



The Ocean in My Ears

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Meri Miller lives in Soldotna, Alaska. Never heard of it? That's because in *Slowdotna* the most riveting activities for a teenager are salmon fishing and grabbing a Big Gulp at the local 7-Eleven. More than anything, Meri wants to hop in her VW Bug and head somewhere exciting, like New York or L.A. or *any city* where going to the theater doesn't only mean the movies. Everything is so scripted here--don't have *too* much fun, date *this* guy because he's older and popular, stay put because that's what everyone else does.

But when her senior year should be all boys, SAT prep, and prom drama, Meri feels more and more distance between herself and the people she loves. Her grandma dies, her brother gets hurt, and even her best friend checks out to spend more time with some guy. As she struggles with family, grief, friends, and hormones, Meri must decide if she really is ready for the world beyond her backyard.

Meagan Macvie's debut novel, *The Ocean in My Ears*, raises questions of love, purpose, and the power to choose your own future even when your future's the thing that scares you the most.

The Ocean in My Ears Details

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From Reader Review The Ocean in My Ears for online ebook

Zoe LaHaie says

When I picked up this book and saw that the first word was “fornication,” I knew I was in for a wild ride. But despite such an evocative opening, *The Ocean in My Ears* wasn't an excessive, overdramatic young adult novel. While it does address serious subjects like life-threatening accidents, teen pregnancy, and abusive relationships it also has moments of charming and angsty humor that set the tone for Meri's view of her hometown. Each character fits into relatively clean categories as either the party friend, the attractive bad boy, or the good guy, but all of them are really brought to life through their words. As someone who appreciates strong dialogue, I was impressed with the way Macvie breathed life into her characters. Overall, a great read!

Dianah says

Meagan Macvie delivers a dead-on coming-of-age tale set in her own tiny hometown of Soldotna, Alaska. Meri faces a senior year full of stress; her boyfriend, her brother, her best friend, her grandmother, her prom, her SATs, her parents, and even the adorable guy for whom she secretly pines; they're all problematic. Trying desperately to untangle from the drama around her, Meri keeps her eyes on the future: her college years -- her ticket out of Soldotna. Macvie's characters have real depth (except for the jerks!), and she writes with a wickedly dry sense of humor. *The Ocean in My Ears* is a first rate young adult novel that will make you cringe -- and giggle -- remembering your own coming-of-age.

Heidi Burkhart says

Most young women from a small town could relate to this book. I didn't know what to expect when I started reading but was drawn in right away.

Many people could tell a story about their experiences and people they knew with a healthy dash of fiction, but Macvie does it with some eye opening clarity.

This is an excellent and inspiring read that many high school students could enjoy.

I will look forward to Macvie's next book.

Lynn Lovegreen says

Brilliant writing, an interesting setting, and a story you won't forget! I loved visiting Soldotna in the 1990s, and I can vouch for the authenticity of her Alaska details. Macvie brought the highs and lows of adolescence to life. I fell in love with Meri and Joaquin. Hope to read many more books from this author!

Note: not G-rated

Karelia Stetz-Waters says

Writing for Ooligan Press has put me in touch with a lot of amazing writers, and Meagan Macvie is definitely one of Ooligan's shining stars. Her debut novel, *The Ocean in My Ears*, tells the story of Meri Miller, a high school senior torn between her life in small, sleepy, and sometimes brutal Soldotna Alaska and her dreams of going away to college. That story—with its adolescent hopes and desires—is enough to satisfy, but the novel is like a house that is bigger on the inside than the outside, a small window looking out on an enormous Alaskan wilderness.

In beautiful prose that reads just like a teenage voice yet wiser and more poetic, Macvie paints a portrait of rural America: the struggles of working families and the tensions between religious faith and everyday reality. Most of all, she explores the gender divide that still drives a wedge between men and women, brothers and sisters, people and their dreams.

