



Lucky for Good

Susan Patron , Erin McGuire (Illustrations)

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ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD LUCKY adores Miles—a cookie fiend, genius, and the closest she’s got to a little brother. But when Miles’s mother returns to Hard Pan, Lucky finds herself with a tricky, challenging moral dilemma and no idea what to do about it. She also gets into big-time trouble for starting a fight with an older boy, discovers a relative (and much-needed ally) called Stick, and says the hardest good-bye of her life. Meanwhile, Hard Pan residents join together into an unlikely but determined army, declaring war against the County Health Department, which wants to close Brigitte’s Hard Pan Café.

This final book in the *Lucky* trilogy continues to explore the vast rocky landscape of the human heart. As always, Lucky is brave and foolish, impulsive and tender, vulnerable and determined—for good.

Lucky for Good Details

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From Reader Review Lucky for Good for online ebook

Steve Clark says

"Lucky for Good" wraps up her story in a still-winning fashion, but sometimes feels a bit like an effort to get it over with so the author can get on with something she really wants to work on. The story starts off with Lucky getting into trouble at school. She gets into a fight with a slightly older boy, and ends up punished with a school assignment where both she and the boy need to track down their family histories. Now, I suppose there's a chance readers might be disappointed with the predictability if the two had wound up romantically linked, or at least, very close friends, so perhaps it should be a relief to discover that doesn't really happen. I mean, they reconcile, and have some ongoing relationship, but he really fades from the focus of the book. Lucky has to track down the father she's never known, and suffice to say, it doesn't end with any clichéd touching reunion, either. She DOES discover a pretty cool relative, but not a whole lot comes to fruition there, either.

So what does the book have in its favor? Well, Lucky, and the quirky but believable characters of *Hard Pan*. In particular, I like Brigid, who DEFINITELY defies standard childhood story stepmother tropes, and her best friend/sidekicks Lincoln and Miles. The interactions between the members of the small community can still be touching. So while it doesn't quite make it to "amazing", I still did "really like it". A low key, pleasant read for days when you are up to enjoying a more realistic slice of life.

Bekah says

The reason behind two stars is simply the story. This one delved a lot into the nature of God, religion, and what not. Pretty deep stuff for an eleven year old to expound on. As Matt said while listening, "I've never heard an eleven year old talk like that". Fun characters and I still enjoyed the book (same reader as the previous- great reader) but just didn't like the subplots as much. Plus, I'm not really into sculptures made out of findings in owl pellets... :)

Josiah says

When a journey like the *Hard Pan* trilogy ends, after years of investment on the part of readers in the characters and the particulars of their lives, I think that the final book usually carries a bit more emotional weight than most stand-alone novels. In this case, I've been reading about Lucky for several years, faithfully obtaining a copy of each new book in the trilogy upon its publication, so for me this is more than just a nice, lovely story coming to a close. Lucky's odyssey toward an understanding of the complexities of living a life that no one among us will ever be able to really control has become an important part of my own life. I clearly see in her my own struggles in coming to peace with living in an unpredictable world where even the most painstaking plans can go completely haywire in the blink of an eye. People disappear from our lives all the time, as was the case with Lucky's mother; she accidentally stepped on a live wire outside of her home one day, and just like that she was gone. Lucky's never even had her father in her life; he was voluntarily missing in action from the very beginning, and were it not for his first wife, Brigitte, flying over from France to act as mother to a young girl she hardly knew and wasn't even related to, Lucky would have been a veritable orphan. But things go wrong so quickly in life, and the sweetness of our moments right now as we

live and breath can evaporate before we even finishing taking our next breath, and the house of cards that we're so sure will hold up for us just because we can't imagine it not doing so will always eventually collapse, at least partially. And if we're not ready to pick up the cards and begin rebuilding, prepared at all times to start the rebuilding again because that's what happens in life, then how can we have the elasticity to flex in sync with a world in the midst of permanent change? We can't hold too dearly to what we have or the exact way we have it today, because someday it will be gone, and so the only way to remain happy is to move and change along with everything that we love. This is Lucky's world, and it's ours, too.

