

ROSENTHAL, Betsy R. *Looking for Me*. 176p. photos. glossary. Houghton Harcourt. Apr. 2012. Tr \$15.99. ISBN 978-0-547-61084-9. LC number unavailable.

Gr 4-7—A luminous free-verse novel, based on Rosenthal's mother's Depression-era childhood in Baltimore. The fourth of 12 children, Edith Paul wrestles with figuring out her place in the family. The author's apt Russian-nesting-dolls' metaphor—"and there's always/one more inside,/sort of like/my family"—gives readers a vivid picture of Edith's struggle to maintain her individuality. Mature beyond her years, the 12-year-old describes herself for a school assignment as "the good little mother," dutifully watching over her younger siblings. Still, she longs simply to be a kid, playing stickball or double Dutch. Frustrated that her family is never invited to Seders, bar mitzvahs, and weddings, Edith is lovingly reminded by Bubby (Grandmother) Etta that with so many children, the Pauls have their own party. When heartrending loss threatens to extinguish the family's happiness, Edith finds inspiration in school and, with her teacher's encouragement, contemplates a promising future. At first, familial obligations and rigid gender roles—"We don't have money for college,/and girls don't need to go anyways," says her father—threaten to derail Edith's plans. However, buoyed by her mother's and grandmother's support, Edith forges ahead. A heartening epilogue states that she was the only girl in her family to earn a college degree. Touching photos of the Paul family and a glossary clarifying Yiddish terms and Jewish traditions nicely round out the book. Rosenthal's spare writing superbly captures the emotional growth of a girl on the cusp of adolescence, despite its specific historical context.—Lalitha Nataraj, Escondido Public Library, CA