The Ocean in My Ears is a timely novel, and Macvie's is a voice we need today. In a country that is becoming increasingly divided between urban and rural, conservative and liberal, those who left the family farm or business or hometown and those who stayed behind, Macvie writes with clarity and compassion for all. But the novel is neither a dreamy nostalgia trip (although you will brim up with nostalgia for your bittersweet youth) nor a scornful critique of small town life. Instead, Macvie uses young Meri Miller's high school experiences to paint a portrait of everything that is beautiful, honorable, troubled, and broken about Soldotna, Alaska. And Soldotna, in turn, stands in for all those places where people work hard and love each other but where opportunities are limited and where an accident or an unintended pregnancy can put an end to a lifetime of dreams. Readers will cheer for Meri Miller as she struggles to navigate the challenges of getting into college as a first-generation college student. At the same time, they will come to realize, as Meri does, how much she loses if she leaves.

emily says

quite the fan. i really like young adult books about alaska (yes, i know it's a niche market but i've read a couple now and they're fun). also, what a 90s vibe we had going!!! this book was like the alaskan young adult novel version of lady bird, and i freaking loved lady bird.

Rob Queen says

Meagan's coming-of-age story, "*The Ocean in my Ears*" feels kind of like a tease, which, in this case, is a good thing.

Throughout the story, we follow the narrator, Meri Miller, through her last year of high school, from summer to graduation. Having Meri as the narrator is a good thing because it shows readers the depths of this character. Had Meri not been the narrator, I think she would have come across as a bit of a bitch, one who readers would find unsympathetic. Because we do get Meri's whole story, we get to see how much crap the poor young woman is actually dealing with, and it creates a rich, complex world defined by poor communication, loneliness, feelings of abandonment, and the delicate sharp edges of existence. Meri then becomes a relatable protagonist who the audience can root for, especially considering that life at this age really is quite difficult for anyone, but specifically for Meri, as most of the situations that she finds herself in are beyond her control. Luckily, she is smart enough (dare I say mature enough) to reach out to those people who could actually help her when she really needs it.

In a reading she did in Olympia, WA, author Meagan Macvie mentioned that she was able to bring a little world wisdom to Meri, maybe give her just enough nudge to push her from being High School girl, to girl with a chance in a challenging life. I think this novel is ultimately saved by the author's decision to do that. There is a lot of wisdom in "Ocean" - not just pedantic or rote understanding of life, but also the emotional wisdom that comes across in a simple reaction - like to a friend's lack of reaction to world-changing events, or of a refusal to be talked down to by a man who clearly has no idea what he is talking about.

The final bit of this review is personal, because one thing that this story did well was to bring back my own flight from my hometown. While I never had the driving urge of a salmon (as Meri's need to escape was brilliantly compared to at one point in the story), a conversation that I had with one of my own high school friends came back to me. It was a question about my own future, of marrying one of the girls in my hometown and settling down there. In looking at the faces of everyone in the small town of Soldotna, Alaska, I saw exactly the same people that I spent my high school years with: those that would leave, those that would never leave, those that would make peace with the simple madness of life there. I also saw myself, the jerk, the unsympathetic protagonist, who only wanted to get out, and whose Ahab-like obsession hindered my inability to see all the glory of my own hometown. Meri, however, was not so blind, and in her own eyes, I could see my own small town upbringing in all the positive light that such wonderful natural beauty and simplicity brought with it.

Melissa Graves says

"Fornication" is the first word we hear ringing in the ears of Meri Miller, the protagonist of Meagan Macvie's lyrical YA Coming-of-Age tale, "The Ocean in My Ears." When we first meet our MC, Meri is a good Christian girl attending church with her family in the remote, small town of Soldotna, Alaska in the early 90's. The pastor's warnings about the dangers of pre-marital sex evoke the exact opposite response in 17-year-old Meri, who has become smitten with Joaquin, a beautiful Latino boy from a nearby school. Meri believes her parents won't approve of Joaquin and though Macvie doesn't overplay the race card - the reader infers that this parental disapproval stems from Joaquin's Latino heritage.

Macvie's writing is wry and authentic as we see the world through Meri's hormone-drenched, rebellious teenage mind. We empathize as we witness her struggling with her family and friend's expectations of her. Should she be the bright, responsible, and conventional girl that she's always been? Or should she break through the boundaries and seek fornication . . . and love?