Not as much happens in *Lucky for Good* as in the two previous books of the *Hard Pan* trilogy; the story takes up not too long after the end of *Lucky Breaks*, with Lucky's friend Lincoln preparing to travel overseas for a big convention of knot tyers in a few weeks. Life around Hard Pan, California has actually been fairly good recently, until a government health man stops by to ask Brigitte a few questions about the French restaurant that she owns. As it turns out, having a restaurant hooked onto one's home is a violation of state health law, and Brigitte will have to find a new place for her restaurant or be put out of business. Her third option, which is to move away from Hard Pan permanently, is too terrible for Lucky to even ponder. Her whole life is here, and all of her friends live in Hard Pan. To leave behind Lincoln, and Miles, and Short Sammy...how could Lucky ever say goodbye to these people?

There's a lot that a close-knit town can do to work together and save a friend's business when its existence is jeopardized, though. But even as the residents of Hard Pan try to figure out how to hold on to the town's only ethnic restaurant and its beloved proprietor, Lucky is given a school assignment to make a family tree of the several most recent generations of her relatives, leading down to her. This project, made harder for Lucky by the fact that she's not in touch with any family members, gives her cause to look deeper into the tree on her father's side of the family. There are still so many things that she wonders about him; how did a man who has chosen not to be involved at all in his daughter's life get two wonderful, caring ladies like Lucky's mother and Brigitte to fall in love with and marry him? Is there something about Lucky that has kept him at a distance all these years, something that has made him not want to be a part of her life? Why, when Lucky lost her mother and needed a solid parent more than anything in the world, did her father send Brigitte instead of coming himself? If there are answers to be found beyond the sketchy details she has been told so far, then it will likely be in her family tree that she finds them. So, undaunted by the lack of communication that she has received up until now from her father's side of the family, Lucky dives into her research head-on, hoping the resolutions that she has long sought will finally come her way.

Lucky for Good is mostly about the dynamics of change in Lucky's life, though, as she moves toward junior high and the way that she views the world continue to evolve. It's not as if she's growing into something better than she was, or something worse; I think it's just that she *is* changing, just as the people around her and even the dynamics of the town of Hard Pan are changing, and though it may be frightening to be a part of our constantly shifting world and her own changes may not always synchronize comfortably with those of her friends and loved ones, it's the willingness to change that matters most. Even her relationship with Lincoln is undergoing its own evolution; what has always been a steady, natural friendship may be progressing toward something more as both of them get older. They're comfortable with each other and that really counts for something, and even if Lucky can't guess what might possibly come next between them, she knows that her affection for Lincoln is real. And there's a lot of time for her to figure out exactly what that means.

If half-star ratings were available, I would rate *Lucky for Good* as a solid two-and-a-half. I considered for a long while whether that meant I wanted to round the rating up to three or down to two, but ultimately I had to go for three. *Lucky for Good* captures some of the same indescribable feelings of quiet awe at the complexities of life in our universe that so beautifully infuse the end of *Lucky Breaks*, capturing with words

the scene of a girl and her friends on the cusp of adolescence, aware that they're moving out into a big, intimidating world together with no way of knowing what's coming or how they're going to react to it. Their life is a story yet to be written, just like all of ours, and I believe that even if Susan Patron were to never write another book about Lucky, her story will continue on in the lives of all of us who have been profoundly impacted by her, and came to understand ourselves better because we loved Lucky and wished so hard for her to be happy. No matter what, our affections will remain with Lucky for good. And, as time goes by, I believe that the *Hard Pan* trilogy will grow in consideration as one of the more indispensable contributions to contemporary American literature for young readers, an emotionally engaging journey of no easy answers that teaches us about ourselves with a profundity that belies the brevity of each individual book. I recommend *The Higher Power of Lucky* and its two sequels with the utmost fondness and respect, and I know that I'm not the only one to do so.

April says

[and lots of love (hide spoiler)]

Anastasia Tuckness says

Lucky is back, and she has some hard questions. Like, why is Miles' mother Justine obsessed with the Bible? Does Miles have to give up his beliefs about dinosaur origins and primate hominids now that he's found Jesus? Did Charles Darwin go to heaven? Why doesn't her father want anything to do with her? Will junior high be full of bullies? Will Lincoln understand how much she will miss him when he goes to live with a master knot-tyer in England? What does Justine want to do with hundreds of owl pellets? Will Lucky and Brigitte (her adoptive mother) have to leave Hard Pan because of Regulation Number 1849, which states that one cannot cook for commercial purposes in a residential kitchen?

