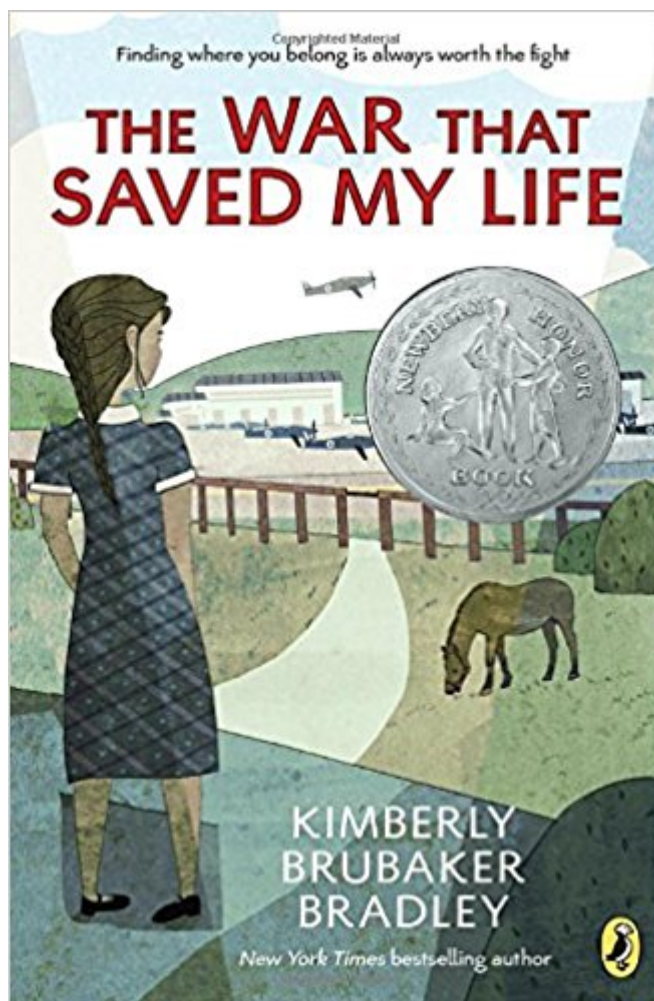


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# The War That Saved My Life



## Synopsis

\*2016 Newbery Honor book\* Winner of the 2016 Schneider Family Book Award  
This #1 New York Times bestseller is an exceptionally moving story of triumph against all odds set during World War II. For fans of *Counting by 7s* and *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Ten-year-old Ada has never left her one-room apartment. Her mother is too humiliated by Ada's twisted foot to let her outside. So when her little brother Jamie is shipped out of London to escape the war, Ada doesn't waste a minute—she sneaks out to join him. So begins a new adventure for Ada, and for Susan Smith, the woman who is forced to take the two kids in. As Ada teaches herself to ride a pony, learns to read, and watches for German spies, she begins to trust Susan—and Susan begins to love Ada and Jamie. But in the end, will their bond be enough to hold them together through wartime? Or will Ada and her brother fall back into the cruel hands of their mother?

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 0580 (What's this?)

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Puffin Books; Reprint edition (May 31, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0147510481

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Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 531 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,203 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Europe #1 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Dysfunctional Relationships #2 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Abuse

Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Gr 4-6 • Bradley turns her keen historical eye from *Monticello* (Jefferson's Sons, Penguin, 2011) to the British home front during World War II. Ada isn't exactly sure how old she is; for as long as she can remember, she's been a virtual prisoner in her mother's third floor one-room

apartment. She was born with a clubfoot and her mother uses her disability as an excuse to abuse her both emotionally and physically. Ada watches the world through the narrow confines of the apartment window, waves to neighbors in the street, and carefully gauges the danger of being beaten during each encounter with her hateful mother. She envies the freedom of her little brother, Jamie, who goes to school and generally roves the neighborhood at will. When her mother prepares to ship Jamie out to the countryside with other children being evacuated from London, Ada sneaks out with him. When the two fail to be chosen by any villagers, the woman in charge forces Susan Smith, a recluse, to take them in. Though Susan is reluctant and insists that she knows nothing about caring for children, she does so diligently and is baffled by the girl's fearful flinching anytime Ada makes a mistake. Though uneducated, Ada is intensely observant and quick to learn. Readers will ache for her as she misreads cues and pushes Susan away even though she yearns to be enfolded in a hug. There is much to like here-Ada's engaging voice, the vivid setting, the humor, the heartbreak, but most of all the tenacious will to survive exhibited by Ada and the villagers who grow to love and accept her.

—Brenda Kahn, Tenakill Middle School, Closter, NJ --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A Newbery Honor Book Winner of the Schneider Family Book Award (Middle School) Winner of the Josette Frank Award Wall Street Journal Best Children's Books of 2015 New York Public Library's 100 Books for Reading and Sharing Chicago Public Library's Best of the Best Books 2015 Publishers Weekly Best Books of 2015 Kirkus Best Books of 2015 Horn Book's Best Fanfare Book 2015 "Achingly lovely . . . Nuanced and emotionally acute, this vivid tale from the wartime home front will have readers ages 10-14 wincing at Ada's stumbles and rejoicing to the point of tears in her victories."

