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I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth The Trip.



Synopsis

The 40th anniversary edition of a groundbreaking teen classic When the grandmother who raised him dies, Davy Ross, a lonely thirteen-year-old boy, must move to Manhattan to live with his estranged mother. Between alcohol-infused lectures about her self-sacrifice and awkward visits with his distant father, Davy's only comfort is his beloved dachshund Fred. Things start to look up when he and a boy from school become friends. But when their relationship takes an unexpected turn, Davy struggles to understand what happened and what it might mean. Shattering frank intelligent. Horn Book This book should be available wherever young people read. New York Times Sophisticated remarkably touching. Time magazine New York Times Best of 1969 Book List School Library Journal Best of 1969 Book List This anniversary edition features reflections from Brent Hartinger (Geography Club), Martin Wilson (What They Always Tell Us), and Kathleen T. Horning (Director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center), with a foreword by Stacey Donovan (Dive).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Martin Wilson wrote an essay about John Donovan's 1969 novel I'LL GET THERE, IT BETTER BE WORTH THE TRIP in the recently published excellent THE LOST LIBRARY: GAY FICTION REDISCOVERED. He, along with two other writers Brent Hartinger and Kathleen T. Horning, offer "reflections" in this 40th anniversary of this perfect book that has the distinction of being the first young adult novel to deal with teen homosexuality. While there are literally dozens of novels-- some better than others of course-- on the subject now, the publication of this book had to have been a

watershed in 1969, just a year before Gordon Merrick unleashed THE LORD WON'T MIND on unsuspecting gay readers. (As I recall, the ads in the long-since defunct "After Dark" magazine touted that novel as the first gay novel that has a happy ending or nobody dies or some such.) But I digress. Mr. Donovan's novel was a fine novel in 1969; it's a fine novel today. The narrator is Davy Ross, a thirteen-year-old, who, when the novel opens, has just lost his beloved grandmother with whom he has been living. After he has to go to New York to live with his alcoholic mother-- she often starts drinking in the early mornings-- here are his thoughts on his loving grandmother and his guilt as he has to go on with his new life in New York: "I feel guilty as h--l that I haven't thought of Grandmother for a long time. She's the only person I may ever know I didn't have to put on some big act around. She's the only person I could be myself with. My mother and my father don't know me yet. But I think of them more than of Grandmother, who will be the most important person in my life forever. And they aren't worth my not thinking of Grandmother." Besides having to deal with the mess called his mother, Davy now every Saturday sees his father and his stepmother Stephanie, who is a sensitive and caring person: "Stephanie talks to us as though we are people, not kids and something apart from other people." His own mother of course fluctuates between reminding him, usually while in her cups, that he is a great burden to her and tearfully telling him, that he is the joy of her life, blah, blah, blah. Then there are the pressures of being the new kid in school where on the first day he takes the seat of the mysteriously-absent student named Larry and meets the class jock Altschuler. But through all his perils of moving to a strange new home, Davy has the comfort of his best friend, a dachshund named Fred. Mr. Donovan's prose is precise, beautiful and believable. His insights into the mind of a lonely thirteen-year-old who is dealing with the death of a beloved family member and the problems of adjusting to a new alien environment and becoming a young man ("Some of the guys at home have already had one or two shaves, but I haven't, and to tell the truth I'd like to") are, in the buzzword of the month, spot-on. Finally he handles Davy and Altschuler's friendship and whatever else happens between them with delicacy and grace. This is one of those moving and honest novels that made me wish Mr. Donovan had written a sequel. Or I can fantasize as to what might have been their fates. The boys would be fifty-three now. Their friendship probably would not have survived the separation brought on by their going away to different colleges. One or both of them may have perished in the first wave of AIDS. They would have been at that dangerous age in the 1970's and early 80's when easy sex was available, particularly in big cities. On the other hand, they may have settled in with life partners and had happy lives. In a word, Davy and Altschuler are totally alive characters. This novel is not to be missed.

"I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip" was published in 1969. Donovan's narrator Davy Ross is a captivating presence, even if there are times when he seems younger than his thirteen years. There is a wry clarity in Davy's view of the world; but that clarity masks a child who has been traumatized and who has, as a result, focused all of his attention on his dog, Fred. Fred, mind you, is a wonderful dog, a comical dachshund who the reader has no trouble appreciating. At least I didn't, but I have always had dogs. But even I could see that Fred seemed to be the only source of joy in Davy's life. That can't be good. I was drawn to this book because it was promoted by Brent Hartinger, for me one of the most important YA writers today. His thoughtful essay that accompanies this new edition of Donovan's novel helped me understand my own mixed feelings about Davy and his world. From a modern reader's perspective, "I'll Get There" may seem inadequate, lacking the strong themes of self-affirmation we have come to expect in novels written for and about adolescence. Particularly adolescence that includes the dawning awareness of gayness. But I was thirteen in 1969, and I too had just suffered the sudden death of a loved one; and I, too, had just realized that I was interested in boys, not girls. As I read through Donovan's novel--the first YA novel to ever deal with an emerging gay identity--I couldn't help but recognize what it would have meant to me all those years ago, had I been lucky enough to stumble across it during my own unlucky thirteen. "I'll Get There" is a touching, compelling story, in the voice of a boy who resonates across the decades to remind us that there have always been gay teens; but there have not always been novels written to help them find their way in the world. I loved Davy Ross, and I loved Fred: but even had I not, this book would have been worth the reading just to witness the birth of a new genre in young adult fiction. The world of YA novels changed because of this book. Had I read it at thirteen in 1969, it might have changed my life.

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