In this deeply satisfying conclusion to the Lucky trilogy, Patron weaves a story of Lucky and all the residents of Hard Pan we've come to know and love, plus a few new ones like Stu Burping the health inspector and his nephew Ollie Martin the skateboarder.

I would recommend this book and the other Lucky books to tween readers who enjoy realistic fiction that's not just fluff, readers who like a plucky female protagonist, and fans of books such as *Caddie Woodlawn* and *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate*.

Barbara says

Susan Patron writes so beautifully that sometimes it takes your breath away. In this third book of the Lucky trilogy, she continues to give Lucky a voice that rings utterly true. The children in it are mature beyond their years but are totally believable. They are also deeply affected by their unique community and its environs. Lucky's observations about life are descriptive and insightful in the most loving way. She grows up in this book in so many ways. Lincoln, Miles, Paloma, Brigitte, and the Beagle are truly beloved characters as are Short Sammy and the rest of the Hard Pan crew. Thank you once again for bringing them all back to life.

Leslie says

I love the way this children's books author believes children have brains they can actually operate themselves.

Few dare in Children's Literature like Susan Patron does, and I really think they should. Lucky's Hard Pan Trilogy ends even more provocatively than it began; which, you may recall, was quite controversial. Can a Children's Book use the word "scrotum," let alone use it on the first page?! This was the worry with the 2007 Newbery Award-Winner *The Higher Power of Lucky*. Bless you Ms. Patron for out-doing yourself with each installment and ending on a high note.

In *Lucky for Good*, Brigitte's Café is doing remarkably well until the Health Inspector drops in, a Mr. Stu Burping. Apparently the Café is in violation of a certain code, and in order to keep the Café open, the community of Hard Pan come together to save it. With Mr. Burping's subsequent visits come his sulky and bigoted nephew Ollie; Ollie who is involved in the impetus behind Lucky learning more about her father. Then there is the return of Mile's mother Justine who has found God in prison. *Lucky for Good* continues in series' portraiture of family, both the one you are born into and the one you create about you. Both require more than a little grace.

In every novel of the trilogy, Susan Patron increases the population of Lucky's world. She creates multifaceted characters who can make life good as easily as they make life difficult. Many misunderstand or are misunderstood, but they are each their own. I am impressed with the deft way Patron uses and defies cliché to engage the reader's attention and their critical thought. Strange is the new Normal. We exist in a climate of diversity and ever evolving circumstances. *Lucky for Good* is not concerned only with common histories (e.g. immigration) or getting along with same species (i.e. 'we're all human' or 'we're blood relatives'), perhaps we can learn to negotiate ourselves into relationship across specie, across belief-systems, and across the planes of the living/dead (via legacy).

What Patron continues in *Lucky for Good* that I find beautiful and brave is the way she stands by the integrity of her characters—especially the children. It is always a good thing when an author does not underestimate their audience, but what about their characters? Adults may not care to hear the word "scrotum" spoken by a child or a children's author, but how about their feelings about Death? About Higher Powers? Or their own views on scientific subject matters?

"There was no one she could ask. She definitely never told anyone about her death thoughts [not suicidal], because she suspected they would make her go to doctors for testing and she'd end up at a school for disturbed children. Well, she was probably a little bit disturbed, but wasn't everybody? And it was not in a bad or alarming way, only inside her own head, where it didn't bother a soul in the world.

"So she carefully kept her thoughts to herself, in the privacy of her mind." (132)

Wonder what perpetuates the idea that Lucky would be seen as "disturbed" for imagining scenarios of abandonment and recovery—in a world where she has been abandoned in one way and another. How do we model our approach to difficult subjects? How do we converse on the difficult topics that children do actually think about?

Hard Pan is perhaps one of the oddest representations of a Utopian society. For Lucky, she finds family, friendship, and a place where people care to have her opinion. You can only hope the same for Miles. Miles is one of the sweetest little boys written into literature and his mother's return is heartbreaking. Not only does Miles have to adjust to the return of his mother, but the new belief-system and rules she brings with her. Having experienced Lucky's growth over the course of the trilogy, you have every hope for him. And Lucky's true-to-Lucky reassurance for Miles? "Well, listen, Miles. Even though you're a kid, you're still a person. You can decide things" (188).

