



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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***“Argue, say argue,”
Mom said. “Fighting is
whenever people hit
each other, shoot each
other. Kill each other.”***

***I said, “You know
what I mean.”***

***Mom said, “I want
you to think about the
difference.”***

-From *Summer’s End*,
by Audrey Coulombis

I recently read two new children’s books with the theme of war. I appreciate the fact that serious children’s book writers are continuing to take on this subject, since it is an omnipresent topic in our daily news.

What I liked about both the books was the even-handed approach to this touchy and emotional topic. For me, just hearing the words Vietnam War makes me want to cry. I find it wrenching to remember the young boys of my generation struggling to decide what to do. I had friends who ate huge amounts of eggs, in hopes of not passing the physical; or they practiced acting disturbed, so the army wouldn’t accept them. And I had other friends who went to war and never came back. It was a sad and confusing time.

So, I was curious to read the Newbury Honor Award winner “Summer’s End,” because it tells the story of how thirteen-year-old Grace’s family

and life are affected by that particular war. At the beginning of the book, her brother burns his draft card and gets thrown out of the house by their father. The ensuing arguments and conflicting opinions vie with the family’s love for each other and the result is a beautifully presented look at patriotism, values, honesty and allegiance.

What I particularly value about this book is the lack of clear answers – because, of course, there are none. Rather, war forces us to look closely at our beliefs and those of others and then make decisions that may affect us for the rest of our lives. This is a difficult concept to accept and “Summer’s End” does a good job of reminding us of the importance of making up our own minds. When Grandma tells Grace “what counts now is what Collin wanted,” Grace replies: “It’s hard to be sure...No one agrees, and they all feel so strongly they are right.” Her wise Grandma simply says, “That’s

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why every one of these boys has to do what they feel is right for themselves alone.”

The other book I read was Patricia Reilly Giff’s “Willow Run,” which is a sequel to her Newbury Honor book “Lily’s Crossing.” The main character in this book is also a young girl, called Margaret by her grandfather and Meggie by everyone else. Giff weaves the story of Meggie’s soldier brother Eddie who has been missing in action since D-Day, her father and mother who want to do more for the war effort, and her German grandpa who refuses to hide his German ways, even bringing Apfelstrudel to a party. Through her eyes, we see the boredom, anxiety and disruption caused by a temporary move to another town so her parents can work in a war-related factory. Most poignant is Meggie’s constant worry her grandfather will be

arrested as a spy because he has a German accent.

Meggie is simultaneously battling her irritation with her grandfather and her own small moral dilemmas as she tries to understand words like courage and fear. Unlike Coulombis, Giff introduces us only to those young men who go and fight, but even within those, we meet one who says “When this is over, I’m going to spend my days making sure wars like this never happen again.” When Meggie asks how, his words perfectly sum up what all of us, no matter which wars we do or don’t support, can agree on: “That’s what we all have to figure out...Every one of us.”