The Five Lives of Our Cat Zook

Emily Loveless

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Book Review

**Title:** The Five Lives of Our Cat Zook  
**Author:** Joanne Rocklin  
**Reviewer:** Emily Loveless  
**Publisher:** Amulet Paperbacks  
**Publication Year:** 2013  
**ISBN:** 9781419705250  
**Number of Pages:** 240  
**Interest Level:** Primary, Intermediate, Young Adult  
**Rating:** Excellent

**Review**

Ever since her father taught her about whoppers, Oona’s been a storyteller and she must tell some of her tallest to rescue Zook from the vet when he gets sick. To comfort her younger brother, Fred, about Zook’s condition, Oona assures him that Zook is only on the fifth of his nine lives. She regales him with tales of Zook’s past lives, each installment reflecting the outrage and betrayal she feels at her mother’s budding relationship with the man Oona believes abused Zook before her family adopted him. But when Oona learns more about “Dylan the Villain” she is forced to edit her own narrative, the secret only she knows about Zook, and the one story whose ending she’s never told. Through the love and support of her family Oona discovers that life does not always have endings you can control, but just like Zook’s fantastical past lives, if some stories don’t end then others can’t begin.

Ten-year-old Oona’s grown-up voice feels natural in the context of her father’s death and her stories within the story of the novel set a clever stage for a subject generally difficult to discuss with children. The story of her father’s final moments is the one that Oona never finished until the end of the book, when Zook’s death draws the final parallel between them. We see Oona and her mother grow together as old secrets and a new romance force them to reconcile their separate versions of grief. At the end of the novel, Oona has changed from a child trying to be an adult to a girl who has more wisdom than many twice her age. Rocklin’s skillful handling of such a complicated subject makes The Five Lives of Our Cat Zook a perfect tool for parents or teachers of young children struggling with loss. Though the story may be predictable for older readers, it is packed with suspense, emotion, and relatable characters that elevate the story from a limited Middle Grade book, turning it into one to be enjoyed by all ages.