"In *Lucky for Good*, Susan Patron tackles big ideas with a deft and delicate touch. Lucky is a delightful heroine, funny and wise beyond her years." ~Frances O'Roark Dowell.

There are tricky conversations within *Lucky for Good*, who is, ultimately for the good of everyone and everything. There have been many a juvenile fiction novel inviting the reader to a greater education of Charles Darwin and Evolution via their protagonists and plot. Much of this appears to be a response to the struggle in our Public Schools over the subject of Darwin. My mother-in-law taught at a Middle School up the street from Focus on the Family—don't think there wasn't a list of subjects and terms to not be mentioned in the classroom. Regardless of how you (as an adult) feel on this subject, the point is that children are aware of the controversial topics and are forming opinions and are often wanting for conversation on the matters. Ollie forms an opinion from one of the many popular beliefs on immigration and it is hurtful, and with regards to the situation: dangerously ignorant.

Children find exposure to different perspectives: via friends, books, unforeseeable circumstances, etc. Goodness knows they come up with thoughts all their own. Lucky just wants to practice talking about it and know how others feel on a given subject—especially her favorite: Charles Darwin. Patron's *Lucky for Good* provokes a conversation on a subject from which children have been pretty much excluded. (Bibliophiles will love the argument on 156-7.) And without subverting the spirit of all three *Hard Pan* books, *Lucky for Good* encourages curiosity, conversation, and critical thought—not only between characters, but with the Readers. A message if there is one needs stating is: I'm not telling you, dear Reader, what to think, but am merely reminding you that you can think and you should think. Creative solutions and hard-earned wisdom abound. And what better place to learn how to cope with Life's big questions and curveballs than *Hard Pan*?

note: if you are concerned that Justine is vilified? She is not any more than most who create fear and uncertainty; not unlike the Health Inspector, not unlike the Father who abandoned his daughter, etc. Justine actually finds a place in *Hard Pan*; she is treated respectfully. I find it interesting that books that inherently encourage hearing another out and to live compassionately receives the least of those things—of course, I could be pleasantly surprised and find *Lucky for Good* safe from challenge, from various sources (e.g. If you don't like hearing the name Jesus or God, nor care for the words "hell" or "Evolution" or "evolving," etc).

Also, *Lucky for Good* doesn't read 'provocative for the sake of provocation.' As Kathi Appelt notes, "Susan Patron writes honest and true, and this, her final *Lucky*, feels trues of all." Justine brings a very common conflict to the landscape and Lucky and Miles, among others have to find a way to make Justine family/community. Miles, for obvious reasons, and Lucky because she views Miles as a brother and does not want him to leave *Hard Pan* and she certainly does not like to see him hurting. Justine is just one new relationship finding a foothold in *Lucky for Good*: there is the evolving relationship between Lincoln and Lucky; there is the hopeful future blossoming with Pete; there is the haunting of a Father's decisions; there is a wild burro and a ginger cat. What Susan Patron does with the characterization and the relationships is magnificent. *Lucky* isn't message-y, but a bit messy, and a bit like life, and it grows on you, and that hopeful

ending to Lucky for Good?—I believe it.

L @ omphaloskepsis

<http://contemplatrix.wordpress.com/20...>

Katie Fitzgerald says

This review also appears on my blog, Read-at-Home Mom.

Lucky for Good is the third and final book in Susan Patron's Hard Pan series. As the book begins, Lucky and her adoptive mom, Brigitte, learn that the cafe Brigitte runs is illegal because it's inside their residence. The people of Hard Pan come together, therefore, to find Brigitte a new location and to settle her into her new building. In the meantime, Miles's mother returns from prison with a new religious outlook that she tries to force upon her son, Lucky fights with the nephew of the health inspector who oversees the move of Brigitte's Cafe, and Lincoln prepares to say goodbye before his big trip to England.

