through joy as well as thorough sadness, and where while the bitter is indeed aleays portrayed alongside of the sweet, the former is thankfully never excessively or morbidly rendered).

And with the above in mind, I am truly and sadly much sorry to say that Ann M. Martin's Better to Wish does not in any manner (at least to and for me) represent an even remotely similar type of story to Little Women. Yes, Better to Wish might have an American East Coast setting like Louisa May Alcott's classic has, but that is really and truly where the similarities seem to end. For while reading about Abby Nichols and her family, has I guess been to a point mildly entertaining and definitely historically and culturally enlightening, the constant and relentless doom-and-gloom scenarios depicted and presented in Better to Wish, the almost strung together iron chain of a constant litany of tragedies and horrors just starts to majorly wear thin and almost becomes more than a bit unbelievable (rather like a standard folk or fairy tale, where the most dreadful possible occurrences often keep being piled on and on, but unlike in many if not even most fairy or folk tales, there is not really a happy ending that beckons in Better to Wish, just more potential sadness, just more heartbreak, with especially the drowning death of Abby's best friend Elizabeth, and this actually even more so than the death of her mother, feeling at least to and for me as though the author, as though Ann M. Martin has just thrown this in for good measure, for a gratuitous tragedy thrill).

And furthermore, with regard to Better to Wish, except perhaps for Abby, her younger sister Rose and maybe Abby's forbidden love/friendship interest Orrin, many of the supporting characters, but especially

Abby's father Luther (as well as his second wife, Abby's stepmother Helen, whom Luther marries after his first wife's death) seem to be textually constructed and rendered without all that much if any nuance and finesse (and family patriarch Luther Nichols in particular really does come across, really does for the most part appear simply and utterly as a total and yes also increasingly tediously monotonous cardboard-like stock nasty piece of excrement, which might indeed work well enough in a traditional fairy or folktale, but is simply not all that engaging and entertaining in a full-length novel, even one intended for children, or in the case of Better to Wish and the sequels, young teenaged girls).

Thus, while Ann M. Martin has with her Better to Wish definitely and seemingly done her research and has for certain established a strong and for the most part both historically and culturally accurate sense of time and place, her rather woeful and much lacking character development (and especially that almost ALL of the main antagonists appear as entirely flat type of villains par excellence) as well as the author's lamentable tendency to figuratively and continuously hit her readers over the head with tragedy, with one gloomy and sad scenario after another, all this does leave a more than annoyed and frustrated taste in my mouth, a rather sad feeling of dissatisfaction and therefore only a two star ranking at best for Better to Wish (for to top it all off, I have also and sadly neither enjoyed nor appreciated the for the most part majorly jumpy and disjointedly episodic textual structure, and how much Ann M. Martin usually just leaves unsaid).

Kristen says

I really wanted to like this book. I thought it was the kind of book I would have enjoyed as a kid. I really loved epic family saga historical fiction in middle and high school (I read The Wakefield Legacy an embarrassing amount of times), and I hoped this would bring me back to those days. Unfortunately, this was just a bit too shallow for me. It's told over the span of almost twenty years with short vignettes of Abby's life. But as each story is basically a chapter, and then the next chapter might skip ahead a couple of years, nothing is ever really resolved or gone into in much depth. And the ending with a cliffhanger annoyed me even more because I do want to know what happened, but don't really want to keep reading. Anyway, if you like episodic, slice-of-life stories, you might enjoy this, but it just wasn't for me. While it is a kid's book, it's more upper-middle grade--there is abuse, racism, classism, lots of death, and other big issues discussed that I think would make it more of interest to 5th and 6th graders.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

In 2022, Abby Nicols is 100 years old. and as she says in the Prologue, when you are as old as she is, you have the pleasure of looking over your life and revisiting different days. And that is exactly what Abby does, being in August 1930 when she is eight years old and ending in February 1945, when she is 22 years old.

In between, the reader gets to know quiet intelligent Abby, her younger impetuous, more out spoken sister Rose, her depressed, weak willed Mama, Nel, still grieving for the two babies that didn't survive rather than focusing on her two living daughters, and her controlling, bigoted Pop, Luther, a carpenter.

