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100 Days and 99 Nights

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Madison, Alan. *100 Days and 99 Nights*. Illustrated by Julia Denos. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2008. ISBN 9780316113540. \$14.99. 137 p.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction;

Subject: Family Life--Virginia--Fiction; Toys--Fiction; Children of military personnel--Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Seven-year-old Esmerelde Swishback McCarther (Esme), who is three years older than her brother Isaac (Ike), loves stuffed animals. Every morning before she leaves for school, Esme arranges her stuffed animals in alphabetical order on her bed. The story is told from Esme's point of view, and from her description the reader meets her great parents. Following a legacy of news reporters, Esme's mother is a writer for the monthly military newsletter, and Esme's father is a sergeant in the U.S. Army. The McCarther family, along with their pets (a goldfish, a dog, and a lizard), has accompanied their father on his tours of duty in Korea, Kenya, Germany, and now Alexandria, Virginia.

The home life of the McCarthers centers around the kitchen "where," Esme explains, "we do all our most excellent cooking and all our most serious talking." On school days, the family follows a precise morning routine, and Saturdays begin by making "tasty top-dog pancakes" from an old family recipe. The McCarthers love to spend time together, delight over the sounds and meaning of words, and even invent words, such as "fustilugs". Everything is going well until "that Saturday" when Esme's father tells his family that he has to go away for a tour of duty that will keep him away for 100 days and 99 nights. After their father leaves, the weekday routine disappears and they fail at their attempts to make pancakes on Saturday morning, making a trip to the usually shunned Pancake Palace necessary. Despite their challenges, this family copes with being separated while the father goes to war. And it has a happy ending!

100 Days and 99 Nights is a great read-aloud selection. It is a refreshing read about a family with parents actively involved in parenting. There are still the usual brother-sister squabbles, but during the absence of their father, Ike and Esme accept more responsibilities and become each others' friend and protector. This novel emphasizes the importance of a father's role in the home, of using words and not fists to solve problems, and highlights the significance of life's rules and routines. Madison's descriptive narrative captures Esme's positive, inquisitive, and enlightening point of view, describing the weather as "ice-cream cold" and "oatmeal hot," and father's tour of duty as going by at a "hippo's clumping pace." The illustrations of the family and stuffed animals by Denos are perfect, and also included is "August Aloysius McCarther III's Top Secret Rules [recipe] for Top-Dog Tasty Pancakes."

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