



Mary Anne and the Memory Garden

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After a fun winter break, Mary Anne is glad to be back at SMS. She's excited about her English project, and optimistic about the weeks ahead.

Nothing could have prepared Mary Anne for the awful news that Amelia Freeman, a friend and a partner on her English project has suddenly died.

Everyone at school is shocked and saddened. Gradually the other kids recover. But Mary Anne only feels worse. If only she could do something for Amelia. . .

Mary Anne and the Memory Garden Details

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From Reader Review **Mary Anne and the Memory Garden** for online ebook

Ds says

Uhm, finalmente un argomento che volevo si affrontasse già molto tempo prima. La morte di un compagno di classe (o di qualcuno di giovane). Non voglio essere morbosa. E' solo che ero molto curiosa di sapere come le ragazzine avrebbero reagito. Facendo qualcosa ovviamente! Eppure ci sono dei piccoli tocchi che ho apprezzato molto. Il fatto che Mary Anne riveli di essere stata da una psicoterapeuta, di andarci nuovamente (oltre che usufruire dell'aiuto fornito a scuola), le cose di cui si preoccupa, la soluzione che decidono di adottare alla fine del libro. Non c'è niente di straordinariamente innovativo, anche perché è stato pubblicato nel '95, però non mi è dispiaciuto leggere questa storia.

Nancy says

In which a character we know nothing about and have never seen before - meh, maybe she was mentioned in passing in a previous book to set this one up, but not much - dies and MA is traumatized.

Bec says

I'll admit it, I got teary eyed. Mary Anne and the Memory Garden is a BSC book where the girls learn to cope in their own way after a classmate is tragically killed. I like the BSC books where they deal with an issue like this.

April says

Fantastic books for young girls getting into reading!! Great stories about friendship and life lessons. The characters deal with all sorts of situations and often find responsible solutions to problems.

I loved this series growing up and wanted to start my own babysitting business with friends. Great lessons in entrepreneurship for tweens.

The books may be dated with out references to modern technology but the story stands and lessons are still relevant.

Awesome books that girls will love! And the series grows with them! Terrific Author!

Rachel Brand says

I remember reading this at the age of nine and thinking about how different it was from the usual BSC books.

They'd dealt with serious issues in the past, but this book just had a generally serious feel all throughout.

Ciara says

my bias against mary anne strikes again. okay, so, mary anne's english class is doing a group project on william shakespeare. mary anne is assigned to a group with gordon brown (who was a good sport about having to partner with howie johnson on the egg baby project), barbara hirsch, & amelia freeman. barbara & amelia are best friends & mary anne likes both of them, though we have never heard of them before. they decide to write a newspaper about shakespeare's historical time period, with reviews of his plays, current events from the day, sales for wagons & other olde-thyme crap, etc. it's a cute idea & everyone is excited about it. amelia leaves their first brainstorming session a little early because she's checking out a new italian restaurant with her family. mary anne goes to bed feeling happy & excited about the project.

the next morning, she is running late. by the time she catches up with the babysitters club members to walk the school, they have all heard that there was an car accident outside town the night before. claudia has more details: it was a family of four, hit by a drunk driver. a 13-year-old died. everyone else is alive, though they have broken bones.

the principal calls a school-wide assembly to break the news that amelia is the 13-year-old that was killed. everyone cries. the principal has grief counselors standing by, & tells the students that they are allowed to miss class the following week to attend amelia's funeral. mary anne is stunned. kristy handles the news worst of all. she just can't stop crying. at lunch, she rails against drunk drivers & abby agrees (her father was also killed in an accident caused by a drunk driver). stacey worries about what to say to amelia's brother & to barbara when she sees them. abby is really grim & is like, "tell them you're sorry for their loss & you will miss amelia. don't just ignore them." claudia agrees & says that she appreciated it when people mentioned mimi to her, rather than pretending that mimi never died. mary anne is so concerned about kristy's weepy reaction to the news that she doesn't really think about anything else.

a few days later in english class, the teacher asks mary anne's group if they want to scale back their project to something more easily accomplished by three people. they decide to follow through with the newspaper idea to honor amelia & her suggestions.