As the story begins, the depression has already begun to affect people's lives. Money is scarce and work even scarcer, though Pop goes to work every day. Eventually, as city people begin to buy houses in the area to use as summer homes, Pop's business grows and soon there is money enough, but there is also sadness and heartbreak enough.

Mama has another baby, a boy named Fred, but he has severe undefined developmental issues. Fred proves to be almost an unbearable embarrassment to Pop that one day he has him institutionalized behind the family's back. Mama's depression gets worse and not even the birth of a healthy little girl named Adele helps her.

Though Rose is the sassy sister, the one you might think is or will be the rebel in the family, it is actually quiet Abby who continues to be friends with Orrin despite her father's demand that she have nothing to do with him because Pop had decided his parent are lazy French Canadian, Catholics who refuse to work. And Orrin isn't the only friend who would not meet her Pop's approval.

Better to Wish is very much like Abby: it quietly goes along revealing meaningful episodes in her life that ultimately bring Abby to the decisions she makes in 1945. Along the way, Abby experiences her share of happiness and unhappiness, fulfilment and disappointment, kindness and cruelty, life and death.

Better to Wish is a nice historical fiction novel, written in the same vein as the American Girl books, but for a slightly older reader and with a much darker side. In the American Girl books, times may be hard, but the main character's family isn't. They are loving, kind and supportive. Here, times are hard and life at home is often cold, disagreeable and unsympathetic. And yet, I found myself so totally drawn into this compelling, coming of age story.

The novel is written episodically, with about two or three intense entries per year, done to resemble the reminiscences of the 100 year old Abby. These skillfully presented kaleidoscopic bits of Abby's life come together to give the reader a clear picture and understand of growing up in the clutches of the depression.

Better to Wish is the first book in a series of four about one girl in succeeding generations within a family. As author Ann M. Martin explained in Time for Kids "the books are about the highs and lows that each girl faces as she grows up during a different period of history." And if the name Ann M. Martin sounds familiar, you probably remember her from her other series called The Baby-Sitters Club.

The next book, The Long Way Home, will be about Abby's daughter Dana and is due out in November 2013. And I can't wait to read it.

This book is recommended for readers age 9+
This book was obtained from the publisher

The review was originally published at Randomly Reading

Julie Williams says

Okay I wanted to like this, I really did. It's set in Maine so that's good. Unfortunately it just didn't do anything for me. I wanted more - there just didn't seem to be any real plot. Maybe the problem was that it jumped so much and covered so much time that nothing really seemed developed enough. Whatever happened to Freddie for goodness sake? Did anyone ever go see him? And what about Orrin? All of a sudden he was not mentioned anymore. And the ending...don't get me started. Sorry this didn't work at all for me.

jv poore says

Initial intrigue blossomed into complete captivation as Abby's narration revealed an inexplicably sweet, strong and resilient girl—a compassionate, sympathetic soul--in spite of circumstances. The centenarian's story begins on a summer evening in 1930. As one memory leads to another, her life unfolds like a map.

Abby's father feels that Maine should be "white". Specifically, Protestant and Republican. His daughters aren't allowed to befriend a girl because her parents emigrated from Quebec—she's "French", not "white". Also below his determined Nichols' Family Standards; "lazy bums...Irish-Catholics." Certainly vocal with his opinion, he nevertheless does not seem to stand out to the family, or the community, as a particularly obnoxious, racist fool.

Although Abby's mother has many bad days with "her mind stuck thinking" of two tremendous losses that left permanent holes in her heart; Dad wants a son. Baby Fred arrives. At home, Dad can pretend that Fred is developing, learning and growing at an average rate. Abby, Rose and their mother know differently, but it has no impact on their love and devotion to the charming child.

At the age of 5, Fred behaves like any toddler—including the time he is forced to sit through a high school awards ceremony. Due to the perceived public embarrassment, the head of the household deems his son less than perfect. Imperfection is unacceptable, leaving Mr. Nichols with no choice. He informs the family after exercising his "only" option.

