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Sonny's house of spies

Donna Cardon

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Lyon, George Ella. *Sonny's House of Spies*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2004. ISBN 0689851685. \$16.95. 298 pp.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Significant shortcomings

Genre: Fiction;

Subject: Family problems--Juvenile fiction; Homosexuality--Juvenile fiction; Coming of age--Juvenile fiction; Single-parent families--Juvenile fiction; Race relations--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

When Sonny was little he idealized his father. When his father left, he and his mom kept hoping that his father would come back some day. But he didn't. As time goes on, Sonny and his mother make new friends and become involved with a new church. Sonny begins working in a doughnut shop owned by one of their new friends, who is a leader in their new church, and is surprised to find a letter from his dad at the shop. The letter sends him on a painful search for his lost father, for his own place in the world, and in his family.

Lyon's writing is compelling; his characters are drawn with deep hues. The setting and the interpersonal relationships are carefully depicted and believable. Unfortunately, like many Young Adult writers, he seems to try to fit as many social issues as possible into the book. He deals with single parenthood, abusive family members, trauma of dismemberment (one character loses a leg), racial issues, homosexuality, and suicide. As one issue is heaped on top of the other, all the reader can do is wonder, "What is going to happen to this poor child next?" The book does not promote homosexuality, and the two homosexuals are not admirable characters (one leaves his family and the other apparently commits suicide). The main character finds peace and resolution when he discovers that he is not homosexual like his father and acquires a girlfriend. This book might appeal to the kind of teen who enjoys wallowing in other's problems. However, most readers will find the social issues too thick to wade through.