



The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz

Laura Toffler-Corrie

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Told in wry emails and brilliant little one-act plays, this laugh-out-loud debut novel offers quirky characters, a whimsical tour around New York City, and an appealing story about what it means to be a good friend.

The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz Details

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Author : Laura Toffler-Corrie

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From Reader Review The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz for online ebook

Barbara says

This very enjoyable book is aimed at ten to thirteen year olds, and that is a very accurate representation of who this book would appeal to the most. It is written as a series of e-mails and one-act plays exchanged between eighth grade friends who are dealing with being apart for a year, although you are only privy to the main character, Amy's, side of the conversation. The issues that are dealt with, such as social cliques, fitting in, friendships, selfishness, acceptance, and loyalty, and the responses the characters have in different circumstances seem very realistic. Parents should be warned that there are a few cuss words later in the book. The edition I reviewed was an ARC.

Ms. Yingling says

Amy is having a difficult year because her best friend Callie is spending it away from their New York City home living in Kansas with an aunt and uncle. Amy has a crush on John, but is irritated to the extreme with her remaining friends. She finds an unusual ally in Miss Sophia, a neighbor who was a librarian for 30 years and is now interested in helping Amy with a school project involving the diary of an immigrant girl. Miss Sophia also brings along her nephew, Beryl, who is from a Hasidic family and is very conservative and uncomfortable in Amy's presence. The three do a lot of research on Anna and her times, and end up making a fairly large discovery. Amy thinks for a while that Beryl might "like-like" her, but they end up being good friends, and even though Amy is not particularly nice to John, he seems interested in her as well.

Strengths: Lots of good details about Jewish life in New York City, and fairly funny. This reminded me a bit of some Paula Danziger books, or A Begonia for Miss Applebaum. (I really was expecting Miss Sophia to die!)

Weaknesses: Amy was not particularly likable, although she did improve, and the format was confusing. Some of it reads like letters,(to Callie) but some is almost in text message format without Callie's replies. This might be why it put me in mind of older titles. Even though this is only two years old, I know very few students who communicate by e mail, and certainly none of them write letters!

Karen says

This was a First Reads win. It was a cute, fun read. Told through Amy's e-mails to her friend Callie who is spending the year in Kansas. At times the e-mails got rather lengthy and it felt like the author just threw in a greeting and a goodbye to continue the conciet. There was interesting info about Judaism, but I think the author missed an oppurtunity to teach the reader even more. I think a glossery ala Georgia Nicholson would have been helpful for the reader who didn't know some of the Jewish terminology. The ending concerning the class immigration project and the "mystery" was a little forced and rushed- the mystery should have been dropped totally or fleshed out more. Some other reviewers were annoyed with how self-centered Amy was, but they apparently have never been around teen girls - they ARE self-centered. That's how they function. Amy's voice rings very true. Again, cute read- I would recommend to Lauren Myracle fans.

Kim says

Please note: I received an ARC of this book through the First Reads program. The book itself comes out in August.

Amy Finawitz, an eighth grade New Yorker, is devastated when her best friend Callie moves to Kansas for a year. Who will be her friend while Callie's away? Surely not the knitting (or is it crochet) obsessed Judy or dorky Claire? But when her social studies teacher assigns each student the diary of an immigrant and tells them to put themselves into their shoes, Callie becomes fascinated with Anna Slonowitz, a Russian immigrant from the time of the Civil War. The assignment takes Callie all over New York, including trips to the Met and Coney Island, as well as deepening her friendship with her elderly neighbor Miss Sophia and introducing her to Sophia's very religious nephew Beryl. But when Callie starts hinting that she may not want to leave Kansas after all, Amy worries she may be really losing her best friend.

