



Hurricane Coltrane

Taya Okerlund

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Merrill Hinton is a lightning rod in a town named for bad weather. He's an ace in math, but not smart enough to put together the pieces of his puzzling life, especially where finding his unknown father is concerned.

Musical genius Robbie Stubbs was born in nearby polygamist compound Colorado City. He has the chops to become another John Coltrane, but that will take running away from home, and into a firestorm of controversy--the kind his friend Merrill knows best.

Merrill sets Robbie onto a course that could rocket them both onto center stage, but being the focus of wide public attention will create serious issues. Robbie's mother is not well, and the shock of her son breaking the family rules like this may put her over the edge.

And Merrill Hinton? His precarious future would become compromised in ways he doesn't yet realize.

Hurricane Coltrane Details

Date : Published April 28th 2015 by WiDo Publishing (first published April 18th 2015)

ISBN :

Author : Taya Okerlund

Format : Paperback 250 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Fiction, Music, Contemporary

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From Reader Review Hurricane Coltrane for online ebook

Alicia says

3.5 stars.

I met Taya at a writing conference, and I thought her a very gentle and wise soul. She's the kind of person, I think, that you could sit on the beach with for hours, just watching the waves, and never say a word. And it would be a comfortable silence.

This is a debut novel. The story centers around two boys, Merrill and Robbie. Merrill is a precocious 15-year old whose infamous mother's reputation (infamous in this small, rural community) makes it even more difficult for Merrill to make friends. Robbie is a musical prodigy raised on a polygamist compound. When they meet, the boys begin an unexpected adventure that changes both of them.

Taya asked for an honest review. "Don't pull any punches," she said. So I'll make my critique first.

1. I had a hard time with the way background information was delivered. It throws me out of a story when the narrator stops to explain something about his culture or beliefs. I prefer to take meaning from the context, and not have it explained to me. This is the main reason I don't read high fantasy anymore. Infodumps can be difficult to get around though, so I understand the author's choices.

2. Another thing I had trouble with: portions of the dialogue. Sometimes I wasn't convinced.

3. I found myself wishing that I could get more. Some of what the narrator experienced only seemed to be scratching the surface. I wanted everything to go deeper, especially for the narrator.

4. This item isn't a critique for the author, but just the text, which is the responsibility of the editor. There were a few typographical errors. But this was an ARC, so it's entirely possible they were taken care of before going to press.

Good stuff:

This book will definitely please the LDS audience, and those looking for a clean read. There is nothing questionable in the content. Those who are interested in the shows *Sister Wives*, *Big Love*, or *My Five Wives*, or are curious about life for the Lost Boys after exile from Colorado City may find this a fascinating read.

I liked all of the development of the characters' musicality. As I live in a family of musicians, I always appreciate music as a major theme. I really appreciated the descriptions of Robbie's expression through music, especially elements of grief. Very nice.

The setting is just stunning. I have lived in Utah, and I have been in Hurricane, Utah, so I know the landscape. The author does a fine job of creating a setting that really breathes.

I loved that there were proactive and complex female characters as parental figures for Merrill. His mother and grandmother always brought something interesting to a scene. In LDS literature, it's nice to read about characters who exist on the fringes of LDS culture. Merrill's mom doesn't fit in, and it's nice to see that she doesn't even try. She's satisfied being what she is, a person of faith who lives according to the dictates of her conscience. I think of her a bit as a vigilante and think she would look great in a cape.

Hurricane Coltrane explores connection, love, family, the transformative potential of friendship, and the power of music.

In the end, Hurricane Coltrane is a lovely little novel from a debut author who shows great promise. I look forward with interest to see what she brings to the table next.

Taya Okerlund says

Just a word from me, Taya Okerlund, the author.

I love this book and I hope you will too.

You'll notice right away that Merrill's character is different. He's completely separate and distinct from me. I suppose he should be part of me, but I can't channel him. He comes and goes, like a good haunt. His voice is his own and I barely edited him at all. That's true for most of the other characters.

Believe it or not, Mindy didn't even make the first draft. She was an afterthought, but if I ever do another HURRICANE novel, she's going to narrate. I've already promised her. We'll see how noisy she gets.

Merrill was a blabber mouth. He wouldn't leave me alone. I had to write almost nonstop through nap times for a year. And nap times are sacred.

Don't take this story too seriously. It's comic, not serious. It's not THE SCARLET LETTER and it's not THE CHOSEN, though I borrow a few bones from both of those genius works. I wasn't really aspiring to immortality on that level. How I do love those books.

Enjoy the ride. I meant to make it a good one!

Amy says

I know this author, so I'm so proud and excited for her!