I'm sad to see this wonderful trilogy come to an end, but for the most part, I think it's been given a nice send-off. At times, I felt like it tried to wrap up too much in too small a space, particularly regarding Lucky's father and his relatives, and I was somewhat put off by the romantic overtones starting to appear in Lucky and Lincoln's friendship. That said, though, the exploration of the relationship between religion and science was an interesting one, which made references back to Lucky's scientific interests in the first two books. I also liked seeing Lucky's journey come full circle, with her knowledge of twelve-step programs and higher powers coming back into the story at its conclusion.

My one disappointment was that Matt Phelan did not illustrate this volume. While Erin Mcguire's illustrations are lovely - especially the one of Miles and his mother hugging during their reunion - I got used to Matt Phelan's style, and it was quite jarring to see another illustrator's interpretations of these characters I feel like I know so well. This is a small quibble, however, and shouldn't detract from the overall success of the novel. This third book is not my favorite of the series, or the best one, but it made a satisfying and fitting ending to Lucky's story, and left me feeling optimistic about Lucky's future success.

Monica Hocking says

Me stopped reading on page #22 cause me no can get a grasp of what was going on or where this story was going! Me was totally confused and frustrated! Guess this no for me.

Eva Mitnick says

If you lived in Hard Pan, who would you be? Are you a creative and thrifty Short Sammy type, living in a water tank? Or are you more like Klincke Ken, who can fix anything and has a fondness for cats and donkeys? Perhaps you're more like sociable Dot, who operates the only beauty salon in town or the Captain, who holds the only steady job with benefits that exists in Hard Pan (postmaster).

Myself, I'd be Mrs. Prender, grandma of the smart-and-sweet 6-year-old Miles and mom of Miles' mom,

Justine, who has just returned from a longish stint in prison. Mrs. Prender has been raising Miles as best she can, bringing him books from the library to feed his hunger for knowledge, and then her intense and complicated daughter returns as a new, passionate, and outspoken Christian. The kind that takes the bible as literal and won't let her son read any books about dinosaurs or anything else that contradicts what the bible says about the creation of the earth.

What a dilemma! It's hard for Mrs. Prender, it's hard for Miles, it's even hard for Lucky.

There are other things going on in Lucky's life, and the most dramatic is that the county, personified by Stu Burping, may have to close down Brigitte's Hard Pan Cafe due to a code violation that doesn't allow the commercial serving of food out of a residence. Luckily, the eccentric and independent residents of Hard Pan prove themselves up to the task of teaming up to come up with an innovative solution, leading to a scene of outrageous hilarity and thrills when a tractor with no brakes, towing a cabin, heads slowly and precariously down the road. Unbeknownst to the driver, Klincke Ken, the road ahead is filled with animals and people - so Lincoln and Lucky's friend Paloma jump aboard the tractor to warn him. Klincke Ken can't hear him and is a little annoyed.

"Later!" Klincke Ken shouted. "I'm a little busy!" He resolved to ignore those two and turned back around to face front and the home stretch. And what he saw caused him to rise up in his seat. Kids! And women! Half the blasted town, it looked like - all over the road!

Homes and propane tanks on the left, a 4-foot drop to a sandy shoulder on his right, and no brakes! The tension mounts but somehow the comedy does, too - until a combination of factors suddenly clears the road. Klincke Ken accepts the miracle. "The sky had never in his life been so blue, the air so pure, or the sun so brilliant."

Lucky, being her usual slightly fierce and rather tenacious self, has her own troubles. After socking a mean boy in the jaw (well, she had good reason, okay?), Lucky is assigned a task as punishment - to create her family tree. And this means investigating her absent father's side of the family. That Lucky handles this with style and aplomb demonstrates how much she has grown up since the day she ran away two books ago. In *The Higher Power of Lucky*, Lucky is still quite fragile and desperate for reassurance and in *Lucky Breaks*, she is trying to handle some powerful and not so positive emotions. Now, Lucky shows herself able to meet difficult situations head-on, with common sense and perspective.

(well, except for that momentary loss of sanity when she punched that boy - ahem!)

It's clear that Lucky is going to weather adolescence just fine. Oh, it'll be rocky at times (because like I said, Lucky is both fierce and tenacious), but her sense of humor and her intelligence will see her through. And Miles will be okay, too - because he's got a great friend in Lucky, plus a loving family in Justine and Mrs. Prender.

