



Us Minus Mum

Heather Butler

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George and Theo's mum is brilliant.

She tells great stories, can wave the fastest of anyone on the planet and, most importantly, she was the one who suggested they adopt a scruffy dog called Goffo.

The boys think she's invincible. But they're wrong.

Because Mum is ill.

Really ill.

It's up to George and Theo to keep Mum smiling. Which will almost probably definitely involve wellies, shepherd's pie and Goffo's victory at the pet talent show . . .

Us Minus Mum Details

Date : Published February 6th 2014 by Little, Brown Books for Kids

ISBN : 9780349124070

Author : Heather Butler

Format : Paperback 304 pages

Genre : Death, Childrens

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gem says

This is a beautifully written and heartfelt book. It is the kind of book that will make you laugh and cry in equal measures, and then you'll want to tell all your friends to read it too! George is a wonderful narrator, and the clever use of different fonts for his differing feelings really helped me, as a reader, to connect to his emotions throughout the story. It's obviously a sad story, but it never dwells on the sadness or feels too melancholic, there is a strong message about families sticking together in times of trouble and there was an overriding sense of hope throughout. I really enjoyed this book and would recommend it to fans of A Boy Called Hope and Wonder.

Fiona Hill says

This book is about two boys losing their mum to cancer. It is told through the narration of the elder son George and written in very short paragraphs, some only a line long. Having George as the narrator makes it very relatable for children who may be experiencing a similar situation. I originally was unsure about the style of writing, however, it really adds to the humour of the book (I laughed out loud many times) and also would help children to access the book. Butler deals with the darkness very delicately, which I feel is extremely clever. The use of different fonts to show George's emotions also helped me to connect to how he was feeling throughout the book.

I did find this book rather slow to start with and due to the title of this book, I did expect it to focus more on how George and Theo coped after losing their mum, however, the death is not until the end and finishes fairly abruptly after that. The book focuses a lot on the children's life before their mum becomes very sick. I think this was why I found it a slow start, however, I can see that it shows the contrast in their family life, which children reading may also be experiencing. It then focuses on how the family work together (with the help of their dog) through their mum's illness which is an important message for children to take away. Overall, I think this is a very beautiful read and I would definitely recommend it to key stage 2 children who are facing a similar journey.

Shelley Bridgman says

Although dealing with a difficult subject Heather handles it with a deft touch and draws you into the grief without it ever feeling gratuitous.

An author to watch

Anna Branson says

Oh my gosh I love this book!!!!!!!

skippity_doo says

I already had a taste of this book at 2014's YLG conference, when Heather talked about writing this book, and finished with a reading. Imagine a room of a few hundred librarians, all trying desperately not to cry.

I immediately ordered a copy for work and picked it up on my way home last night. Despite dealing primarily with illness and bereavement, this book is also very funny (especially if you're the sort of child who thinks dog farts are funny). I enjoyed the security in this story - all of the adults in George and Theo's life and supportive, caring and loving. Even their grandma, the strict, 'old-fashioned' teacher and it's this security that helps the boys through their mum's illness and, eventually, death.

Never mind crying on the tube - I walked all the way in with tears on my face, because I couldn't bear to put it down!

(Nominated for the Carnegie 2015 - let's hope it makes the longlist.)

Missy says

SO SAD!

Anna Brookes says

I did enjoy this book but it was quite slow and the ending was pretty sad....reminded me to live each day cos you never know what's round the corner!

Mat Allison says

This book made me laugh out loud and cry. Amazing, loved it.

DCLibrarian says

You need tissues when you're reading this book. It's funny but sad too.

Jane Branson says

This book is a novel aimed at 9+ year olds about two boys losing their mum to cancer and on that basis you'd be forgiven for avoiding it. But it's brilliantly done - the darkness is handled so lightly, the characterisation is perfect and there isn't a hint of sentimentality. The scenes of family, school and dog life are acutely observed and I laughed out loud, a lot. And then I cried and cried.

Serendipity Reviews says

Originally reviewed by author, Liss Norton, for www.serendipityreviews.co.uk.

This has been a difficult book to review because it deals with such a sad subject – the illness, decline and death of George and Theo's dearly loved mum. Told in the first person, from George's point of view, it begins by showing his close family having fun together, then moves into a troubling time where the boys try to cope with Mum's illness without really understanding how serious it is. Finally they discover that Mum has terminal cancer. Her death comes very near the end of the book.

The first part of the story, before Mum falls ill, shows a normal family adopting a new dog and making up limericks. There's a lot of farting in it, which children will find funny. Gradually clues begin to emerge about Mum's illness, though these are fairly subtle and easily missed at first. As the illness progresses, the boys' routine alters and friends and extended family members rally round. Mixed up with this is a subplot about a bully in George's class.

George goes through many different emotions during the course of the story, but is haunted by the possibility that Mum's illness is his fault. This is a common misconception amongst children trying to cope with the illness and death of a parent, and Butler handles it with a gentleness and compassion which will help children in a similar situation. However, the story ends too soon after Mum's death, in my opinion, with the boys and Dad making up a new limerick about Mum and vowing to remember her. The front cover states: 'one family, their dog and a new beginning', but I didn't feel that the book showed this new beginning. I wanted to visit the family again a couple of months later, to see the boys and Dad moving forward in their life without Mum.

Butler's writing style is unusual, very spare and with paragraphs which often consist of only one sentence. This may help young readers to access the story more easily, but the subject matter is more suited to an older age group. I would recommend this book for children facing the death of someone they love, not least because it will help them to understand the emotional turmoil they're experiencing. However, I imagine it would be a worrying read for those whose lives aren't touched by such a tragedy; few children even consider the possibility that one of their parents might die and maybe it's best not to encourage them to think about something which, thankfully, happens to only a few.

Ruth Clark says

Loved this book. Despite the obvious difficult subject the book is such a warm, witty description of family

life. It made me laugh and cry at the same time.

Aurora says

A dog can change your life.
If you treat it good at first, it will reply you.
DO the things you want, listen to you.
you want that dog.

Sarah-Jayne Windridge-France says

A poignant, heartwrenchingly emotive tale - told in the voice of a young boy. As a mother of 3 who's had her fair share of medical dramas it touched me and I shed more than one tear.

It's well-written, punchy and more than a little cute.

Despite sensing where the tale will end - endurance is key and the final tears are bitter-sweet.
