

Three books the whole family will enjoy

“All the Stars in Heaven”
by Michele Paige Holmes
(Covenant, 2009, \$17.95)

If this book is any indication, Covenant is broadening its horizons and branching out to books that are clean but not strictly for an LDS audience.

Jay Kendrick is pining for an old love and has no real interest in dating during his third year at Harvard Law School. That is, until the fateful day he’s coerced into attending a ballet practice and comes under the spell of Sarah Morgan’s music. As the unknown pianist plays, Jay is entranced.

“The melody was haunting, unfamiliar — beautiful. ... Jay closed his eyes, feeling the emotion as the piece hit a crescendo, then grew soft once more.” Jay moves to the stage to meet the musician and after exchanging only a few polite words, “A fist met (Jay’s) left eye, and he staggered backwards. A second blow followed the first, and this time Jay went down, blackness overtaking him.”

This first encounter with Sarah’s cousin Carl is a small taste of what comes later. Her father, Chief of Police Grant Morgan, has hired Carl to be Sarah’s bodyguard, but nobody except the chief knows what she is being protected from. She only knows that from the time her mother died and she came to live with her father, he has cautioned her repeatedly that “they are always watching.” As the violence against Jay and other people associated with Sarah escalates to a near-death hit and run, kidnapping and arson, Sarah feels more and more pressure to do as her father wishes, even though she discovers he is lying to her about many of the things he has used to manipulate her.

Why, the reader keeps asking herself, does this father treat her as he does — nearly keeping her prisoner and repeatedly threatening to make her quit school, even though she is 24? She has been “protected” to the

point that she has never ridden on public transportation or seen a movie; Carl drives her to and picks her up every day from school; she is only allowed to attend church and choir practice if she is good; and she has never had a boyfriend — or any other friend — her entire life.

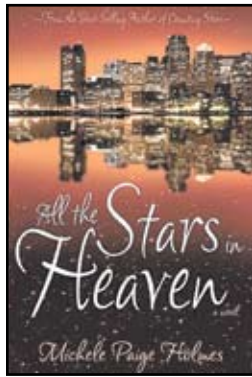
Terrified of the menacing Carl, even when she reports the abuse he has dished out, her father continues to make excuses for him. Why is a chief of police using an ex-con as a bodyguard for his daughter; why does he profess love and concern yet treat her like a slave, endanger her life by insisting she act as an undercover narcotics decoy, and keep her under his control at all costs?

Holmes is a master at keeping the reader in suspense. From beginning to end, the mystery builds and builds, yet there are enough clues along the way that the reader begins to have premonitions of what’s coming. However, even though I figured out part of it, the ending, just like the story, is a lot more complicated than I imagined.

This is the author’s second book. The first, “Counting Stars,” was a best-seller and I don’t see any reason this one won’t follow suit.

“The Evil Harbormaster”
by Marty Reeder (American Book Publishing, 2008, \$18)

Marty Reeder of Smithfield weaves a lighthearted story in a setting most of us are familiar with: Bear Lake and



Regional Reads

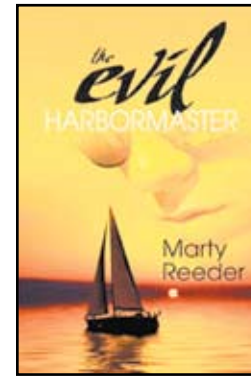
By Charlene Hirschi



Camp Hunt. I’m not sure Bear Lake even has a harbor master, but Reeder has taken local Boy Scout lore and turned it into a charming story about Sydney, a Camp Hunt staff member, and the pirating of his sailboat, “The Silver Moon,” by no less than the very man who is entrusted with protecting the lake and its users — the harbormaster. Because he is only 16 and the harbormaster has so much power and authority, he has a hard time convincing local authorities that his boat has been stolen.

In some ways, the reader must stretch her imagination to believe someone could confiscate a boat and the young man in question would not immediately call Dad and tell him the story, but of course then Sydney and Mandy, who has had her waverunner stolen right out from under her by the harbormaster’s cohorts, wouldn’t have ended up being hunted down and shot at, the book would have been one chapter long and we wouldn’t have been introduced to more Scout lore along the way to a completely baffling ending.

The book is a fun read and will appeal to a wide family audience. Reeder’s voice reminds me a bit of Nicholas Sparks in “A Walk to Remember.” The book is strictly for entertainment and families who



like to read together will no doubt enjoy it. As one reviewer writes: “My son and I had a lot of laughs reading and discussing it together.” I can believe it.

“Silent Passing” by Syd Perkes (Publish America, 2009, \$24.95)

For fans of Perkes’ first novel, “Lettie”: good news! He has again concocted a delightful story full of pathos and the undertow of life’s events. Perkes definitely is not a “happily-ever-after” writer. Like “Lettie,” “Silent Passage” ends on a sad note, but even so will make a fine family read as it weaves the story of young Andy and Charlie, an elderly widower who has become a hermit since the death of his wife. This story of two people separated by age and vulnerability will no doubt rekindle forgotten memories and touch the heartstrings of all who read it.

Set in a small farming community in the 1940s WWII era, this reader couldn’t help but wonder if Andy isn’t modeled after Perkes’ own Hyde Park childhood — this is only conjecture, of course, but Perkes’ understanding of Andy and Charlie’s needs and motivations seems a little too real to be invented out of thin air. Add that to Andy’s love of drawing and one does have to wonder.

Andy is the youngest in his family; his beloved brother Ned is fighting in Europe and his much older sister is getting married. Because Ned is gone, Andy must shoulder the

responsibility of filling in with the farm work in his absence. To make some money, Andy finally gets up the courage to ask his neighbor, Charlie, if he could use some help herding his cows to pasture for the summer. Both Andy and Charlie are surprised when he tells Andy yes. Over the course of the summer, a friendship begins to develop between the old man and the young boy, but someplace along the line, Andy is swamped with his responsibilities at home and doesn’t visit the old man for a while. In the meantime, Charlie starts to fall susceptible to the attachment he feels for Andy and decides to withdraw from the relationship because he doesn’t want to be hurt by either rejection or abandonment.

Perkes is a fine storyteller and I enjoyed this book even more than the first one. His dialogue skills have been honed and his characters are so believable I experienced the joy of the budding relationship between the boy and the old man and the pain of its demise. This slice of life/coming-of-age story kindled memories of my own childhood relationships with older people and made me savor all over again those long-ago bonds.

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.