And Lincoln? Well, I'd definitely vote for him for president!

Hmm, this seems not to have been a review so much as a catching up on some folks I love to visit when I'm in the area. So, to wrap it up - this is a funny, thought-provoking, and touching finale to Lucky's trilogy. And I'm devastated that I won't be able to read about Hard Pan any more. Nooooooooooooo!

Debi says

Good childrens book ~ euphoric adult's book ~ read the 1st 2 books 1st

ALPHAreader says

Review of all three books in the 'Hard Pan Trilogy'

Lucky Trimble lives in Hard Pan, California, in a canned-ham bedroom attached to a trailer. She lives with Brigitte, who is not her mother but her biological father's French ex-wife. Brigitte came to Hard Pan all the way from France because Lucky's father asked her to, after Lucky's mother went out into the desert after a storm and was struck dead by lightning.

So for now Lucky lives with Brigitte, who calls her 'petite puce' which sounds lovely in French, but really means 'little flea' in English. Lucky loves Brigitte, but does not dare hope that she will want to be Lucky's mother for good.

So in between trying not to hope that Brigitte will become Lucky's mother, and avoiding looking at her real dead mother's ashes in an urn, Lucky decides to find her higher power to get her through. It's what everyone talks about at the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting held at Hard Pan's Found Object Wind Chime Museum. Higher power. Short Sammy talks about it a lot, when he recounts the story of the day his beloved dog got bit by a snake and his wife left him, and how he ended up finding his higher power that got him through the worst time in his life.

'The Higher Power of Lucky' was Susan Patron's 2007 Newberry award-winning middle-grade book. In 2010 Patron went on to continue Lucky's story with 'Lucky Breaks', and ending with 'Lucky For Good' in 2011, when Lucky is twelve-years-old, rounding the books out to the 'Hard Pan Trilogy'.

Susan Patron's series is a complete delight; for both its charismatically flawed heroine and her delightfully quirky hometown of Hard Pan. The first book, 'Higher Power of Lucky' begins when Lucky is ten-years-old, and her mother has just recently passed away, 'replacing' her with her father's ex-wife, the French Brigitte. We are introduced to this very unconventional family unit, which encompasses the wider town of Hard Pan, populated with quirky characters. There's Lucky's best friend, Lincoln, a knot-tying protégé with hopes of becoming the future President of the United States. Little boy Miles who has a perfectly-timed cookie-retrieval system for visiting all the Hard Pan residents. There's also Short Sammy who lives in a water tank, and mourns the loss of his best dog friend not to mention an archeological team who breeze through Hard Pan to stop at Brigitte's renowned French-bistro café.

The books are all about Lucky; a glorious ragamuffin of a girl who is navigating the changing landscape of her life after losing her mother. The books begin when she is ten and follow her to age twelve, but Patron's brilliance lies in not restricting Lucky to her young age - she has moments, particularly in 'Lucky Breaks' and especially 'Lucky For Good' when she's starting to notice the opposite sex, beginning to appreciate (and resent) the flaws in her character and truly come to realize the impacting world beyond Hard Pan. 'Lucky For

Good' is a particularly interesting book for Lucky's evolution, because she starts to think on the feelings of resentment and anger she has towards her absent father - who abandoned Lucky and her mother shortly after she was conceived. Patron doesn't inundate the books with all of these life-changing, big marker moments - and it's partly thanks to the third-person narration that as readers we can see Lucky's forming character, but don't get bogged down in the life-changing momentousness of it all. Patron is such a masterful storyteller, particularly in her middle-grade revelations, that she gives the readers just enough incite to have that spark of recognition regarding big changes within Lucky. And some of Patron's emotive descriptions and similes are just so pitch-perfect and brilliant;

Lucky had the same jolting feeling as when you're in a big hurry to pee and you pull down your pants fast and back up to the toilet without looking - but some man or boy before you has forgotten to put the seat down. So your bottom, which is expecting the usual nicely shaped plastic toilet seat, instead lands shocked on the thin rim of the toilet bowl, which is quite a lot colder and lower. Your bottom gets a panic of bad surprise. That was the same thump-on-the-heart shock Lucky got finding out that Miles's mother was in jail.
— **'The Higher Power of Lucky'**