kristy is STILL not handling her shit well. she's distracted at BSC meetings & can't stop crying. finally abby suggests that they start a stoneybrook chapter of students against driving drunk to honor amelia's memory. kristy throws herself into the project & is soon back to her usual non-stop idea machine self. but then mary anne starts to feel really sad, despairing, hopeless, & listless. she starts sleeping all the time & can't concentrate. after a week of this, she calls her old therapist, dr. reese. she admits to dr. reese that she is angry that amelia's life was snuffed out so young, because of someone else's selfish carelessness. she tells dr. reese about kristy's surprisingly emotional reaction to amelia's death & students against driving drunk. dr. reese points out that kristy's reaction was about a loss of control--it scared her that amelia could die in a car accident with no warning & there was nothing anyone could do. starting students against driving drunk was a way for kristy to regain a sense of control. as long as mary anne could divert her energy into taking care of kristy, she felt okay, but now that kristy is standing on her own two feet again, mary anne has nothing to feel but sadness over her friend's death. she is in mourning & she just needs to work through it. this makes mary anne feel a little better, but she thinks she will feel a lot better if she can find a way to honor amelia's memory.

she is inspired by letters from dawn about a project she has taken on in california. there was an abandoned lot in her neighborhood, full of trash & old wood & all kinds of crap. dawn thought it was an eyesore & a health hazard, especially after one of her sitting charges fell in the lot & punctured his hand on an old rusty nail. she gathers together some friends & sitting charges & they clean out the lot. then they hold a fundraiser in the neighborhood to buy gardening gear, & they turn the lot into a beautiful community garden. on the day they do their planting, the owner of the lot shows up. he points out that they may have cleaned & beautified the lot, but it's still his lot, & he could tear out all their plants or sell the lot or do whatever he wants. he makes dawn nervous, but he says he will let them have their garden. a few weeks later he stops by again while dawn is weeding with one of her sitting charges. dawn realizes he was checking up to make sure people are really taking care of the garden & it's not just a fleeting fancy. he tells dawn that he is giving the garden to the neighborhood.

mary anne decides that the students at stoneybrook middle school should plant a garden for amelia. she pitches the idea to barbara & amelia's brother, josh, & they like it. they ask the administrators, & after some wrangling, the school offers them the school courtyard. they'll plant flowers & install a bench with a plaque with amelia's name on it. mary anne knows she will always miss amelia, but she feels better having done something productive & beautiful to honor amelia's memory.

basically, this book was a huge snore. i guess it handled the "death of a classmate" storyline pretty decently, but it definitely had a treacly "very special episode" feel.

M.M. Strawberry Reviews says

Drunk driving is bad. It takes innocent lives. So don't drink and drive, mmkay. Mary Anne agrees with that message 100 percent because one of her friends was killed by a drunk driver, mmkay.

Samantha Glasser says

I don't remember this book, but I have an old diary where I wrote a note to my friend apologizing for laughing at her for crying when she read this. I told her, "I am crying too."

Alex says

I'm sick again and craving a BSC comfort read, so I grabbed this one off my bookshelf. I've always loved this book, especially since the quality of these were definitely tapering off by this time yet this one is actually really good.

I recently lost my best friend, and reading about other people grieving was strangely comforting to me. For the short time it took me to read this, I could concentrate on someone else's sorrow over mine, and for that I am grateful.

Mary says

This book was sad AF. However, 5 stars for the character Mr. Seitz. We need more Seitz characters in all books.

Samantha says

This book resonated with me when I was younger. I read this at the end of 5th grade, and when I was in 6th grade I had a very wonderful teacher pass away. I had had family members die before, but that was different for me. I had been much younger, and not able to fully comprehend the situation. When he died, however, it just...hit in a different way. One moment he had been alive, young and vibrant and fun, and then he was gone. He'd been in a bad car accident a couple of months prior and had told us all about it. He hadn't been hurt, and had felt lucky to walk away. Then, out of nowhere, a heart issue he hadn't known about did him in.

This book helped me cope a little better, by making me feel that grief was universal. I wasn't just feeling it, everyone else around me was too. When I re-read this book today at work, I admit I teared up. Some things are hard to read about, even in a kids book. It just felt real, and I think that they handled the topic well. It was very eloquently done for a BSC book.

