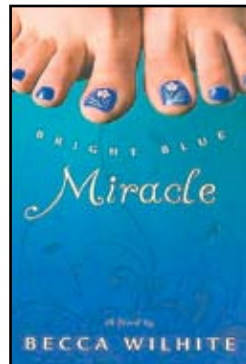


Future is bright for new author Becca Wilhite

“Bright Blue Miracle” by Becca Wilhite (Shadow Mountain, 2008, \$12.95)



IT IS ALWAYS exciting when a new author comes to my attention, especially when the future looks as bright as it does for Utah writer Becca Wilhite.

If “Bright Blue Miracle” is an accurate barometer, we will be seeing a lot of her work — hopefully soon. This book will appeal to tween and teen girls and even their mothers and grandmothers. A good storyline and a heroine whose feet are solidly planted on terra firma (at least most of the time) makes for a book I’m happy to pass along to nieces and granddaughters.

Leigh Mason is 17, the oldest in her family, and not quite ready to accept the man — or any man for that matter — her mother has just announced she will soon be marrying. When Mom calls a family council to announce her news, Leigh, never shy about expressing herself, decides, “I could not keep it in any longer. If I didn’t speak now, I would

definitely regret it. Or throw up. Or both. ‘But isn’t loving someone — or lots of someones — also a good reason to avoid some things? Like wrecking our lives? Like throwing their happiness in the toilet? Like setting them up for rejection and adding totally needless complication to their families?’”

As if that weren’t bad enough, he comes with the added baggage of a step-sister for Leigh, and guess who will not only have to share her mother with this new rival, but also her bedroom? The girls get off to a rocky start and it doesn’t help that Leigh can’t really find any

Regional Reads

By Charlene Hirschi



fault with Betsy — except the fact that she exists at all.

But the final straw for Leigh is when her best friend, who has been her buddy since grade school — and just happens to be a boy — is smitten with Betsy. Realizing she is treading on thin ice and wanting to bond with Leigh, Betsy seeks her approval. Like even! This

development just adds insult to injury as Leigh continues her party party with a vengeance.

As Leigh stood by her bedroom window she heard noises coming from the front porch. There was “a man silhouetted in the porch light. ... But the voice I heard wasn’t his. It was much too high and light, with too much sighing, and possibly a giggle. Conspicuously girly — so the guy on the porch wasn’t alone. I had that uncomfortable foreboding you get in nightmares when you know someone is going to get hurt, and the distinct impression that it was going to be me.”

Still struggling to avoid a relationship with Betsy but promising her mother she would try, the two are invited to spend time with “Grammy” in Oklahoma. “She adored me. She liked the twins, of course, everyone liked the twins. But she had a special place in her enormous heart carved out just for me.” So now she has to share Grammy with Betsy too? What more can happen?

Of course it is Grammy and

softened hearts that create the miracle referred to in the title. Blue toenails and what else awaits Leigh in Oklahoma? The author confesses that “‘Bright Blue Miracle’ doesn’t retell my family’s story. That story would be far too strange for fiction. But my friendship with my sister provides the basis for the relationships in the book.”

I’m not going to spoil the ending, but trust me, you will like it.

What else I’m reading: Just finished Luanne Rice’s “Dream Country.” It’s been out a while, but it is a real winner. More on this book and author are coming soon to my Web site, www.charlenehirschi.com.

Book critic Charlene Hirschi holds her master’s in English from Utah State University. She is among a number of freelance writers whose columns appear in The Herald Journal as part of an effort to expose readers to a variety of community voices. Authors, readers and editors are invited to visit www.charlenehirschi.com.

‘How Lincoln Learned to Read’: Daniel Wolff examines the lives of 12 Americans and the educations that made them

By The Christian Science Monitor

WOULDN'T IT BE great if we could realize — early in life — what we needed to know in order to be successful? Or, more important, to make a positive difference in human affairs?

Since that’s impossible, maybe the more relevant question is: How do we make the best use of our upbringing and education?

Extraordinary Americans, history shows, have been “educated” in many different ways. And here, we’re not talking just (or even mainly) about

book-learning. For much of our history, formal education as we think of it today has been available to relatively few.

In “How Lincoln Learned to Read: Twelve Great Americans and the Education that Made Them,” Daniel Wolff looks at a dozen people ranging chronologically from Benjamin Franklin to Elvis Presley, examining each one’s early life. His working premise is the one posed in “The Education of Henry Adams” a century ago: “What part of education has ... turned out to be useful and what not.”

This is a terrific book. It’s compact (25 pages or so

per individual) but rich and thought-provoking.

It draws heavily on each character’s own writing, mainly letters and diaries. It gave me new insights into great Americans I thought I knew pretty well, and it taught me much about those I’d barely heard of before.

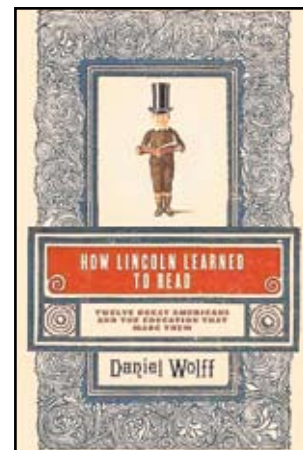
Broad in scope, peppered with detail, insightful, it could be the basis for a classroom or book club review of American history from our founding as a nation through the 20th century.

Between Ben Franklin and Elvis, Wolff also examines Abigail Adams, Andrew Jackson, Sojourner Truth, Sarah

Winnemucca, Henry Ford, W.E.B. DuBois, Helen Keller, Rachel Carson and John F. Kennedy.

“Whatever the particular circumstances, an American education is going to bear the marks of rebellion,” Wolff writes, provocatively. With these 12 leading the way (and at a time when the early-life lessons of a new barrier-breaking U.S. president have been examined in detail) that’s very worth considering. And it left me wondering what Wolff could have done with Oprah or Bill Gates or Yo-Yo Ma.

How about a sequel?



“How Lincoln Learned to Read” By Daniel Wolff
Bloomsbury (352 pp., \$26)