

Background about the Book – All the Way Home

Imagine what it would be like to have a disease that caused your legs to become twisted and practically useless. Living in Brooklyn most of her life, polio survivor, Mariel Manning has had to live with her crippled legs since she was four. Although she's used to being stared at and whispered about, Loretta, the nurse who adopted her from the hospital, tells her she's the same as any other kid. Mariel isn't so sure about that. After all, not only are her legs twisted and funny looking, she doesn't even know who her real mother is. All she has are distant memories of her mother and the hospital she was in at Windy Hill, located about 250 miles away. Enter Brick. Brick lives in Windy Hill with his parents on an apple orchard farm. Claude and Julia, an older couple who treat Brick as their own grandson, live on an orchard right next to Brick's. A welcome rain begins to pour on Brick's way home from school. Lightning follows, setting both orchards on fire. Brick runs home, but is stopped by the sight of Claude and Julia trying to fight the fire alone. Noticing Claude's burned hands, Brick steps in to help him extinguish the fire; however, his own family's orchard couldn't be saved. His parents realize they'll have to move and send Brick to live with a friend of his mother's in Brooklyn —a friend that just happens to be Loretta. When Mariel and Brick finally meet, they end up helping each other in ways that neither could have imagined.

About the Author



Biography

Patricia Reilly Giff has received the Newbery Honor for *Pictures of Hollis Woods* and *Lily's Crossing*, which is also a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor Book. *Nory Ryan's Song* was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults and an ALA Notable Book.

"I always start each day by writing. That's like breathing to me," says Patricia Reilly Giff. In fact, this bestselling author admits: "I wanted to write from the first time I picked up a book and read. I thought it must be the most marvelous thing to make people dance across the pages."

Reading and writing have always been an important part of Patricia Reilly Giff's life. As a child, her favorite books included *Little Women*, *The Secret Garden*, the *Black Stallion* books, the *Sue Baron* books, and the *Nancy Drew* series. Giff loved reading so much that while growing up, her sister had to grab books out of her hands to get Giff to pay attention to her; later, Giff's three children often found themselves doing the same thing. As a reading teacher for 20 years, the educational consultant for *Dell Yearling* and *Young Yearling* books, an adviser and instructor to aspiring writers, and the author of more than 60 books, Giff has spent her entire life surrounded by books.

After earning a B.A. degree from Marymount College, Giff took the advice of the school's dean and decided to become a teacher. She admits, "I loved teaching. It was my world I only left because I was overwhelmed with three careers—teaching, writing and my family."

During the 20 years of her teaching career, she earned an M.A. from St. John's University, and a Professional Diploma in Reading and Doctorate of Humane Letters from Hofstra University. Then one morning, Giff told her husband Jim, "I'm going to write a book. I've always wanted to write and now I shall." Jim worked quickly to combine two adjacent closets in their apartment into one cramped workspace, and as Giff jokes, she "began [her] career in a closet."

Giff tries to write books "that say ordinary people are special." She says, "All of my books are based in some way on my personal experiences, or the experiences of members of my family, or the stories kids would tell me in school." Therefore, when she runs out of ideas for her books, Giff says, "I take a walk and look around. Maybe I spend some time in a classroom and watch the kids for awhile. Sometimes I lie on the living room floor and remember my days in second grade or third. If all that doesn't work, I ask Ali, or Jim, or Bill"—Giff's children, whose names often appear in her books.

When she's not writing, Giff enjoys reading in the bathtub and going to the movies and eating popcorn. She and her husband live in Weston, Connecticut. They have three children and five grandchildren. In 1990, Giff combined her two greatest loves—children's books and her family—and, with her husband her children, opened The Dinosaur's Paw, a children's bookstore named after one of her Kids of the Polk Street School novels. This store is part of Giff's quest to bring children and books together. She and her family are trying to "share our love of children's books and writing and to help others explore the whole world of children's books."

Throughout the year, Giff visits schools and libraries around the country and speaks to her readers about her books and about writing. When discussing her work, Giff claims, "I have no special talent you know. I never took a writing course before I began to write." She believes that "anyone who has problems, or worries, anyone who laughs and cries, anyone who feels can write. It's only talking on paper...talking about the things that matter to us."