Shira says

in the first TRULY GOOD book by ghostwriters Jahnna Beecham and Malcolm Hillgartner (for real, their books up to this point have gotten an average of 2 stars out of me), mary anne is excited about the group she's been assigned to for her shakespeare project, which consists of some of her favorite acquaintances, including amelia freeman, who has been referenced as an 8th grader at sms before (as far as I can remember, only in Dawn Saves the Planet). her excitement is cut short when amelia is suddenly killed by a drunk driver. the book quickly turns into a case study about different types of reactions to grief. many kids in the school are very angry at the drunk driver, while others struggle to figure out how to behave around amelia's brother and best friend. kristy seems to be taking it the hardest; at bsc meetings, she stares blankly at a wall and says nothing, which if you know anything about kristy is truly truly disturbing behavior. when some kids start an SADD chapter at sms, kristy gets better, since she is able to throw herself into a project. but mary anne still struggles with her sadness and even goes to see dr. reese, a therapist she has seen in the past (who we know about from Chain Letter), who explains to her that it's normal to be sad about losing a friend. eventually mary anne decides to memorialize amelia by helping create a garden on the sms grounds. part of how she comes to this decision is the only reason for the exceedingly mundane subplot, in which dawn is upset that a local lot in palo city is crappy, so she and her friends and babysitting charges fix it up and turn it into a community garden. this subplot would be boring in any book, but it's borderline offensive in this book, since these chapters have such a radical difference in tone from the others.

highlights, most of which are just sad moments that were handled well:

- the number one most important thing is that it's a mary anne book but I still liked it. mary anne actually has a reason to be sad, so I don't have my usual problem of her making other people's sadnesses about her.
- claud is making a rube goldberg invention. I love it, mostly because it makes me think about how in this day and age with all the arts inclusion in STEM stuff she would probably actually thrive in school
- for their shakespeare project, mary anne and amelia's group intends to make an elizabethan newspaper

complete with a gossip column, hints from heloise, etc. that are thematically appropriate for shakespeare's time. so cute!

-amelia talks about having mary anne and the other kids in their shakespeare project group go with her family to dinner, but they can't because the family has a small car and they wouldn't fit in it. mary anne remembers this at one point and wonders whether she would've been in the car for the crash. it adds a level of intensity, since she knows she could've been in the car.

-dr. reese's theory about kristy's inability to recover from amelia's death and then her sudden bounce back after starting the SADD chapter is that kristy felt helpless and needed to do something to channel her anger, and organizing something made her feel productive and like she was solving a problem.

-when josh (amelia's brother) comes back to school, kids don't know how to talk to him so they avoid him. claud talks about how when mimi died she appreciated people talking about mimi and felt like they didn't care about her death if they avoided talking about her. abby says that in spite of the awkwardness, josh will appreciate people talking to him about amelia.

-one of sharon's best friends died when she was young. she tells about how she used to pick up the phone to call jane when something funny happened and then remember.

-mary anne is worried that she will behave inappropriately at the funeral (cry too loud, say the wrong thing to the family, etc) and the guidance counselor tells her it's normal to feel that way

-mary anne talks to josh when he's finally back at school to give him condolences and he totally breaks down

-I love this line: "even though I know that therapists can help you with your problems, a tiny part of me worries that I might be crazy." so many people feel this way, and they could all use therapy (because everyone could use therapy)

-at dr. reese's behest, mary anne makes an amelia journal of her memories. she puts in good and bad things about her, keeping her human

-damn, I'm crying. josh's speech at the dedication of the garden: "in closing I would like to thank someone who can't be here to accept your applause. someone who was always willing to listen when I needed to talk. someone who made sure I was included in her friends' games. someone who was never ashamed to tell me she loved me. I'd like to thank my sister. we love you, amelia. and we will always miss you."

-ann's note at the end includes a reference to her friend lisa novak peretz who was brutally murdered (because she and others made the lisa novak libraries in honor of her, like mary anne helps to make the garden in honor of amelia)

lowlights/nitpicks:

-a kid at school says that a drunk driver is as bad as someone who takes a gun and shoots someone. now, I really hate drunk driving and think it's awful and think that people who do it suck but this is just not true. death due to neglect versus death due to intent: both legally and morally different.

