

Title: *We Are Lost and Found*
Author: Helene Dunbar
Genre: Historical Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Oliver W. 8th grade

Date Reviewed: June 18, 2020

Michael is a gay teenager living in New York City in 1983 when the AIDS outbreak is first starting. He lives with his abusive religious dad, and his caring mother, who doesn't have the courage to stand up against his dad. Michael's brother Connor was kicked out of the house by his dad after he came out as gay at his high school graduation, and Michael thinks it is best to keep his own sexuality a secret for now. He is trying to find who he is and wants to be able to enjoy himself the way he wants without having to worry about catching AIDS. Michael hopes to protect everyone that he loves, as well as himself. Michael's two best friends, James and Becky, provide him with advice and they do many things together. James is two years older than Michael and Becky, is also gay, and is an actor. He always seems to have some insightful advice to give and seems to have found his place in the world, which Michael envies. He lives in a cramped apartment, where a person named Stephen who lived there has died from AIDS. Becky is trying to figure out how to move forward in life, as her boyfriend Andy, who she really likes, has joined the Guardian Angels and is rarely around. She also has to put up with her mom, who is a divorced drug addict. All Michael wants to do is to tell his parents the truth about his sexuality, but he is scared about the potential consequences of telling his dad. Michael is a talented guitar player and thinks of music as the great equalizer.

Michael's favorite place to go is a gay dance club called The Echo. It is the only place where he feels that he can truly be himself. When he meets a charming boy named Gabriel at The Echo, he realizes what it means to truly feel attracted to someone. When Michael's parents leave for a few days, he invites Gabriel over to his apartment. But when he learns that Gabriel has been with many other people, he starts to fear that Gabriel has AIDS. As his fear consumes him, he wonders if it is worth it to give up ever having sex to protect himself and the people he loves. Connor, who seems to have endless friends and contacts, tells Michael that Gabriel has had sex with someone who died from AIDS, which deepens Michael's fear. When James is beat up by some people after doing a show, he has to leave Michael and go to his parents' house in Connecticut. Michael must decide what he is willing to give up to be himself, and to be able to live his own life.

Did the plot keep you interested?

The plot didn't really keep me interested. Not much happened, as Michael's life is uneventful. I think it would have been much better if the story was told from someone else's point of view, like James, instead of Michael's. I thought James was a more interesting and complex character.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was a little too slow for me. It was just an account of the life of a regular gay teenager in New York City. There isn't much action, and Michael never really has a huge struggle that he has to overcome. Again, I think that James has a far more interesting story to tell.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

There is quite a lot of profanity and scenes about drugs and sex in this book. The characters don't live very healthy lives, and many people in this book use drugs, smoke, or are heavy drinkers. I think that this book would be appropriate for readers in grades 7 and up.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to readers who are interested in books about people with LGBTQ backgrounds. I think this book would be good for people who don't mind uneventful and slow-moving books and appreciate books that depict how a teenager might feel growing up and becoming independent in the world.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

I think it would be helpful for teens to know that the author does not use quotation marks in this book. It is a little confusing at first, but you get used to it. Sometimes it is hard to tell if Michael is actually saying something out loud or is just thinking it in his head.

I would rate this book *3 stars*. It really wasn't very eventful and there isn't anything that stands out about this book, but the format was surprisingly catchy. At first, I didn't like the lack of quotation marks, but I started to enjoy it as I kept reading. The book was almost like a journal that Michael would've written, as it just has snippets of scenes that don't happen one after another. It is different than the usual book format, but I enjoyed it, and it was cool reading something that a teenager might have written. It wasn't so carefully written and was almost carefree when things were described. However, there wasn't really anything suspenseful or anything that was leading towards a climax in the plot. It takes a while for anything to really happen in the book. I prefer books where the main character is presented with an issue in the beginning and they are able to resolve it in the end. It was hard to stay interested in the book because the reader really didn't have any idea what was going to happen next and there was nothing in the plot to look forward to. I think if this format was used with a more interesting and eventful plot, I would really like the story.