Reviews – All the Way Home

Though worlds apart, city girl Mariel and Brick, a farmer's son from upstate New York, have a lot in common. They're both strong-willed, fiercely independent, and fervent Brooklyn Dodgers fans. Their divergent paths merge when Brick's family's orchard is destroyed by fire, and his parents send him to stay with Mariel and her adoptive mother in 1941 Brooklyn. Though excited by the chance to see his beloved baseball team play in person, Brick can think of little else but getting back to Windy Hill and saving what's left of the apple trees. Unexpected help comes in form of Mariel, whose big heart cannot always overcome the weakness of her polio-stricken legs. Determined to help Brick and discover the identity of her birth mother, Mariel finds a way to get them both to Windy Hill—where Brick's trees and the hospital where Mariel was born await—

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one shaky step at a time. Author of the much lauded *Lily's Crossing*, Patricia Reilly Giff has written another lovely work of historical fiction that perfectly evokes a long-past time and place. Here, we can't help but smell Brick's apples and hear the cheers of the hopeful Dodgers fans in Ebbets Field. A wonderful story of friendship and personal triumph for the preteen set. (Ages 9 – 12) – *Jennifer Hubert*

Amazon.com Review

Newbery Honor novelist Giff (*Lily's Crossing*) brings together two appealing young characters in this story of friendship, family and finding where one belongs. When fire destroys the apple crop on his family's upstate New York farm in 1941, Brick's parents must find work elsewhere and send their son to live temporarily in Brooklyn with Loretta, an old friend. Loretta, a nurse, years before adopted a young polio victim, Mariel, whom she had cared for in a hospital located near Brick's family's farm. Though she loves Loretta, the girl is determined to find her birth mother, of whom she has faint memories. Mariel is drawn to the likable Brick, yet initially her embarrassment at her polio-scared legs (which, in her mind, "curved like the pretzels in Jordan's candy store") prevents her from talking to him. But when he shares his resolve to return home to help a beloved elderly neighbor harvest his apple crop, Mariel encourages him to make the journey. Impulsively, she decides to accompany him and to visit the hospital where she was taken when stricken with polio, hoping to find clues to her mother's identity. The pieces of the plot snap together a bit too easily and snugly as Giff solves each youngster's dilemma. More credible is the emotion that runs high and affectingly throughout the narrative, as well as the many period details. Ages 8-12)

From Publisher's Weekly

Read Alikes – All the Way Home

Belle Teal by Ann M. Martin

Fairest by Gail Carson Levine

Boston Jane by Jennifer L. Holm

My One Hundred Adventures by Polly Horvath

A Drowned Maiden's Hair by Laura Amy Schlitz

The Ever-After Bird by Ann Rinaldi

Counting on Grace by Elizabeth Winthrop

Discussion Questions: All the Way Home

Family

How would you describe Brick's family?

What is his relationship with Claude and Julia?

Why didn't Brick's parents think about leaving him with Claude and Julia in the first place?

Mariel calls Loretta her "almost mother." Do you think Mariel will continue to use this term when she returns to Brooklyn after her trip to Windy Hill?

Discuss Brick's mother's reaction when she learns that he has returned to Windy Hill.

Brick thinks he can explain to his mother why he needs to stay with Claude and Julia. What do you think he says to his mother?

Friendship

Mariel and Brick resist befriending one another in the beginning. At what point does their relationship change? Mariel wonders why it is so easy to be friends with Brick when she couldn't bring herself to be friends with Geraldine Ginty and the other kids in the class. Discuss the barrier that keeps Mariel and Geraldine from being friends. What has Mariel learned about friendship? Discuss whether her relationship with her classmates will change when she returns to school.

Brick tells Mariel "I never had a friend like you." (page 164) How might Brick describe his friendship with Mariel? What is it about Ambrose that makes Brick want to tell him everything?

Separation and Loss

Both Brick and Mariel are dealing with separation and loss. Brick has lost something more than his family. How does he deal with this loss? How does Mariel's trip to Windy Hill bring closure to her loss?

Belonging

Discuss how important it is to feel a sense of belonging. Claude says to Brick "I have been waiting for you." (page 116) How does Claude know that Brick belongs in Windy Hill, and that he will come back? When Claude tells Brick that Mariel belongs in Brooklyn with Loretta, he says "She just needs to find out for herself." (page 154) Why does Mariel need to make the discovery on her own?

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions can be applied to any book. You can tweak the questions for your specific book. They can be cut into strips and passed around in a basket to help facilitate discussion.

My favorite part of the book was...

A better title for this book would be...because...

(Name of character) reminds me of myself because...

My least favorite character was...because...

If I were (name of character, -----) I would (wouldn't) have...

(Name of character) reminds me of someone I know because...

I changed my mind about...because...

I would (wouldn't) like to read another book by this author because...

This book made me think...When I finished this book, I still wondered...

This book reminded me of...

I'd like to tell the author...

What happened in this book was very realistic (unrealistic) because...

This book was better (worse) than the movie version because...

When I started reading his book, I thought...

I didn't like...because...

This book made me realize...

If I could talk to (name of character), I would say...

One thing I have noticed about the author's style is...

If I could be any character in the book I would be...because...

I was surprised when...

I think the main thing the writer was trying to say was...

The most important thing about this book is...

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I predicted that...

I think the writer must be ...because...

I would change the ending...