The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz is cleverly told through Amy's emails (and frequently one act plays), which took a little getting used to because we don't get Callie's side of the exchange except through Amy's reactions. But Amy is a hoot, and the way she includes all sorts of minutiae in her emails (including fortune cookie fortunes and regular updates on her class crush) feels very authentic to anyone who's been through middle school and/or separated from a friend. I must admit that at times I had to remind myself I am not the intended audience for this novel (readers on the early end of the YA spectrum, i.e. middle school kids), because at times she struck me as a little judgmental or snotty. In her emails, she mocks Judy for what Amy sees as a dorky hobby; sure, the girl's a bit overenthusiastic, but she otherwise seems to be perfectly nice. However, eighth graders can be obsessed about who's popular and who's different, and to avoid any semblance of nonconformity in the interest of being liked. Similarly, the way Beryl acts and dresses (he is Hasidic and wears a prayer shawl, refuses to sit next to or shake hands with Amy because she's a girl) first makes Amy think he's a dork and not want to be seen associating with him by her peers. But over the course of the novel, she realizes he is a decent, intelligent person who gives some excellent advice, and that matters more than his sticking out from the crowd.

One of the things I really liked about *The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz* was how her school assignment helped Amy to appreciate history and to learn more about her own heritage. As an educator, I've found that many students think of history as something that happened long ago to people who were nothing at all like themselves, so seeing Amy relate to Anna and revisit her city as if through Anna's eyes was really rewarding to me. In my idealistic little la-la-land, this is the kind of book that might get students interested in their own background, e.g. how their families or people like them got to this country. I do kind of wish the book had an afterword to explain the history behind Anna's story--there's one particular episode I was surprised to find was taken from history (I am an US history idiot), and I'd love to learn more about where the ideas for Anna's story came from. But as I said at the beginning, this is an ARC, and maybe the final book does have one. Or maybe kids, who aren't so history-obsessed as I am, just really wouldn't care.

The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz is, above all, a fun read creatively told by an appealing narrator. Though the resolution struck me as a bit easy, overall the book was quite entertaining, and would make an excellent gift for the middle schooler in your life.

Noni says

A First Read from an advance reader's edition which I received for free. Where or where was the editor who could have shared his/her wisdom to help turn this book into a truly terrific one for this age group. It reminded me of the old adage "Too many cooks, spoil the broth" and in this case too many scenarios that

have this wandering all over the place. I liked the authenticity of Amy being assigned a terrific immigration project as most schools cover immigration in detail in the eighth grade. She is given the journal of a young Russian Jewish girl who had settled in New York with her parents at the turn of the century. The exploratory trips with her elderly neighbor and the neighbor's nephew were at times a bit superficial but interesting more by the interactions than the historical discoveries. The important discovery at the end seems rather over the top.

I liked some of her school reactions regarding classroom and lunchroom incidents as I felt they rang true. BUT using "hunkalicious" to describe the class heart throb is more Southern California than savvy New Yorker. A real negative is the amount of time spent on the computer. For example on October 3rd - Amy is on the computer emailing from 6:20 -8:22 p.m.

The story is about a young girl who emails her best friend who is spending a year in Kansas. The entire book is one sided in that the reader only sees Amy's emails (some of which are reactions to a comment or action of her best friend Callie). The more I got into the book, the more I began to really dislike Amy who more or less wants the world to revolve around her. While adolescents can be very dramatic - this borders on real selfishness.

The author redeems herself a bit when Amy begins to realize that she might be a bit self-centered but between all of the Jewishness of the nephew's family, the school heart throb who lets it drop that he just happens to have a cousin who is Jewish, Amy's brother Kevin who has dropped out of college to pursue an acting career and all of his far-out activities, the length of some of Amy's emails, -- a story I really wanted to like left me very, very disappointed.

Having worked in a school setting with the targeted age group for 25 years, I know that the title will attract a few readers but don't think they will take the time to finish the book and it will languish on a bookshelf. Don't blame the author as much as the editor who could have really turned this story around.

Ruby33 says

Wow! This is one of my favorite books! Being around the age of the main character, I really related to some of the things she was going through. I also found the voice to be hilarious, and it had me chuckling outloud. And to top it all off, there was a sweet message in it as well as a cool discovery at the end.