Throughout the tumultuous times, Abby intuitively empathizes and instinctively protects those she loves and holds dear first, all other human beings second, thinking of her own wants and needs last, if at all. Abby is the epitome of "good people" and her story instills hope.

This review was written for Buried Under Books by jv poore.

Peg says

3.5/5*—Martin has crafted a quiet story of vignettes woven together to introduce us to 8-yr-old Abby, who lives with her parents and sister in a small town in Maine in the 1930s. Her mother suffers from depression (tied to the death of two babies); her father is domineering, bigoted, verbally abusive and class-conscious. When his carpenter business becomes quite successful, he moves the family to a large house in the nearby larger town. At least Abby can continue to see her two best friends Sarah and Orrin during the school day. Over the next ten years, Sarah drowns, Orrin moves away, Abby entertains several beaus, and a new son who is disabled is born into the family. Abby grows into a caring and resilient young woman in spite of her mother's growing distance and her father's behavior. Her story shows the class distinction of the era as well as the limited role of women in an upper middle class family.

Miss Amanda says

SLJ gr 3-7 226pgs

1930s-1945 Lewisport, Maine. The story starts when Abby is about 8 years old and ends when she is about 22. The story follows Abby and her family as they discover that money can't buy happiness. As her father's business grows more successful, Abby's family isn't able to enjoy their success because of a number of tragedies including the accidental death of Sarah, Abby's best friend, her father's lack of understanding toward Fred (Abby's little brother who is developmentally delayed?), her mother's depression etc.

Each chapter describes one episode in her life. Months and sometimes years pass between each chapter. In each chapter, some sort of tragedy or conflict occurs and is dealt with in an abrupt manner. The reader is given no sense of closure because as soon as the chapter ends the story skips ahead a few months or years.

I'm not sure who I would recommend this book to.

Abra says

What... what the heck was that?

I'm hard-pressed to think of a book I have more intensely disliked while reading. It feels to me like the author was bucking HARD for a Newberry and thought Newberry = depressing as hell. But Newberry also equals other things like cohesive plot and excellent story telling, which this book did not have.

The writing is average at best. Its difficult to tell what age she is writing for. The simple style feels intended for young readers but the content is dark and the book ends with the heroine in her twenties.

The chapters jump ahead years at a time, so characters disappear and plot threads are never resolved. There is very little genuine character development. I didn't care much for any of the characters. I was intensely frustrated most of the time, for one reason or another, usually because nothing was ever shown being resolved.

Most importantly, it was terribly, TERRIBLY depressing. Granted, many of my favorite children's literature has dark themes. Watership Down, Island of the Blue Dolphins, The Giver, The Boy in Striped Pajamas, etc. But those books also contain childlike wonder, curiosity, humor, adventure, and many other things that balance out the darkness and give an overall impression of, if not hope, than a full life. This book was just a series of really terrible things happening to a family controlled by an emotionally abusive father. There was no lightness, no humor, no bright side to balance out all the deaths and miscarriages and abuse.

I don't normally slam books this hard but I really loathed this one. Despite a promising time period and premise, it doesn't offer much to anyone, child OR adult.

Barbara says

It will be interesting to watch how the author connects the four books that represent four generations of a family, and I'm excited to see here tackling historical fiction here. This first book centers around Abby Nichols, eight when the book starts in 1930. Her controlling and often-angry father turns out to be quite a bigot, a characteristic noted when he refuses to allow her to play with immigrant or Catholic children. Mr. Nichols is upwardly mobile, determined to make a better life, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but he seems to care little about how his wife and children feel. As often happens, the wealthier he grows, the more distance there is between him and his family. The final straw occurs when he puts Fred, his special needs son, in an institution without allowing the others to say goodbye. Throughout all the ups and downs in the family's lives, Abby remains solid, constantly studying and earning top marks. Sadly, her father sees no reason for her to attend college. I liked a lot of the elements in this story and felt as though I were viewing history through Abby's eyes. Gloria Steinem once wrote about how the personal is political, and this book is a fine example of that. As far as what I didn't like: characters drifted in and out of Abby's life, there was no resolution of her brother's fate, and her mother's death was handled rather swiftly. I haven't made up my mind about the ending either, but I certainly liked Abby, and I'm sure others will as well.

