



Guitar Boy

Mary Jane Auch

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Travis Tacey doesn't have it easy: his mom's in the hospital suffering from brain trauma after a terrible car accident, and his father has lost his good sense in the aftermath and kicked him out. Homeless, penniless, and only fourteen years old, Travis tries to make money off of his singing and guitar playing skills. But when his beloved guitar--a family heirloom--is stolen, Travis grows desperate. By a stroke of luck, he gets a job helping a guitar maker. Through Travis's love of music, his devotion to his family, and the kindness of strangers, he begins to find his way in the world. But how will he keep his family together?

Guitar Boy Details

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From Reader Review Guitar Boy for online ebook

Kendall says

This book was very entertaining, but somewhat slow to start. The book certainly picked up speed later on, and made it well worth the wait.

Perhaps the biggest reason I rated this book 4/5 stars instead of 5 was because of Travis himself. I found Travis a very contradictory character, who tended to lash out at people or hide things unnecessarily. That said, it didn't hinder my enjoyment of the book, but it did make me alternate between loving Travis and finding him somewhat grating. The Adirondacks was a very interesting setting for the story, but it also felt somewhat forced. Some of the names seemed very out of place and not at all indigenous to the Adirondacks. Again, just my opinion.

I wanted to give those two complaints first to get them out of the way, because I really loved the book. It was entertaining, and the author's enthusiasm was embedded throughout. It was a lot of fun! I would recommend this book to most anyone who enjoys guitars, but, infinitely more importantly, to someone who needs an uplifting story. I enjoyed it highly.

Dustin says

Have you ever known what it's like to be on your own as a child? Do you know what it's like to be extremely mad at a parent? Travis knows what it's like. His mother has just gotten into a car accident and is now in the hospital. Now he is left with his father and four siblings. Their father is having a tough time supporting his family. He's even taken his daughter out of school so she would take care of her siblings. Now his father wants Travis to quit school and make money to support his family.

Travis doesn't like this because his father doesn't have a job and now he's making Travis work instead of him. After Travis quits his job, his father kicks him out of the house. "I said, get out!" (pg. 61) He's now trying to live on his own. How can he go home now that his father is mad at him? In "Guitar Boy" by MJ Auch, Travis is broke and only has one thing, his guitar. He tries to make a living with his singing and his music playing, but this is hard when you are homeless.

I give this book a four star rating for the amazingness of this book. I recommend this to any middle schooler who loves realistic fiction.

Sonny says

I was close to giving up on Guitar Boy after 20 pages or so. The characters hadn't said or done anything remotely novel or meaningful. I felt like I knew exactly where the book was heading (boy finds himself through music), mapping out the plot in my head. I was bored.

Well, I was about half wrong. The characters stayed boring, lifeless. They say and do things because we know they will--they're overly kind, overly harsh, etc.

But the plot takes a nice turn when protagonist Travis is kicked out of his home after an accident leaves his mom brain-damaged and his father plot-advancingly mean.

What I smelled out as a boring book about a boy finding himself through music turned out to be a about a boy gaining a little independence in the face of trouble. That's what kept me reading to the end. There are some mixed messages concerning familial duty, and Travis's new set of adult friends seem irresponsibly perfect. But I can see this as an enjoyable read for a young adult looking for a relaxing book, where no one has to fight to the death or anything.

Lily Banda says

Travis Tracey doesn't have your normal teenage boy problems. Bad grades, girl issues, and fitting in aren't really his concern. Instead, he has to worry about things like his recently paralyzed mother, his abusive and cruel father, and supporting his family. After being kicked out of the house by his father after an argument, Travis sets off in the world with only his mother's old guitar, the clothes on his back, and a few dollars. After only a couple days in the world, everything is going terribly, until Travis befriends a guitar maker and shop owner, Scott McKissack. And for once, things are going okay for Travis, despite being alone and homeless. Something good about this book was it took turns that I didn't think were going to happen. When i thought one thing was going to happen, the author took it in a completely different direction. However I didn't like how fast the book moved. Like one minute they're in the hospital and the next they're in a diner. I feel like there could have been a little bit more detail put into it. It was still a really good book though.

Clover White says

Travis's mom has been in a bad accident and is laying in the hospital with brain damage. His father spirals out of control, due to his grief. The father loses his job and kicks fourteen-year old Travis out of the house. Travis leaves with too-big shoes, the clothes on his back, and his great-great-great grandfather's guitar.