Rebecca says

I loved this book! Not only is Amy hilarious, but she is perfect combination of what makes YA fiction so appealing to teenage girls. Amy is neither a Damsel in Distress or a Kick Ass girl. Instead she is wonderfully recognizable as an ordinary kid who could easier be one of her readers peers: the thirteen year old in me wanted to be friends with Amy and also to be her.

It doesn't hurt that the email/play structure is clever without being gimmicky, that the story is compelling or that every other character is just as richly developed as Amy herself. I will definitely be reading whatever Ms. Toffler-Corrie publishes next.

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Tom says

Very, very funny and insightful look into what it means to be young and discovering yourself and the world.

Kathy says

If you are looking for a fun read, peppered with the sarcasm and wit of an 8th grader, give The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz a try.

Amy starts the book being quite self-centered. Everything is all about her. The story is told in the form of emails Amy sends to her friend who has moved away, abandoning Amy in NYC with no friends or social life. I enjoyed Amy's snarky comments and humor as she communicates the woes of her life to her friend. Through the course of the 4 months this book covers we watch Amy transform, grow and change for the better.

Aimed at girls ages 11-14 this book had me laughing out loud many times while reading it. The all email format worked for this story. Teaming up a geeky girl, an old lady and a religious zealot to create a "dream team" for a research project made for a fun adventure.

There is some mild language in it but nothing extreme.

Content: some mild language

Rating: 4 stars

Source: From Author For Review

Rachel Star says

Amy Finawitz's life isn't exactly looking up right now. Her best friend Callie has just moved to Kansas for

the rest of the year, leaving Amy stuck in New York with a social life that consists of avoiding people more than actually going out. Worse, her brother has dropped out of college to "follow his inner chi", her parents are driving her crazy and her teacher thinks she feels like a little abandoned emu. But when Amy finds a Callie-Replacement, an elderly neighbour and her religious nephew, things start to get interesting... A heartwarming and funny story told in emails from Amy to Callie as well as in the mysteriously wise words of numerous fortune cookies, *The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz* is one girl's journey to finding friendship in the most unlikely of places.

I really liked this. It was addictively written; after I started it, it was so difficult to stop. The prose flowed beautifully, and despite only hearing Amy's side of the story, I never once felt I was missing out. I loved Ms Toffler-Corrie's turn of phrase; she has a real talent for picking perfect words and putting them in perfect places.

The plot could have been slightly busier, but the pace was good and the writing style was awesome enough to carry the story along, as well as having a great character cast; Miss Sophia is a truly genius invention. Yet another feature of this book that made it go up in my estimation was how the romance was done. There was no shying away from the superficialness of teenage crushes (speaking as a teenager myself, I know that sometimes, yes, it is all about the looks), and Amy was never defined by who she fancied. This book was about more than just one kind of relationship, which was really demonstrated by her feelings towards Beryl and it was incredibly refreshing. How great is it to read something that isn't *all* about getting a (or "the") guy? Also, I enjoyed the Jewish aspects, despite not being at all religious myself, which made this book feel more genuine and original and just better. I'm not really much of a laughing at books kind of girl, but this did make me grin more than a couple of times. And snicker once or twice. Definitely one of the more enjoyable reads about at the moment.

Overall, *The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz* stands out from the crowd of humour chick lit on the shelf as being one of the best, due to it's fabulously alive cast and brilliant prose.

Reading Vacation says

REVIEW

My fortune cookies say...

Change can be a good thing.

Amy starts off being very self-centered. I really didn't care much for the all-about-me attitude that she had early in the story. Since Amy's best friend, Callie, moves away, Amy finds herself being open to making new friends and putting herself out there. Even though she wasn't thrilled about it at first, Amy realized that the world does not revolve around her life in New York.

One-sided emails can be confusing.

This entire book is presented as emails from Amy to Callie and one-act plays that Amy writes. The emails are fun to read, but they can be frustrating to understand because we never see Callie's replies. Sometimes, I had some trouble following the conversation. The one-act plays though, were cute and funny.