Jennifer Rayment says

4.5/5

The Good Stuff

Very realistic and true to the time period (warning some of it is quite sad and may be hard for the more sensitive reader but it is written beautifully and appropriate for the age level)

Abby is a strong willed likeable character that you will cheer for

Loved the relationship between Abby and Rose

Moral issues are done in a non preachy way which is an impressive feat for middle grade fiction

Will encourage readers to learn more about this period of history

Liked the slice of life and how the series will go through 4 generations of women. Reminded me a little of a series by Phillappa Carr that I read when I was a teen. This type of series really appeals to me

All of the characters feel very real and act appropriately for this period of time

Looking forward to reading the rest of the series

Lovely use of humour

The Not So Good Stuff

Jumpy at times

Father is a misogynistic racist jerk

Favorite Quotes/Passages

"Long years later, when Abby was old, very old, she liked to recall this evening. Not because Rose had lost her dime, of course, but because it was pleasant to dwell in this time when losing a dime was the biggest worry she and Rose faced. They hadn't yet learned that it was better not to know what was waiting for them

around the corner."

"When we grow up," said Sarah, "we should tell our husbands that we have to live next door to each other so that we can see each other every single day and our children can be best friends, too."

Who Should/Shouldn't Read

Great book for middle grade girls who are not into the paranormal

Some more sensitive middle graders might want to stay away as it deals with darker subject matter like mental issues, racism, death and depression

Fans of the babysitter's club will enjoy this series as the writing style is the same and highlights the importance of friendships

4.5 Dewey's

I received this from Scholastic in exchange for an honest review

Ms. Yingling says

Abby is looking back at her life in the year 2022, when she is 100 years old. In anecdotal chapters, she recalls various scenes from her life that made an impact on her. Raised by a controlling father and a sad, frail mother, Abby and her sister Rose live in a small coastal town and get along as best they can.

Strengths: Historical events such as the Great Depression and WWII effect Abby, and details of everyday life are nicely portrayed.

Weaknesses: This was possibly the most depressing historical fiction book I've come across. Whatever bad things could happen, did happen. The poor mother. She suffers the father's abuse, has multiple miscarriages, finally has a baby boy who is "feeble-minded" and is sent to an institution and eventually dies. At least Abby manages to break free from her family, but the whole book made me too sad to think about handing it to a student. I was surprised at Martin-- Picky Reader adored the Doll Family books, which are a bit happier!

Katie Fitzgerald says

In the year 2022, Abby Nichols turns 100 years old. As she looks back on her life, she recalls her entire girlhood, from age 8 to age 22, remembering the many ups and downs she endured under the rule of her controlling father. She remembers her little brother, Fred, born with unexplained mental and physical problems, her mother who lay in bed haunted by the memory of two babies who didn't survive, and who never had the courage to stand up to her husband, and the secret friendships Abby maintained with people her father hated - mainly Catholics and Democrats. Through it all, Abby keeps things in perspective, and when she is old enough to make up her own mind, she does so, for better or for worse.

Better to Wish is the first book in a planned set of four stories that will explore the childhoods of four different women from four generations of the same family. In a lot of ways, this book is everything I fear about historical fiction. There is a lot of unhappiness, a lot of death, and a lot of unfairness, which, at times,

can make the story seem grim. Abby's father is an oppressive presence in the story, and his cruelty only seems to grow as the years pass by. Abby's mother is an obvious victim of her husband's controlling nature, and Fred, too, ultimately suffers punishment for being "different." Because this book is by Ann M. Martin, however, I didn't run screaming from it when I realized it would make me sad. Somehow, through her gentle, straightforward style, Martin makes it comfortable to explore these darker aspects of growing up. She foreshadows bad things before they happen, so the reader is never blindsided, and Abby is such a strong main character, the reader always winds up feeling that she has everything under control.