These books are very much focused on family, but not the conventional, nuclear one of other middle-grade books. Patron, in her 'Lucky' series really embraces the notion that it takes a village to raise a child, and lacking blood-ties doesn't mean lacking in love. Lucky's interactions with her stepmother, Brigitte, are heartfelt and lovely;

Brigitte laughed. "I tell you a little story about why I love to live here. When I first arrive in California, I see the sign on the highway; 'Soft Shoulder.' I think this is a very beautiful thing for a road sign to say: 'soft shoulder.'"

Mrs. Wellborne laughed and nodded.

"We do not have any like it in France, and I am curious. Later I learn it means the side of the road is too sandy and your car can get stuck. So 'soft shoulder' is a practical warning, but sweet. Like a small poem. It is a romantic way to see the world, just like to believe anything is possible." She shrugged. "Before, when I live in France, I believe not everything is possible. Never do I imagine that one day I will go to a little town in the middle of this big California desert or that, even working very hard, I can start my own business."

Lucky listened with some amazement. Usually Brigitte didn't share those kinds of private thoughts with someone she'd just met. The two moms must have really bonded because of those phone calls.

"And," Brigitte continued, "certainly never do I dream that the girl waiting inside a water tank house will later be my daughter. So now that I am almost American, I see out of my almost-American eyes that it is true: Anything can be possible. And if Lincoln does become president, he will be a very great one."

— **'Lucky Breaks'**

I really enjoyed reading Susan Patron's Newberry-winning series, focused on Hard Pan native, little girl Lucky and the cast of quirky characters in her desert hometown.

Isabel Haber says

Middle-schoolers will have the easiest time relating with Lucky in this final Hard Pan installment. I enjoyed

this book a lot, and think it would be hard not to love Lucky!

Patsy says

This is my favorite Lucky of the three, and that's probably because of the family history connection. Contention is resolved and a large part of Lucky's angst is relieved, at least in part, to family history discovery.

Henry Martin says

This was my second reading of the entire Lucky trilogy, and the second time around it was even better than the first time.

Susan Patron has a way to deliver a powerful impact with simple sentences. Never mind that this book is geared towards young readers - it is a fully developed masterpiece.

It starts with a setting - Hard Pan, California. A small town in the Mojave Desert surrounded by abandoned mines, sediments, and . . . desert. Miles from anywhere, even the dreaded cellphones do not get a signal there (sounds rather good).

And it continues with the characters - a bunch of desert rats, all quirky and adorable in their own way. All except Brigitte - a French woman who came to the desert to be Lucky's guardian following Lucky's mother's death. Lucky's father? A man who sends a monthly check, but shows no other interest in his child. Lucky thought she never met him, until she discovers that the man who handed her the urn containing her mother's ashes was, in fact, her father. But he never talked to her, choosing to hide behind his dark sunglasses instead. The others all have their baggage - Short Sammy, a recovering alcoholic who adopts a piece of the desert highway; Dot - a beautician who only gives one kind of haircut, and whose daughter is in jail; the Captain - who runs the post office and rations out free government food; and a few others.

The main protagonist is Lucky herself, yet her interactions with the remaining three child characters is crucial. There is Lincoln - a future president who obsesses with knot tying; Miles - cookie loving genius and Dot's grandson, who does not know his mother is in jail; and Paloma - the daughter of rich, overprotective parents from Hollywood.

Starting with the first book, the story thickens - Brigitte turns out to be Lucky's father's first wife - yet that only adds a dimension to the overall delivery. I say story because there is really no plot to speak of (in traditional children's literature terms). Instead, we are offered a glimpse at the life of a young girl, whose mother died, whose father abandoned her, and who is growing up living in three welded-together trailers in the middle of a desert. I would say this alone would be akin to a European independent film.

Susan Patron skillfully uses the settings, characters, and circumstances to blend together a moving experience. Because that is what this trilogy is - an experience. It tackles major life themes in a matter-of-fact way, it teaches without being preachy, and it enlightens without being soapy.

Highly recommended to read along with your pre-teens and teens, because it opens up many opportunities

for conversations.