Boys are not always as they first appear.

Amy learns an important lesson about boys. The school hottie, John, is a good guy, but he can be a little self-centered. On the other hand, Beryl, the Hasidic boy Amy meets has more to offer than it first appears.

History lessons are not necessarily boring.

I enjoyed reading about Amy's school history assignment. She uncovered some interesting tidbits about the past. I would have loved that assignment! Maybe I should mention it to my history teacher.

Thank you to Macteenbooks for sending this book for me to review.

RATING

4 Plot

4 Characters

4 Attention Grabbing

5 Girlie Meter

4 Ending

21 TOTAL

5 STARS

Laina SpareTime says

Cross-posted from my blog where there's more information on where I got my copy and a whole bunch of links and everything.

For the most part, this is a cute story with an interesting format. It had a couple of issues I'll address, but it's mostly sweet and funny. I'll admit it took me a couple chapters to remember that email existed and Amy was getting replies we didn't get to read from Callie in a short time, not sending things through the mail. This was despite the time and date stamps. This is entirely my own fault for forgetting what century it was.

There's a lot of humour, and the setting is very vibrant. Amy is most definitely a New Yorker, and it plays an important role in the book. Amy spends a lot of time learning about New York history, specifically related to the school assignment the plot revolves around, and that is incredibly interesting. I also liked the kind of subplot/message about going out of your comfort zone and making new friends. And I really enjoyed reading about Amy's Judaism, and how she compared her experience to other peoples'.

There were like two things I didn't like though. One was smaller, but like the obsession of her mother with dieting and eating low-carb and how she forced that on her family, and also replied to her daughter expressing body confidence issues basically with, "Exercise." I'll admit I'm a little more sensitive to these things than most, but it left a bad taste in my mouth. There's not really any fat characters who aren't, like, old ladies, either.

I also think this book is unrealistically white amongst the main characters (it's New York, come on) and not queer friendly at all. Amy describes some of her brother's friends as "gender benders" and it's not used in a kind way. Her brother is also constantly described as a "bum" for dropping out of college - the entire book is very unfriendly to the idea that college isn't for everyone - and there's a really weird crossdressing running "joke". At one point Amy's parents go to see her brother's play, and due to someone getting sick, her brother plays a female character, including costuming. Her parents yell at him, an adult actor, in public, for doing this. The narrative basically says it's okay, though, because her brother's not actually a crossdresser. This is repeated a lot. There are jokes about drag. A lot.

It's not funny honestly. And since this is a young YA, this is aimed at a younger audience. Amy is in eighth grade. That's a very impressionable age. It is seven years old already, but I found that very distasteful in an otherwise sweet book. I'm left with mixed feelings in the end.

Aurali says

I won this book on firstreads. Admittedly I am not in the target age group and do not spend a lot of time with 8th graders. That being said, although the plot was pretty good (including the immigrant journal) the main character ruined the book for me. It was hard to empathize with Amy – she was downright mean at points in the book and I don't believe that is what the author was going for. There was a small section toward the end where Amy was supposed to learn a lesson about being nice to others but it didn't seem to really sink in with her.

In my opinion this could go from a poor book to a good book with a few strategic changes. 1) I felt that the cover image really detracted from the book. The girl on the cover looks like she just smelled something awful and that sets the tone for Amy's character. It is really hard to sympathize with a character who has that look on her face. 2) The references to the Midwest did not feel authentic. There was a lot of slang and references that I just didn't believe an 8th grader would know about. 3) If the negativity/meanness was toned down a bit to reflect embarrassment the character would be a lot more sympathetic and the book a lot more enjoyable. 4) The author has to tell us what happened to the Lincoln letter! This was a major historical find and the author just brushed over it without describing any of the hoopla that would ensue when a discovery of this magnitude is made.

Fierce Reads says

hysterical! everyone will find a little bit of Amy in themselves as they get a front row seat to her antics, adventures, and attempts to keep busy in the absence of her best friend.