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Prisha S. 11th Grade

Date Reviewed: June 22, 2020

This book takes place in New York City with several remote locations. The time period ranges from December 1982 to September 1983. Each chapter is titled by the month which it occurs in, so the timeline is easy to follow. During this time and place, gay life was thriving, but so was AIDS. It was a relatively new breakout of the disease, and many were unsure of it- how one contracts it, how fast it spreads, and how deadly it could be. The main character and narrator, Michael Bartholomeo, struggles between these two main problems, figuring out his love life and separating that from his fear of AIDS, and he deals with other problems as well. From the start, Michael is a timid, non confrontational junior in high school. He is aware that he is gay, but only shares this with his close friends and brother, knowing it could lead to problems with others. His two best friends are James Barrows and Becky Kaplan. James is also gay. He is known and well liked by almost everyone in the community. He has a sophisticated demeanor, which Michael explains is because of his half-British ethnicity, and has a specific appearance described as consisting of "straight lines". He is involved in musical theater and acting, and graduated from high school a few years before the story takes place. Michael's other best friend, Becky, is also a junior. She deals with her boyfriend, Andy, who is shown to be losing in her, and her drug addict mother. Becky has learned to be independent and gives helpful advice to Micheal throughout the

story. Although James and Becky constantly argue, the three are a tight-knit group and have each others' backs. Micheal says James is "the soul" of the group and Becky is "the heart". Michael says from the start that he doesn't really know who he is inside. He wants to fall in love and escape his harmful, homophobic father. Michael's older brother, Connor, was kicked out of the family apartment years ago because he is also gay. Although Michael did not come out to his parents until the end of the book, he and his father have a tense relationship. Meanwhile, James brings Michael to "The Echo" every weekend, a gay nightclub, so he can finally expand his love life. Michael is trying to get comfortable with others and reflect James, the popular guy in The Echo. Michael eventually meets Gabriel, a strong, tall, attractive man in Michael's eyes. They meet each other outside of the club and get to know each other even more. As Michael's relationship with Gabriel grows, so does his fear of AIDS, which straight men claim is a way to "get rid of the gays," according to Michael. He isn't able to become vulnerable to Gabriel and feels ashamed, but proud he protected himself. Later, Michael attends an LGBTQ parade in the city and gets more comfortable with who he is. Then, he meets a guy named River and, safely, has a one-night stand with. Michael finally feels a bit more free and knows more about himself. Unfortunately, one night, James was beaten by a group of men in the streets and suffered injuries. He is sent away to Connecticut then London by his parents so he is properly cared for. Michael feels lost without one of his best friends. He realizes that he can't stay in the closet much longer. This problem has been gnawing at him and will make him feel more like himself. He tells his parents and, expectedly, is kicked out and moves in with Connor. Michael is often visited by his mother and writes to James in London. Most of his life issues were resolved except "fixing his family", mainly his father, which Michael doesn't have control over.

Did the plot keep you interested?

I was hooked by Michael's combatting struggles and how certain events made him realize more about himself, by positive and negative means, and that all of his problems weren't fully resolved. I didn't understand the storyline of Connor's roommates and how that was relevant to the overall plot. Some sections go into depth about Connor's friends, but aren't mentioned later in the story.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace was easy to follow. The rising action was complex and in-depth with a brief falling action and resolution.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is appropriate for grades 9+.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to a reader who wants to learn more about or relate to the struggles that people of the LGBTQ+ community have to face. Especially in this time period, the community was looked down upon and was not nearly as normalized as it is today. We can learn about the amount of courage people had to have in order to bring respect for the community.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

This book also involves problems almost all teens face to this day, including friendship troubles, poor relationships with parents, and trying to discover who we truly are as a person everyday.

Rating: 4 stars: I enjoyed this book and found it worthwhile reading

I learned more about the LGBTQ+ community and its history in an emotional, relatable way. Some parts of the story didn't seem to fit in the plotline, but I'm glad I read the book.