Hurricane Coltrane is set in Hurricane, Utah, and tells the story of a super smart high school kid, Merrill, who's dying to break out of the small town, and a musical genius, Robbie, who's escaped from a polygamist compound. Merrill railroads Robbie into performing in a TV reality show. The details are great, the setting is rich, and Merrill has the funniest voice and personality that pulls the reader through the narrative. What a fun book!

Janie says

Authored by my sister-in-law.

Katie W says

Merrill is an extremely smart high school student, but he doesn't do well socially. He doesn't know his dad, has a mom who is a big activist and helps rescue polygamous victims, and a sweet grandma who tells him how it is. He's trying to figure out who he is and what he wants to do with his life. A random meeting with Robbie, a boy from the nearby polygamist compound, changes Merrill's life. Robbie is a genius when it comes to music and will do almost anything to succeed, even giving up his family.

Merrill and Robbie are so similar, yet so different. They come from different worlds, but they both show a lot of bravery and strength. I love Merrill's grandma--she is so accepting and loves those around her unconditionally.

I love the unlikely friendship that forms when decisions are made and opportunities are taken to embark on this road to growing up. I'm still trying to figure out exactly how I feel after reading this. I was excited, nervous, and happy for these boys, yet my heart was wrenched in places and I felt emotionally drained. There were a few parts that I wish had been fleshed out just a little more, but overall, this was a great journey with well-written characters and a fantastic setting.

Content: mild language (a few mild words); mild religious elements (one boy is a Mormon and one is FLDS, but not much religion is discussed, aside from a few morals each has--definitely not preachy); very mild romance (very brief mention of an unwed mother, crushes); very mild violence (brief mention of abuse).

I received a copy in exchange for an honest review

Martha says

Things I liked: Merrill was a very realistic smart-mouthed teenager, but he wasn't afraid to make a fool of himself to protect a friend. Most of the gentle plot twists were easily believable (the culmination of the website situation feels just a bit less plausible, and the finding-the-new-agent part seemed much too easy & perfect). The characters were, in general, nice people (flawed, normal, nice people). There was a happy-but-not-all-perfect ending.

Things I didn't like: What good does it do to buy off someone if they not only don't know WHY, but don't even know they ARE being paid for their silence? Okay, that isn't really a book issue--it's a "that character is stupid" complaint. The pace is a little slow, but that can be considered a style choice rather than a true flaw.

If you want a book with action-packed adventure, this is not that book. If you want a glitzy, exciting book, this is not that book, even with a couple of trips to L.A. If you want a book about good & bad families and about people who are mostly trying to do what is right in hard situations, this might be that book. If you want a book about worthwhile choices in real life and loyalty under pressure, this might be that book.

Fluttershy says

[I liked that Robbie decided to throw the competition in favor of playing his own composition. I think that's what someone who loved music best would do. (hide spoiler)]

Amy Shannon says

Stunningly heartwarming

Merrill and Robbie have a great strength within them. It's a very emotional and compelling story, that shows the journey and adventure of growing older. The characters were well developed and the story was very intuitive. I liked the characters and the growth of the story, and it shows that not everything is perfect, and there are flaws, even in loyalty and heartbreak.

Karin says

This story is set in southern Utah and focuses on two boys and their journey together to figure out themes such as loyalty, family, friends and ultimately their future.

There is so much to love about this book. The setting is interesting and different enough to keep our attention but there are enough familiar details in the relationships to make us feel right at home. The small town feel is so well-drawn, it's easy to feel like you're welcome for an extended visit. Even when the group of kids go to L.A., we get a real sense of place and setting.

Okerlund does a great job at feeding us motivation and emotion through the main characters, Merrill and Robbie. It is so easy to love them and sympathize with them. For me, it was especially compelling to read and connect with the music part of the story. So much can be portrayed and expressed through music, joy, enthusiasm, sorrow. It's all there and nicely done.

There's not a lot to critique about this story. I felt like it jumped around just a bit to show the passage of time and it left me a little disjointed at times. From a mother's perspective, I like that she didn't ease up on the vocabulary. That's always nice. I also appreciate that there are strong, female characters in Merrill's mom and grandma. The relationships weren't perfect and I appreciated that it provided an avenue to acknowledge that sometimes family relationships are hard and that they take work and compromise. Even Robbie, though we don't know very much about his mother, we know she supported and loved him and tried to protect him.

Loyalty is a key theme in the story, between both family and friends. The story is set up perfectly for this theme to be explored and expressed at just the right time in the narrative. I really enjoyed this story and feel like I made some new friends. I'm excited to let my middle-graders read this story and talk about it with them. This is a great recommended read or all ages.

Jeffrey Goff says

Merrill Hinton is a self-proclaimed instigator. Not that this is too preposterous of a claim, since his single-mother does her fair share to shock the staid citizenry of the small Southern Utah town of Hurricane.