"Secrets are sometimes the only gateway to knowing." - Meri Miller

Throughout our journey with Meri, we meet the guardians of her young life, the people who shape her: her boy-crazy, MIA best friend, Charlie, her annoying little brother, Alex, her over-protective Mother and dismissive Father and even her wise and understanding dying Grandmother - each character rings true-to-life with just enough of an edge to earn them a place in fiction. As Meri navigates each intimate relationship, we experience all the different sides of her as she tries to decide who to be.

“Love is letting every day be new.” - Meri Miller

“The Ocean in My Ears” is a love story and the Joaquin/Meri/Brett triangle frames the book but it doesn’t define it. Meri’s searching, rebellious spirit wants love but she also wants to go to college to be a writer and she wants to go far away from her small town. By falling in love with a small town boy, Meri falls in love with her hometown again. Macvie gives us a beautifully written tour of the wilderness surrounding her small town on Alaska’s Kenai Peninsula where dipnetting, mudding, snow-machining, and hanging out at the 7-11 are the primary recreation activities. The lyrically rendered setting stands in contrast to Meri’s wry, wise-cracking teen voice and perfectly encapsulates the way so many teens feel in their small-town worlds. For anyone who grew up in a small town, “Ocean” will feel vivid and authentic. While the book is a quick read, I often set it down to take time to reflect on my own struggles and experiences as an unconventional teenager in a small town in the 90s.

And while the title of “The Ocean in My Ears” seems to refer to the ocean that surrounds Meri’s small town in Alaska, I think it truly refers to Meri’s inner life, her ocean of consciousness. Writers often use the ocean as a metaphor for the unconscious mind and Macvie uses it here to great effect. Meri must wade into the rivers and streams of her own biases, longings, desires, ambitions, and grief to fully discover the ocean within her ears - her true self.

“I hate regret, but I hate stupidity more.” - Meri Miller

I highly recommend, “The Ocean in My Ears” - it is a book of tremendous authenticity, humor, and heart. It’s a book for the teen of yesterday as well as the teens of today, it’s for anyone who’s been afraid to reach for their dreams but did it anyway. Read it and dive into your own ocean. Relive your own journey. You won’t regret it.

Disclosure: I have met the author, Meagan Macvie, in-person at various times but this did not affect my review.

Emily Frantz says

The Ocean in My Ears is a lovely literary YA coming-of-age novel. I really liked Meri as a character. She’s relatable, imperfect, smart, naïve, and funny. The writing was both fun and deeply genuine and perfectly reflected Meri’s complex emotions. Growing up is hard, and this book really explores how even ordinary teenage life is messy, confusing, sad, and disappointing. The characters all seem really realistic, and I could envision them making mistakes and learning from them in the small-town Alaska setting. And while the book is set in the ’90s, the struggles of Meri are still incredibly accurate to today, especially for anyone growing up wanting to escape their small town. I think this book would be lovely for any young adult trying to navigate the treacherous roads from childhood to the freedoms, responsibility, scary unknowns, and sheer chaos of adulthood.

Linda says

This was a well written realistic fiction for young adults. Told consistently in Meri's POV, but covers a variety of characters in this method. The only reason I would hesitate to recommend this title is to avoid promoting a main female character who has to figure out she's being treated like a doormat. Hopefully a lot of young people will read it, while their inner voice say "Stop! He's a loser! You deserve better than that!" I understood her desire to leave the small town of Soldotna, Alaska. She doesn't lose sight of bigger/better places, which comes from within herself. Someone please share your take why some teen fiction take a place in the 80s, when my teen years took place. Yes, I love the 80s. Is it now retro? ;-)

Alexa Dooseman says

This book brought me back to my own high school experience - and all the confusion and excitement and anticipation that went along with it. It's so difficult to depict that time in a teenager's life without tipping into melodrama, but Macvie keeps her story real and grounded. She writes with sympathy and humor, giving her characters relatable worries and motivations. I understood where Meri was coming from every step of the way - even when she made decisions that wouldn't end well. I wish that I'd had a book like this during my own teenage years - it would have shown me that you can mess up, be confused and still come out the better for it.

Melissa Fish says

When I first began reading this coming of age YA novel, I found the main character, Meri, truly aggravating-- and then I recognized that it's simply because as a 42 year old grown woman, teenage girls ARE sometimes aggravating. The story is set in Soldotna, Alaska, about 55 miles from where I live now, but in the early 90's when I was a teenager. That aggravation I felt when I started the book bloomed into recognition, and then it was off to the races, I didn't want to put the book down. The story feels genuine in a way that many YA novels fall short, all the way from hanging out at 7-11 hoping to run into cute boys to sort of cheesy free verse poetry. Brava!