-the dawn plotline. it makes the book feel weirdly disjointed.

claud outfit:

"Today she was wearing a black derby hat with a red-and-white polka dot ribbon, which matched her "ruby slippers" (high-top sneakers with red sequins). Black-and-white striped trousers with red suspenders, and a black long-sleeved T-shirt completed the outfit."

mary anne outfits:

"I was wearing...a vest Claud had found at a vintage clothing store. She'd decorated it with funky pins and a burgundy silk rose corsage. I was wearing the vest, along with my denim skirt and a white blouse Dad had given me for Christmas."

"I raced back to my room, threw on the first things I could find--a jean skirt, red cotton sweater and loafers--then made a beeline for the stairs."

snacks in claudia's room:

-pretzels (n.s.)

-homemade cookies shaped like top hats with "happy new year!" written on them

-apple cider (n.s.)

-chocolate stars (n.s.)

Shannon says

At this point in my BSC reading career, I vaguely recall being disappointed at the random new things that would seem thrown into the books. Mary Anne was my favorite character, but she seemed way too sappy in this book.

Hannah says

*2.5

Logan Hughes says

Mary Anne enjoys getting closer to Amelia Freeman, a girl she knew slightly, through a group English project. When Amelia is suddenly killed by a drunk driver, everyone is shocked. Mary Anne becomes depressed, and returns to her old counselor Dr. Reese. After reading letters where Dawn describes cleaning up an old vacant lot with neighborhood kids, Mary Anne decides to plant a garden in Amelia's memory. While the grief and permanence of her friend's death remain insoluble problems, by the end of the book, Mary Anne's world is starting to look a little brighter.

This is no Claudia and the Sad Good-bye, but it has its tear-jerky moments. I like that the authors spent some time building up a low-key future-oriented school plot for Amelia before suddenly killing her off, which would have created a nice slap in the face if you didn't already know from the title, the back cover summary, and the fact that Amelia is the only new character (classic redshirt), that she is dead by chapter 5. The description of the unreal feeling in the school following the death of a girl everyone knew seems realistic. Kristy's arc is especially interesting: at first, she seems even more upset by the death than Mary Anne, although she didn't know Amelia as well. She keeps repeating things like, "She was so young. She had her whole life ahead of her." As Dr. Reese notes, Kristy's solution of throwing herself into action--forming a chapter of S.A.D.D. at the school--helps her more than it helps Mary Anne because it addresses the roots of her grief (shock, injustice, powerlessness), whereas Mary Anne's sadness is more about missing a friend.

Rant: The fact that Amelia was only introduced in this book is a problem. Even the other minor characters in the book (such as the other two members of Mary Anne's study group) are reused stock characters. With only one new character in a "somebody dies!" book, there's no suspense. I know it's a PSA about drunk driving, not a ratings stunt, and they couldn't very well kill off one of the baby-sitters (nor would I have liked that), but couldn't they have used one of the poorly-developed background characters? Someone whose name we've seen again and again, just so we feel like it's someone we know, someone who couldn't possibly die because they're a fixture in the world. Would it really have been so bad to kill off Erica Blumberg or Trevor Sandbourne?

Lingering Questions: Seriously, WHEN was Dr. Reese introduced? She's been mentioned twice in the series now--here and in Claudia and the Perfect Boy. I've read all the Mary Anne books before that and there is nothing, nothing about her going to therapy. Surely it wasn't in "Mary Anne and the Zoo Mystery" or something.

EDIT: Dr. Reese is first mentioned in Chain Letter. Thanks, Shira.

Weirdest Moment: On her first day back to school after break, Mary Anne temporarily forgets how to open her locker, and Alan Gray helps her. A weirdly long amount of time is spent on this sequence, such that it feels like it's setting you up for a moment later when Alan is accused of either taking something or planting something in Mary Anne's locker. This does not happen. In fact, Alan Gray doesn't appear in the rest of the book at all. I know we're part of a larger universe here, but, call me old-fashioned, I feel like it's weird to elaborately introduce members of the ensemble that you don't plan on using in this volume.

Timing: January, immediately after winter break

Revised Timeline: Beginning of the second semester of junior year of college
