



The Way Back Home

Allan Stratton

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Zoe Bird is going nowhere fast. She's angry and lonely, and her only true friend is her granny, whose Alzheimer's is worsening. When her parents put Granny in a home, Zoe decides now is the time to break free. She smuggles Granny out and together they hit the tracks on a cross-country trip to find Zoe's long-lost uncle. But there will be some home truths along the way. . .

An emotional story about family, surviving school and being true to yourself for fans of *The Art of Being Normal* and *Unbecoming*.

The Way Back Home Details

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From Reader Review The Way Back Home for online ebook

Ronni says

When I finished this I felt like I'd just finished a love story. Very sweet, emotional and quite touching.

Kirsty Hanson says

Grab your tissues, because you're seriously going to be taken on an emotional rollercoaster ride with this book. I found this particularly difficult to read because it hit very very close to home with the character of the Granny. I got half way and I just didn't think I could read anymore because it was getting too personal, but I ploughed through it and I'm really glad that I did.

Zoe Bird is going nowhere fast. She's angry and lonely, and her only true friend is her granny, whose Alzheimer's is worsening. When her parents put Granny in a home, Zoe decides now is the time to break free. She smuggles Granny out and together they hit the tracks on a cross-country trip to find Zoe's long-lost uncle. But there will be some home truths along the way... Zoe Bird is going nowhere fast. She's angry and lonely, and her only true friend is her granny, whose Alzheimer's is worsening. When her parents put Granny in a home, Zoe decides now is the time to break free. She smuggles Granny out and together they hit the tracks on a cross-country trip to find Zoe's long-lost uncle. But there will be some home truths along the way. . .

Just because this book is emotional, that doesn't mean that it's a brilliant book. It was good yes, but not one that I would consider reading again. I HATED Zoe's parents. I hated them. I have never ever disliked a pair of fictional parents this much in my life; they made me so angry. They didn't care about Zoe, at all. What kind of parents believes a sadistic, disgusting and horrible girl like Madi over their own daughter? Them, that's who. Because they only saw what they wanted to see and I truly believe that they were projecting; that they wanted Zoe to be like the version of Madi that they saw. When Zoe told them that Madi was bullying her, they didn't believe her for even a second, they told her that she was lying. When Zoe came home when Madi had tried to kill her, they didn't let her explain where she had been, they just went off on one. Ugghhhhhhhhhhh. I FEEL SO BAD FOR ZOE. All she wants to do is be with her Granny and look after her and the parents have to sabotage that as well, by putting her in the care home because no one can be bothered to look after her themselves. 1) Granny said that she wanted to die at home, so they ignored her wishes. 2) She wouldn't let anyone but Zoe bathe her and feed her, but they still sent her to the care home. I just kept seeing a lack of love from the parents because they were so hung up on trying to be like the Dad's brother and his wife.

"If you can't live like you want when you're old, when can you?"

- Allan Stratton, The Way Back Home

So yeah, as you can see, I have a lot of anger about the parents on this book. I'm going to try and not get into another massive rant about the character of Madi because that would last forever. She's just a hateful, self-absorbed brat.

On the pleasant side of things, I really did love how the relationship between Zoe and her Granny was portrayed. The love between the two of them was just amazing. Ok so Zoe was very stupid taking her Granny cross country to Toronto but at the end of the day, Zoe just wanted to help and get her Granny away from a place where she knew that she was miserable. I also thought that Granny's Alzheimer's was written perfectly, I genuinely couldn't fault it and I also loved how Zoe didn't lose her patience with her, she just kept calm and tried her best to make sure Granny was getting what she needed.

It was also amazing to be introduced to a transgender character and even though this was the only element of diversity that existed within the book. However, I have no experience with transgender individuals so I cannot say whether this representation was all good or not. But, she was an amazing woman who deserves a medal for what she had to put up with in her family when she was younger. No one should ever have to go through the transition without the support of their loved ones.

Overall, this was a quick, emotional read. And even though it seemed a bit rushed in places (especially when they were in Toronto), it was still an enjoyable read that I wholeheartedly recommend everyone to read. I stated earlier that I would not be reading this book again. This isn't because it's terrible - because it isn't - it's just because it was too emotional for me as I also said earlier, it hit very close to home. I would love to hear what you guys thought about this book!

Warning: includes triggers for depression, suicidal thoughts, death.