—The Wall Street Journal \* "Ada's voice is brisk and honest; her dawning realizations are made all the more poignant for their simplicity. . . . Things come to an explosive head, metaphorically and literally. Ignorance and abuse are brought to light, as are the healing powers of care, respect and love. Set against a backdrop of war and sacrifice, Ada's personal fight for freedom and ultimate triumph are cause for celebration."

—Kirkus, starred review \* "Proving that her courage and compassion carry far more power than her disability, Ada earns self-respect, emerges a hero, and learns the meaning of home."

—Publishers Weekly, starred review \* "Involving, poignant, nuanced . . . This is a feel-good story, but an earned one . . . distinct and powerful in its own right."

—The Horn Book, starred review "There is much to like here—Ada's engaging voice, the vivid setting, the humor, the heartbreak, but most of all the tenacious will to survive."

—School Library Journal "The home-front realities of WWII, as well

as Ada's realistic anger and fear, come to life in Bradley's affecting and austere told story, and readers will cheer for steadfast Ada as she triumphs over despair.

•Booklist "Skillful, smooth . . . Ada's tough journey from brokenness to healing is poignantly credible in its development and emotionally satisfying outcome. . . . The feel-good appeal of the rescue fantasy combines with the increasingly tense World War II backdrop to make this an effective page-turner."

•BCCB "Expertly operating on many different levels, this exquisitely written novel incorporates themes of self-discovery and self-worth, strength of family, the power of love, and the many different kinds of courage. . . . Heart-lifting."

•Joy Fleishhacker "An astounding novel. Will you cry and rejoice and hold your breath? Absolutely. Will you find the book as exciting, wise, and profound as I did? Yes. This book is remarkable."

•Karen Cushman, author of Newbery Medal winner *The Midwife's Apprentice* "A moving story with an authentic voice. Beautifully told."

•Patricia MacLachlan, author of Newbery Medal winner *Sarah, Plain and Tall* "I love Ada's bold heart, keen wit, and amazingly fresh point of view. Her story's riveting. I was with her every step of the way."

•Sheila Turnage, author of Newbery Honor book *Three Times Lucky* "In Ada's small war lies our large hope that love cannot, will not, be overcome. I read this novel in two big gulps."

•Gary D. Schmidt, author of National Book Award finalist *Okay for Now* From the Hardcover edition.

As a child I was what one might call a selective reader. Selective in that I studiously avoided any and all works of fiction that might conceivably be considered "depressing". "Bridge to Terabithia"? I'll have none please. "Island of the Blue Dolphins"? Pass. "Jacob Have I Loved?" Not in this lifetime. Lord only knows what caused a book to be labeled "depressing" in my eyes before I'd even read it. I think I went by covers alone. Books picturing kids staring out into the vast nothingness of the universe were of little use to me. Happily I got over this phase and eventually was able to go back to those books I had avoided to better see what I had missed. Still, that 10-year-old self is always with me and I confer with her when I'm reading new releases. So when I read "The War That Saved My Life" I had to explain to her, at length, that in spite of the premise, cover (again with the kids staring out into nothingness), and time period this isn't the bleak stretch of depressingness it might appear to be. Enormously satisfying and fun to read, Bradley takes a work of historical fiction and gives the whole premise of WWII evacuees a kick in the pants. Ada is ten and as far as she can tell she's never been outdoors. Never felt the sun on her face. Never seen grass. Born with a twisted foot her mother considers her an abomination and her own personal shame. So when the chance comes for