I find it wonderful that no matter what Ann M. Martin writes, there is always something in it to remind me of the Baby-sitters Club. She creates characters who seem like real children, and whose interactions with one another ring true. Though this book takes place between 1930 and 1942, the dialogue sounds fresh and feels contemporary. Martin brings the entire time period to life by making the characters very accessible to her audience. Abby's relationship with her sisters Rose and Adele reminds me a lot of similar relationships in others of Ann M. Martin's books - Kristy and Karen in the Baby-sitters Club, Pearl and Lexie in Ten Rules for Living with My Sister, and even the relationships among the Rosso kids in Ten Kids, No Pets. It makes me so happy to be able to enjoy new books by my favorite childhood author, even as an adult.

Historical fiction readers who enjoy the American Girl books will be drawn to this new series, but I think even realistic fiction readers who normally avoid historical fiction will find it hard to pass up a series that explores so many interesting connections between generations.

Amanda Caldwell says

Review originally posted at The Book Babe, [HERE](#).

Better To Wish is the latest book in a new series from author Ann M. Martin. Most young women will remember Ann M. Martin as the author of the famous 90s book series, The Babysitter's Club. When, I first started reading this book, I really had no idea what to expect and I didn't know what it was about. Both on Netgalley, where I requested the ARC, and Goodreads there was a one or two line description which really told nothing about the story. But, the book was from Ann M. Martin and nostalgia for The Babysitter's Club wouldn't let me not request this book.

This book follows the life of Abigail Cora Nichols, at the time we enter the book she's 8-years-old and living in a small cottage near the Maine coastline. We know her mother has lost two babies and Abby and her sister, Rose, are the only of the four to have survived. As the book moves along, her mother's depression basically becomes debilitating. We know her dad, Luther, has a horrible temper and cares a lot about keeping up appearances. To add some spice to the list of his negative attributes, he is also very prejudiced. He does not like Catholics, Jews, French Canadians, or anyone else who isn't a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP). Even though the book is set during The Great Depression, it also turns out that he does not like "lazy people" who do not work... even if there's no work to be had.

Just to stop there, you're probably thinking "wow, that's a lot of heavy stuff." Let me just say, it gets worse. I don't want to spoil it, but in every chapter there seems to be some grim event. The book overall is very sad, but I think it's very true to life. Especially for that era. The book follows Abby from the time she's eight until she graduates from high school and a bit beyond that. So, there's plenty of room for terrible things to happen.

At first, I wanted to say that this book isn't really the kind of book that a child should read. According to

Amazon, the book is for ages eight-and-up. Thinking of a child reading about depression, grief, prejudice, and some other sad stuff just didn't seem appropriate. But, then I thought children are way too sheltered nowadays. Everything is always rainbows and sunshine and even though this book has its difficult topics, it's also uplifting. You can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I think it would be good for kids to read this. Adults too.

I so loved this book. I connected with it. I loved Abigail, the main character. I cannot wait for the next one to find out what happens after the cliffhanger at the end. Abigail is a great role model for young girls. She is so intelligent and insightful. No matter what happens, she is never down on herself, nor does she mope and whine. We could all learn a lesson from Abby. That's why I'm giving this book 5 out of 5 stars, the highest honor.

In my last review of a children's book, *Secondhand Horses*, I spoke about how a great children's book will connect with readers of all ages. This is one of those books. Do yourself a favor and read it. I did not expect to enjoy a book for children as much as I did this one. I'm very eager to see how this unique series will play out.

I received this book as an Advanced Reader Copy (ARC) courtesy of Netgalley and Scholastic in exchange for an honest review.

Madi says

This book almost explain's all the up's and downs in a girl's life. Abby the main character has a lot going on. I was shocked when I had read the her Mom and her best friend from childhood die. This was a sad yet a happy story that I would definitely recommend this book. It was cool that the author was really Abby's granddaughter. One of the best books that I've ever read.