Disclaimer: this book was sent to me by the publisher in exchange for an honest review

Dove says

This was a short and sweet read. You get through it super fast, but the storyline is perfect. There is nothing more the author could have added. I loved the character development, the plot development, etc. Everything was perfect about the book. I liked how it talked about family disputes, LGBTQ+ community, mental illness, etc. There's a girl whose very close with her grandma. Her grandma is going to be sent to a senior home because she has Alzheimers, so she forgets everything. Her memory is getting worse, so it's hard to deal with her, but she really doesn't want to go to a senior home. Zoe, the girl, gets bullied by her cousin, and doesn't fit in at school. So, she takes her grandma and runs away to Toronto, where her uncle stays. They're looking for her uncle because he broke contact with the family for years, but through reading letters between him and her grandma, it seems they used to have a loving relationship. They have difficulty finding him because he's no longer a male but is now a female. The reasoning for the family disputes becomes apparent. I liked how it took place in Toronto, and I liked how Zoe had reasoning for acting out, she wasn't just an emotional teenager. I liked how karma played a role in this book, and everyone got what they deserved. The ending was very emotional, and it made me tear up, but I understood the reasoning behind the family's actions at the end. A beautiful book about family!

Lia says

General Rating: ★

Diversity rating: ★★ (LGBT+: transgender; mental illness: alzheimer's)

The Way Back Home is a story about a girl whose grandmother with Alzheimer's is sent to a care home. And since you're reading this review and I'm assuming after this you won't read this book, my review will contain some spoilers.

First things first, **do not read this book. Unless you hate yourself, then be my guest, read this book.**

Second, **the main character is a horrible brat with serious issues.** If I were her parents, I would definitely put her in some kind of institution because that girl seriously needs to get her act together. She is not only rude to her family, she is mean to everyone (except her grandma), she is self-absorbed, reckless, immature, and if I think she has some type of mental illness (possibly depression?) because what she thinks and does is not normal.

Some quotes of things she says to her parents / thinks about her parents are:

(edit: they're in the car)

I want to kick the back of her seat so hard she'll fly through the windshield.

"I can't wait till you're old," I mutter as we go inside. 'I'll lock you in Greenview so fast your heads'll spin. When you cry and scream like Granny, I'll laugh."

"I hate you. I wish you were dead."

Mom's lip trembles. "What did we do to deserve this?"

"You got pregnant, that's what. Why didn't you get rid of me? I wish you had." I run to my room, smother my face in my pillow. A whirlwind of hollers. "LEAVE ME ALONE LEAVE ME ALONE LEAVE ME ALONE LEAVE ME ALONE!!!" I keep it up till they do.

Third, **the whole book is basically built around the fact that you're supposed to feel sorry for Zoe (the main character), which I didn't obviously** . The side characters are if possible even worse than Zoe. Madi, her cousin, is an absolute bitch. She is literally evil. (view spoiler)

So then her grandmother is sent to an elderly home, which is something I think is completely grounded because she could barely function alone. Zoe completely disagrees with her parents. I am on the parents' side this time. Zoe's parents are not perfect and I would say they were quite bad parents (they believed Madi over their own daughter!). On this topic, however, I think they were completely in the right to put grandma in the home. **When you start to agree with parents in YA books, you're either just too old for the book, or the kid is just stupid. This time it's the latter.**

Zoe decides to break out her grandma and go to her uncle who she never met and don't even know where he lives or let alone lives at all, which is just about **the stupidest decision I've heard so far**. She freaking let her grandmother who can barely function at all drive on the freaking highway. GIRL GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER. Zoe never learns, and even in the end, she is still rude and hateful.

I am giving this book 1 star, because I can't come up with any reasons why I would give it any more stars. **I hated this book, it made me angry and pissed and I just wanted to punch these characters in their face.** The writing was okay and I kind of liked Zoe's relation with her grandmother but that was all of the good things I could come up with. I would honestly not recommend this book to anyone, but if after all of my ranting you still decide to pick it up, I wish you good luck.

This might be the most negative review I have ever written, but every time I think about this book I get angry so...

Maria says

This review may contain some spoilers.

The Way Back Home tells the story of Zoe Bird, an angry, rude and sarcastic teenager, who I ironically fell in love with from the very first page. Usually I find annoying and self-absorbed teenagers... well, annoying and self-absorbed, and I have limited patience for their view of the world. However, something about Zoe captivated me. At one point in the novel, she asks her Granny: 'why do you love me? Why would anyone love me?' If you're finding Zoe to be an unlikeable heroine, I would suggest attempting to see her through her grandmother's eyes: someone who is 'good, and kind, and loyal' with the 'biggest heart in the world.' Behind all her poor behaviour and reckless decisions, I believe that is exactly who she is.

This relationship between Zoe and her Granny is at the heart of the book. It's the reason why I loved it so much. The love they had for each other really resonated with me, and I believe it will resonate with anyone who has loved and lost a grandmother.