Ada to join her fellow child evacuees, including her little brother Jamie, out of the city during WWII she leaps at the chance. Escaping to the English countryside, the two are foisted upon a woman named Susan who declares herself to be "not nice" from the start. Under her care the siblings grow and change. Ada discovers Susan's pony and is determined from the get-go to ride it. And as the war progresses and things grow dire, she finds that the most dangerous thing isn't the bombs or the war itself. It's hope. And it's got her number. I may have mentioned it before, but the word that kept coming to mind as I read this book was "satisfying". There's something enormously rewarding about this title. I think a lot of the credit rests on the very premise. When a deserving kid receives deserving gifts, it releases all kinds of pleasant endorphins in the brain of the reader. It feels like justice, multiple times over. We're sympathetic to Ava from the start, but I don't know that I started to really like her until she had to grapple with the enormity of Susan's sharp-edged kindness. As an author, Bradley has the unenviable job of making a character like Ada realistic, suffering real post-traumatic stress in the midst of a war, and then in time realistically stronger. This isn't merely a story where the main character has to learn and grow and change. She has this enormous task of making Ava strong in every possible way after a lifetime of systematic, often horrific, abuse. And she has to do so realistically. No deus ex machina. No sudden conversion out of the blue. That she pulls it off is astounding. Honestly it made me want to reread the book several times over, if only to figure out how she managed to display Ada's anger and shock in the face of kindness with such aplomb. For me, it was the little lines that conveyed it best. Sentences like the one Ada says after the first birthday she has ever celebrated: "I had so much. I felt so sad." It's not a flashy thing to say. Just true. You can see the appeal of writing characters like Ada and Jamie. Kids who have so little experience with the wider world that they don't know a church from a bank or vice versa. The danger with having a character ignorant in this way is that they'll only serve to annoy the reader. Or, perhaps worse, their inability to comprehend simple everyday objects and ideas will strike readers as funny or something to be mocked. Here, Bradley has some advantages over other books that might utilize this technique. For one thing, by placing this book in the past Ada is able to explain to child readers historical facts without stating facts that would be obvious to her or resorting to long bouts of exposition. By the same token, child readers can also pity Ada for not understanding stuff that they already do (banks, church, etc.). Ms. Bradley has written on her blog that, "I don't write in dialect, for several reasons, but I try to write dialogue in a way that suggests dialect." American born (Indiana, to be specific) she has set her novel in historical England (Kent) where any number of accents might be on display. She could have peppered the book with words that tried to replicate the sounds of Ada's London accent or Susan's Oxford educated one. Instead, Ms. Bradley is

cleverer than that. As she says, she merely suggests dialect. One of the characters, a Mr. Grimes, says things like "Aye" and ends his sentences with words like "like". But it doesn't feel forced or fake. Just mere hints of an accent that would allow a reader to pick it up or ignore it, however they preferred. Basically what we have here is "Anne of Green Gables" without quite so much whimsy. And in spite of the presence of a pony, this is not a cutesy pie book. Instead, it's a story about a girl who fights like a demon against hope. She fights it with tooth and claw and nail and just about any weapon she can find. If her life has taught her anything it's that hope can destroy you faster than abuse. In this light Susan's kindness is a danger unlike anything she's ever encountered before. Ms. Bradley does a stellar job of bringing to life this struggle in Ada and in inflaming a similar struggle in the hearts of her young readers. You root for Ada. You want her to be happy. Yet, at the same time, you don't want your heart to be broken any more than Ada does. Do you hope for her future then? You do. Because this is a children's book and hope, in whatever form it ultimately takes, is the name of the game. Ms. Bradley understands that and in "The War That Saved My Life" she manages to concoct a real delight out of a story that in less capable hands would have been a painful read. This book I would hand to my depression-averse younger self. It's fun. It's exciting. It's one-of-a-kind. For ages 9-12.

I recommend this book because it is about a disabled person that overcomes many personal struggles through a time of war. The main character is Ada, a brave disabled 10-year-old girl that overcomes many challenges. Other Characters: Jaime (Ada's little brother), Susan (Ada's caregiver), Ms. Smith (Ada's Friend). The story took place in 1935 during World War I in London when children need to leave to the countryside to avoid the war. Ada teaches herself how to walk and also learns how to deal with her own problems while taking care of her brother. My favorite character is Ada because she is a leader, takes care of her brother, and she helps people. I think other people will like this book because it will inspire people to overcome their struggles. -Christian Ramos

I love a make me feel good book and this one certainly filled the bill! The book came complete with a villain you loved to hate and a host of characters you loved.

Amazing!! Perfect for the youth reader. I loaned it to my mom who is in her 60s and she loved it as well. Very sad and parents might want to read first if they feel their child might be sensitive to issues like child neglect and war. But just read together and talk the issues over them is my advice. Bought

a copy as a gift as well. Everyone should read this book. Love love love!!

What a fabulous book! Many of the other reviewers have detailed the story, so I will not do so here: just to say it is a great tale of growing up, learning life lessons and saving the lives of every character in the book. I guess you could even include Mam in that as she got what she wanted in the end! A great tale for any age reader! I will be recommending it to my teacher friends...and others as well. Awesome job Ms Bradley.

Bought this for my daughter, but I read it also. Very much enjoyed. She loved it too. A couple of her friends from school suggested this book and I'm glad they did.

It is so handy to be able to completely write off a parent. Makes it a lot easier to make decisions, but I understand that it is also easier for the young readers to make the mental conversions necessary as well. Nevertheless, I liked reading the book. I mean, who hasn't imagined a difficult situation in which we actually take advantage of a situation and learn new skills instead of sitting back and wishing "things" were better? Yes, if only I had... or If I had it to do all over again I would... Just as this heroine did.

I read this book to my three sons, ages 10, 8, and 7, and we all loved it. My tough 10 year old boy was crying big tears as the story ended, as he felt so drawn in by the story. We have read a lot of books together over the years, and this has been one of my favorites. My boys asked a lot of thought provoking questions about why things were a certain way or why Mam treated Ada and Jamie so badly. It's a beautiful story that has a lot of dark topics, like child abuse/neglect, war, and disability, but there are a lot of lessons to be learned from it. I want to read it again :)

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