Merrill is the fifteen-year-old narrator of Taya Okerlund's Hurricane Coltrane. His is a witty, sarcastic voice of a misfit who wants to be accepted, but knows that will never happen. Being fatherless in a town described as the "sticks" is not a stigma he can overcome. Not that his mother does much to lessen his ostracism. She runs an organization which assists in getting women and children out of the nearby polygamist community of Colorado City, the notorious compound of FLDS leader Warren Jeffs.

When Merrill meets Robbie Stubbs, a "plyg" kid, music prodigy from Colorado City, his life takes several unexpected turns. Ranging from close to home, to Las Vegas, to Hollywood, Merrill tells a story of life and death, truth and lie, ignorance and knowledge.

Okerlund's Merrill is a joy to read. He's a real kid, with real issues, in a real town. His story is never predictable. He is funny, at times irreverent, but he was never forced or phony. I could very well imagine him sitting across from me, actually telling me his tale. Okerlund has created a voice believable and poignant. And he tells a believable and poignant story of love, loyalty, heartbreak, and loss.

This is one of those books I didn't want to end. The emotion I felt upon reading the last page is not something I feel with every book: sadness that it was over; joy that I had read it. A work like this is what makes reading one of my loves. Granted, everyone is going to have their own take, but one thing I will say is this book is well worth the investment.

So, yes I highly recommend Hurricane Coltrane. An original, unpredictable, funny, sad, loving story of a boy, his mom, and the "plyg" kid prodigy. I can only hope Okerlund has a few more tales in her figurative pen, because this one left repeating one word: "Wow."

Jayne Payne says

Hurricane Coltrane was a fun read. I enjoyed the setting of small town Southern Utah where the scenery and towns are so familiar to me.

At first glance Robby seems to be a bit of an anomaly, he just doesn't fit in with the typical teenage mentality of our time. Some may see this as a result of true fiction but I find it quite encouraging. I've always believed that people can be pleasantly surprising, even teenagers. He is unique and mature and I like that about him!

Merrill was also a great character. It takes a lot of strength to leave your culture to find yourself. I admired many of his actions and I was always cheering for his success.

As far as the writing goes I thought Taya did a great job. I never felt hung up on the way anything was worded or said, which left more time for contemplating the story.

I had a few minor issues with some of the logistics, like the fact that peaches aren't ready to be picked on the 4th of July (even in Hurricane) and no public school would allow a kid to start attending without proper registration by a legal guardian or parent. But I realize these were simple things that helped the story move forward.

Overall I would recommend everyone to read Hurricane Coltrane. Coming of age books are so often reserved for girls; it was fun to see some of the "fitting in" and "in what ways does my life have value" questions answered by a group of talented boys.

Marsha Cook says

loved it

Charity Bradford says

Quick Easy Read This isn't my normal type of book. In fact, I probably wouldn't have picked it up if not for the review swap request. So, up front, the author gave me a free copy to read and review honestly.

This YA book is really about finding out where you fit in the world. What makes you happy and whether or not you care what others think. It's a coming of age story in a not so standard setting.

The Good:

Okerlund did a wonderful job with her character development. Merrill is moody and quirky in all the right ways. He's accepted that his mom's reputation affects his social standing in every way. At first he tries to do his best anyway, but he gets a lot more interesting when he decides to throw in with his mom and hang everyone else. The best part about Merrill deciding to help his mom's cause is that it's very natural. His personality is already suited to helping others.

Robbie is everything I expected him to be without feeling cliché. That's an accomplishment. He felt real. His problems were heart breaking and I wanted to slap a few people on his behalf. My favorite line in the book is where Robbie talks about still being in prison. Being an artistic person myself, I could relate to that.

The Bad:

There really wasn't a lot to mention here. The writing is clean. There were a few spots I was pulled out of the story by explanations. However, I'm of a mixed opinion about those places in the story. Okerlund references aspects of Mormonism and the polygamist FLDS. She takes a moment to explain the words she uses, which I think will be helpful to people not familiar with either religion, but they also felt like author intrusion.

The only other spot for me was something at the end. A few things come to light (trying not to spoil anything here) but one of them isn't clear. I'd like to know if the man who turns out to be Merrill's dad was also the guy on the Deadbeatparentportal. It wasn't clear and could go either way.

All in all I was surprised by the book. As I said, not my normal thing. There were no murders, aliens, explosions or romance. But, the story was well told and I enjoyed it. I give Hurricane Coltrane a solid 4.

1-5 scale and what it means:

- 1: I couldn't even finish it / just plain bad
 - 2: I hope I didn't pay for this / disappointing
 - 3: I didn't hate it, but it was still missing something / forgettable but inoffensive
 - 3.5: On the line between good and ok / like, not love
 - 4: Solid mind candy / worth reading
 - 4.5: So very close to perfection! / must read
 - 5: I could not put it down and I'm still thinking about it! / a true treasure
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