(Disclaimer: I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.)

Michelle says

DNF @ p. 50 (ish)

I really wanted to like this. I picked it up because it was nominated for the Governor General Award for Young People's Literature this year and I enjoyed Stratton's mystery/horror novel THE DOGS a few years ago.

The first 50 pages was comprised almost entirely of dialogue. This isn't a bad thing in of and itself, but the way the characters spoke was very forced, stilted and unnatural. I wish I could provide some examples, but I've already returned my library copy. I had no issues with the other elements (plot, characters, etc.), and I might have been able to get past the dialogue as well if it didn't take up so much of the prose.

I have too many books I'd like to get to, so I'm not going to force myself to read something I likely wouldn't like.

Eve beinguniquebooks says

Zoe is misunderstood by her parents and bullied by her vile cousin whom films an extreme case of threat

against Zoe as they find it hilarious making Zoe beg for her life, literally.

Her gran suffers with Alzheimer's and is getting slowly worse and more forgetful as well as being prone to going wandering alone with her confusion getting herself into dangerous situations.

Her gran though, wishes to not be stuck in a home and so Zoe takes on the task of tracking down Teddy her grand absent son and set to repairing their relationship so her gran can eventually die as she wishes eventually in her own beloved home, The Bird House.

As a shocking twist with finding Teddy happens they rely on kind strangers to help them by crashing in their spare room. Not wanting to go home and risk Gran going back to the care home she detests, Zoe needs to make a choice about whether to go home or run further...

A story which shows family loyalty at it's finest as Zoe refuses to let her gran be unhappy where she doesn't want to be. The bullying aspect is horrific but not unbelievable as situations have probably happened where things have been that severe in events. Meanwhile, the family relationship is so broken when they begin to make amends for not listening to their daughter they finally bond a little like a realistic normal family. I immensely enjoyed this book especially highlighting Alzheimer's as an illness in YA as any young carers will relate to Zoe in how she has to aid her gran so much.

A test of family ties and the bond between generations.

Bruce Gargoyle says

I received a copy of this title for review from the publisher via Netgalley.

DNF at 36%

Ten Second Synopsis:

Zoe's loves her grandmother dearly and is devastated and rage-filled when her granny is put in an old folks' home after her dementia becomes apparent.

This could have been a good read, but I could not get past the immature, repellent protagonist or her immature, repellent relatives. In fact, everyone in this book seemed aggravatingly immature except for the granny and in the first third of the book she wasn't in it nearly enough. I'd recommend How Not To

Disappear if you're looking for a similar, but much better, book about girls and their grannies on a road trip with dementia as the third passenger.

Miriam Smith says

Won in the Goodreads Giveaways - not read, passed on.

Megan says

This is a lovely YA novel that straddles the perspectives of youth and old age beautifully. It is complex but easy to read and engage with at the same time.

Janay Brazier says

I liked it but I didn't love it. I had my Kindle of text-to-speech reading it too me most of the time. I liked the idea of it and the writing was pretty good but I didn't gel with the characters like I wanted to. I felt for her when she was being bullied but overall I didn't feel much. Maybe I'll reread it at some point to try again because reading a new book after ACOWAR was never going to feel amazing.

Kulturalnie z Ani? says

Mia?a wzloty i upadki..bardzo szybko si? j? czyta?o,jednak w?tki LGBT,choroby czy problemów rodzinnych by?y nieco na si?? wci?ni?te i dosy? p?askie.Sama poprawiaj?c t? opowie?? na pewno doda?abym od siebie nieco bardziej wyszukany j?zyk,bohaterowie byliby bardziej wyrazi?ci,a sama historia jeszcze mocniej z?apa?aby za serce.
Dla mniej wymagaj?cych czytelnik?w nie b?dzie to jednak z?a lektura.B?dzie szybka,przyjemna i przy tym poruszaj?ca.

Jessica O'Reilly says

This book was a really fast read, which can be a good or bad thing depending on the story being told. In this case, I think it resulted in watering down the story a bit, as things seemed to develop too quickly and it wasn't quite the story I was expecting. That's not to say I didn't still enjoy it, because I did, but I think it could have been better. It needed some things to be expanded on to feel a little more natural and organic in the story, as opposed to feeling kind of rushed and "what can I put in here to make the readers understand why Zoe runs away."