Things I liked about this book: the Adirondacks setting, the glimpse into a community of music-minded friends, the basic decency of the hero.

Things I did not like: The lack of the back story. Even if things get out of control because of the accident, why was the family so poor and backward before the accident? The father works, the mother works at the prison (decent wages), yet the kids have never had new clothes. Why? And I found it immensely unbelievable that Travis could have lived in the same house for 14 years, and yet has never been to a different town in the area. He's never seen a vista of mountains?? And he wanders around, on foot, completely lost, for days. He's not in the woods-- he can't find his way around the roads right near his house? The whole family situation seemed very unbelievable.

It was interesting to read a little bit about guitar-making, including a poem about the wood in the guitars finally finding a voice after growing for a hundred years.

Gracekell says

I feel really bad for the main character because his dad was a maniac and was always screaming at him. And his mother was in the hospital after an accident with brain trauma. Travis was a really strong character.

Ellen says

When I added "Guitar Boy" to my TBR pile, I remember thinking that it sounded more like a middle grade novel than a YA. That idea might have stemmed from the summary, or the knowledge that the last novel I read by M.J. Auch was one I read at fourteen and pulled from the MG section in the library. Whatever the intended audience, I finished "Guitar Boy" in a day and loved every minute of it.

Travis is a fourteen year old guitar player whose life has been turned upside down in the wake of his mother's car accident and subsequent injuries. His father is trying and failing to run the household and keep his five children fed, and a string of bad decisions leads to him throwing Travis out of the house. Travis ends up unofficially apprenticed to a local guitar-maker while he attempts to piece his life and his family back together.

For an incredibly simple premise, this story had so much heart and so much personality. It wasn't as much about music as it was about connection--to the family you're born with and the family you choose. The people Travis meets when he's isolated from everything he knows become as much a family to him as the one he's left behind, and I loved watching those bonds strengthen as the story progresses. All of the characters in "Guitar Boy" felt authentic, like if you pulled off the interstate at some nowhere town in the Adirondacks you might encounter any of them.

Every one of the subplots tied neatly together, from the local festival Travis helps the guitar-maker prepare for, to Travis's own missing family heirloom guitar, to his attempts to reach his mother. The links in the overall chain of events were believable and heart-wrenching and ultimately hopeful.

"Guitar Boy" is the kind of book that I want to avoid talking about too specifically, because no amount of summarizing will even begin to do the story justice. If you like quieter stories with great character development and a happier ending than you might have dared to hope for, definitely give this one a read.

Kelsey says

Oh my gosh this book is amazing! Can someone please give me amnesia so I can enjoy it all over again? If you're a fan of music you will totally dig this book.

Bethany Miller says

2.5 stars

Ever since their mother was seriously injured in a car accident, life hasn't been easy for fourteen-year-old Travis and his brothers and sisters. June, the oldest, has already quit school in order to care for her younger brothers and sisters. When their father loses his job, Travis is forced to quit school so that he can earn money to help support the family. Travis's mother is in a nursing home, where she doesn't seem to be getting the help that she needs for rehabilitation. One night Travis and his father have a terrible argument, and his father kicks him out of the house. Travis sets out alone with nothing but the clothes on his back, a broken bicycle and a guitar that has been in his mother's family for generations. With nowhere else to go, Travis decides to

seek out a local guitar maker in hopes that he will be able to repair the old guitar and possibly give him work. Along the way Travis accepts a ride from a stranger, and the man steals the guitar, which is Travis's only connection to his mother, whose brain trauma has made her almost unrecognizable to her children. He must find a way to get the guitar back, help his mother, and reconcile with his father and the rest of the family.

Guitar Boy is set in the Adirondack Mountains of New York, and the local color that the author creates in part through the emphasis on local music and guitar picking is one aspect of the novel that makes it somewhat unique in young adult literature. Travis is a likable main character, and his father is a standard-issue villain throughout most of the book. The secondary characters are pretty well fleshed out but not completely realistic. The plot also strains credibility at times, and the resolution is a little too quick and tidy; however, it may satisfy readers who hope for a happy ending.

Julia W. says

This book was good. It definitely changed my perspective on life and everything I have. It made me super thankful for a good family!
