

'LIAR FROM VERMONT' BY LAURA C. STEVENSON

BY JENNY LAND MACKENZIE

Laura C. Stevenson's just-released book "Liar from Vermont" is delicious — I found myself slowing down, trying to make it last. The collection of stories is beautiful, both in its descriptions of Vermont in the '50s and '60s and in its evocation of youth, but its pages never sink into nostalgia.

Peggy is a real, imperfect heroine, and through her eyes, I felt myself back in each stage of childhood with its mixture of the not-quite-as-expected and the unpredictable. Stevenson convincingly captures the voice of a girl at different ages, who grows frustrated with a teacher who can't understand her, voices exasperation with her menopausal mother, exhilarates in learning to drive, and tries to render herself attractive according to her sisters' "Femininity Quotients." And through the observant Peggy, who experiences Vermont as a summer visitor, we have snapshots of irrevocable change in a state often viewed from the outside as anachronistic and static.

The stories skillfully weave through chapters of Peggy's early life, presenting carefully distilled moments which can each be enjoyed independently, but when taken together reveal the arc of her development towards adulthood. It's one of those books as perfectly balanced as a poem, where every phrase and detail counts and where what is left unsaid stays with you as much as what is on the page. Rather than feeling like a collection of childhood anecdotes which leave a hazy impression, the book functions much like a novel; distinct

plot threads weave in and out between the stories, moving towards resolutions which sometimes play out and at other times disappear back into the overall web of the book, much the way the strands of our real lives play, surface, and retreat.

By the end of the book, we have seen Peggy develop into a grown young woman who is as self-dissatisfied as most of us are, yet who accepts that she has developed relationships with other people, within and outside of her family, and a relationship to her world. Like many young people who live year-round in Vermont today, Peggy chooses to find herself at the next stage of her identity outside of the familiar green hills. Even so, the reader feels as deeply as Peggy that the time spent within Vermont has shaped her choices, and will continue to do so, whether she returns or not.

Stevenson's new book is both lyrical and beautifully driven in its telling of the story of a young woman who seeks to fit into a world she views from the outside. The poignancy is never diluted by sentimentality; the characters are real people, familiar to us as people who live in Vermont, whether year-round or part-time. Peggy's view of the world is just idiosyn-

cratic enough to keep us reading, to surge ahead for and towards the unpredictable.

Jenny Land Mackenzie is the author of the novel The Spare Room, along with poetry collections in the U.S. and in England. She teaches English and Creative Writing at St. Johnsbury Academy and lives in Peacham, Vermont.

Author Talks About Turning Experience into Fiction

Author Laura C. Stevenson will speak at the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum on "Writing from Life: Turning Experience into Fiction." The event will be held Wednesday, August 5 at 7 p.m. The program is free, open to the public, and handicapped accessible. Space is limited and doors open at 6:30 p.m. Please arrive no later than 7:15 pm.

Stevenson will sign copies of *Liar from Vermont* after the program. Profits of the book sales at the event will be donated by the publisher, Brigantine Media, to the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum.

More information about *Liar from Vermont* is available at www.lauracstevenson.org.