The first half of the book spends time on showing readers why Zoe feels alienated by her parents and so close to her granny. She's in denial of her grandmother's dementia and believes that her parents see her as a problem they want to get rid of. And after one too many times of trying to tell them the truth about her cousin Madi bullying her only to have them think she's lying and talk about sending *her* away, too, she

decides to solve the problem for them and take her granny to see her kind-of long lost son. You can understand what the writer was trying to achieve with this - that Zoe feels a strong connection to her granny, not only because of their relationship, but specifically because of the relationship they share with Zoe's parents. It just felt like it was missing something, and I'm not sure what, but that's kind of what I mean about this story as a fast read kind of working against it a little. The second half of the story focuses more on Zoe's denial of her grandmother's dementia, and her slow realization of just how serious it is. She comes to understand, in taking care of her grandmother, why her parents felt that she was a danger to herself and in need of professional care, but still strives to find a different solution that can work for everybody.

One of the things about this book that I thought was written extremely well was the dementia aspect, and you can tell that the author has personal experience with it. It's the little things, like Granny being asked simple questions and deflecting instead of answering in the hopes that no one will notice she doesn't know what the answer actually is. It's her taking her granddaughter out for ice cream and forgetting where they're going, why they're going there, how long they've been there. It's how the dementia gets progressively worse as the story goes on, to the point where Zoe can no longer deny that something is seriously wrong with her grandmother and that it's not just a quirk in her personality, or a defensive response because she feels threatened. That's where the real heart of the story lies, and I kind of wish there had been a bit more of that shown as well.

I also think that Zoe as an alienated teenager was fairly realistic. Kids say really hateful, spiteful things when they aren't getting along with their parents or when they feel like their parents for whatever reason don't care about them, and that's the position she was in. Part of the problem is they have no filter - so those angry things we sometimes think in the heat of the moment as adults but keep locked up, they unleash. But I do think by the end of the story she learns a bit from her behaviour and begins to improve it after everything she went through. Again, it feels a little off and rushed, but I think a lot of that is just down to this being a shorter story.

Ben Reffell says

This book is an occasionally heartfelt train wreck.

This is another Red Maple 2017 book I read. I haven't read them all yet, but this one might be the worst.

For starters; the main character, Zoe, is an over-angsty, sometimes sociopathic teenager. I'm not exaggerating. It's told in the first-person, and within the first few chapters, she's already voiced several fantasies of her parent's deaths. Maybe it was supposed to be funny? It was really troubling to read.

Sometimes in books, I don't mind this. Deeply flawed characters are cool with me. If it's self-aware and handled properly, these characters can actually be quite compelling. But the issue is, is that you are supposed to care about this girl. It's difficult when she is very unlikeable.

Seriously! This girl needs help. In fact, the entire family need help. They bicker, shout rude insults and irritate each other, not to mention the reader!

The author is undoubtably trying to showcase a broken family, and I'm all for that. But the consistent feuding gets old very quickly. And the way the book decides to "fix" their issues is in a few pages at the end, and it comes off as quite superficial. I hated it.

If this book was aimed at adults, I might not have had such an issue with it. But it's target audience is much younger than that, and it attempts to portray Zoe as almost a role-model, which I don't think is a good message.

This isn't even mentioning her actually-psychotic cousin, who, not kidding, almost MURDERS Zoe, along with her demented group of friends. It's supposed to be an intense scene, but the entire immoral-ness of 97% of this novel's characters was distracting me.

The grandma (and some side characters near the end) may be the only somewhat-likeable people in this entire book. Jeez.

Before you call me insensitive, I know that Zoe is struggling with her grandmother's Alzheimers. That would make me upset too, but I cannot sympathize with this girl who is rude to everyone except her grandma.

The writing itself is subpar. It's to the point and no sentence exactly pops out. There are bad attempts at humour involving poop and rhubarb pie. Don't ask.

The second half of this book has no direction. Zoe (kind of a spoiler ahead) runs away with her granny to Toronto to find her uncle. With only 500 dollars.

The novel then becomes a jumbled road trip in which our main character cries, hangs out at diners and searches aimlessly for an uncle that may or may not exist.

And there's a final "twist" that could be emotional for some people, but just came off as a little over-sentimental at that point.

Positives? Well... hmm.

There's a really satisfying scene in the last few pages that made me smile (a certain awful character learns what karma is).

A sequence at the end was genuinely touching, too. This was one of the only effective parts in the book, though.

PS: The author himself, Allan Stratton, seems nice!

Despite the positives, I would not recommend this to anyone except those who like self-absorbed characters and poop jokes. C-

a10sadie says

I really enjoyed this book, and I felt, as someone Zoe's age, that it was relatable. Zoe is sometimes a little bit unreasonable, but aren't all teenagers sometimes? That is why I related to it all the more because I know sometimes I feel like she does, and I think what she does, even if it is unreasonable to think and say. The end was so bittersweet, but I loved it. I loved the twist and hated Madi.

I would definitely recommend this book!