Emily A. Macvie says

Having roots in small, rural towns I was emotionally catapulted back to my adolescence while reading this book. Megan Macvie nails the conflicting feelings of being emotionally invested your hometown but also dying to cut ties with it and all it stands for. Similar to the fact that Meri is intolerant of her not-even-close to worthy boyfriend Brett lying to her parents, while she, herself, does just that... small town code is akin to someone else picking on your sibling: you don't get to bag on it unless you grew up there. Being inside Meri's head is an honor. Walking in her shoes is like a memory I don't really have. All of her problems, goals, and triumphs aren't the ones that I lived but they easily could have been. The tapestry of small-town life is pretty mass produced. Different fast food restaraunts and main drags, but pretty much the same gig. They are communities centered around church-life, old grudges, and high school sports... complete with high

school parties in the shadows with their festering aggression and intolerance (and a peppering of already-graduated-has-beens). I just felt it all during my teen years... and it all came careening back to me while I journeyed with Meri through her last year of being formed by the surroundings she hadn't chosen for herself. Even if I hadn't spent my formative years in Smalltown, MT and, later, Smalltown, ID... I would identify with the girl that Meri is, was, and is becoming.

Macvie's use of words is gritty, honest, and poetic. I went over certain lines over and over just to savor her voice. Meri's thoughts range from self-indulgent to socially conscious and back again, just as the voices should in any forming human's mind. Sometimes I wished I could bestow unsolicited advice upon this struggling young girl, and other times I wished she was right in front of me to offer some guidance in my thinking.

I strongly recommend this book... especially for young adults trying to live their way to their answers and also for the young adults living-on inside of my fellow 40-somethings who want to revisit the hope, confliction, and glory of coming of age in the 90's.

Terence Brierly says

Meagan Macvie has crafted such a lovingly detailed depiction of Alaska in the 90s that one starts to wonder if it is autobiographical in parts. Soldotna Alaska is the setting here, as seen through the eyes of a wistful teenager making terrible decisions in an oppressively conservative, oppressively boring little place. It comes complete with crappy diners, small-town carnivals, and sketchy hot tub houses. Meri, the soon-to-be high school graduate, is trying to find a way out of Alaska, but life inevitably throws a mountain of shit at her along the way. That said, this isn't your typical coming of age story, where the main character learns everything she needs to know about herself and then skips merrily towards destiny. Whilst reading *The Ocean In My Ears*, I was struck with how realistically aimless the characters are, and how distressingly reckless their decisions can be. This story's heart is in its sometimes naive, and occasionally downright loathsome characters. Having come from a small town, it feels just like home.

The Ocean in My Ears is a darkly funny YA novel that I'd hazard to guess is as much for women in their early 30s as it is for younger crowds. Meri's troubled journey away from Alaska is probably the best piece of fiction to come out of Ooligan Press, and I'd wager it will put the little indie publisher under the watch of literary critics and enthusiasts across the industry. No matter who you are, it's a delightful, insightful read, and I'd say check it out. Also, damn, that cover is gorgeous.

Suzanne says

Meagan Macvie's big heart shines on every page of this thoughtful, generous, observant novel. I am lucky enough to have read an advance copy and glad to have an opportunity to post a brief review and recommendation for others. Full disclosure: I know Meagan and have written alongside her for several years. More disclosure: I went to high school in the Midwest in the 60s. Even though Meri Miller's story unfolds in Alaska 35 years later, *The Ocean In My Ears* transported me emotionally and viscerally right back to that time. Meri is unique but her struggles, anxieties and successes are universal – loss and fear, love and understanding. Her story and her circumstances draw you in quickly. She is a flawed and beautiful young woman -- kind and self-absorbed, awkward and brave. Meagan skillfully conveys the tumultuous events of Meri's senior year in a voice that is searching and true. I cared deeply about these characters, including not only Meri but her best girlfriend Charlie, her brother Alex, and her new friend Joaquin. I think you will, too.

