

Blackwood and Brouwer Booksellers Review

Looking for Me, by Betsy R. Rosenthal

9780547610849, \$15.99

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

April, 2012

Notable: verse novel, historical fiction based on authors mother; period photographs; different look at Depression; NOT *Cheaper by the Dozen* (although there are 12 children); family interaction; a not-especially-religious Jewish family, coming of age; inspiring, but not in a sappy way; very appealing cover.

Review: There's a lot going on in this little book (166 pages including glossary and author's note). It covers a year in the life of 11 year old Edith, the 4th of twelve children growing up in Baltimore in 1936. Her youngest sister is born, one of her brother's dies, she starts work at the family diner (often working until after midnight), and is inspired by her teacher (eventually going to college - first girl in family to do so). The poetry is tight and poignant, using very few words to get a point across - everything from her father's lack of interest in his children, to her fear of spelling bees, to sibling relationships. There is humor and love, as well as hardship and loss. Rosenthal is very good at showing, not telling, letting the reader figure it out. Here's the poem "Winter's on Its Way", about halfway through the book. A succinct, and, dare I say beautiful, description of poverty.

"And I wish I had new shoes
to wear on this rainy day.
But I don't,
so I stuff cardboard
deep down in the soles
of my hand-me-down-downs
and pray I'll get to school
before the rain
soaks through the holes."

We get to know Edith, and she gets to know herself. Brilliant.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 9