



Heaven to Betsy

Maud Hart Lovelace , Vera Neville (Illustrator)

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High School is Heaven! It's Betsy Ray's freshman year at Deep Valley High School, and she and her best childhood chum, Tacy Kelly, are loving every minute. Betsy and Tacy find themselves in the midst of a new crowd of friends, with studies aplenty (including Latin and--ugh--algebra), parties and picnics galore, Sunday night lunches at home--and boys!

There's Cab Edwards, the jolly boy next door; handsome Herbert Humphreys; and the mysteriously unfriendly, but maddeningly attractive, Joe Willard. Betsy likes them all, but no boy in particular catches her fancy until she meets the new boy in town, Tony Markham . . . the one she and Tacy call the Tall Dark Handsome Stranger. He's sophisticated, funny, and dashing--and treats Betsy just like a sister. Can Betsy turn him into a beau?

An entertaining picture of school clubs, fudge parties, sings around the piano, and Sunday-night suppers in Betsy's hospitable home.' 'Chicago Tribune.

Heaven to Betsy Details

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Elizabeth says

This one makes me a bit melancholy, for it's a rather bittersweet read for me. Tib has moved to Milwaukee and Betsy and her family have moved into a new home away from Tacy and her family. Betsy and Tacy are now freshmen in highschool and experiencing so many changes and heartaches in this book. Sigh.... I prefer the first four books when Betsy, Tacy and Tib are girls together and Betsy and Tacy live across the street from each other. Still and all, it's an EXCELLENT book-- of course it is :-)

I do love how close the Ray family is. I also adore Julia and Betsy's relationship and Julia, Betsy and their mother's relationship and how they all gather together to discuss all the social events afterwards right before bedtime.

ak says

I don't think I had actually read this one before and I learned this one was kept outta libraries because Betsy and Julia converting from Baptist to Episcopalian was considered CONTROVERSIAL.

Emilia P says

This book is just fine. But there's too much change! Ah!

First of all, Betsy moves! And then, because of that...

My main qualm is that there is way way way too much boy-stuff and not NEARLY enough Tacy. In fact, since Tacy isn't boy crazy she ends up on the periphery of pretty much all the goings on of freshman year. And in turn, I ended up resenting every other girl introduced in this book. In short: screw you, Bonnie and Carney. Give me back my Tacy. ASAP. Also, it was clear all along what a bad seed Tony was, and I was pretty furious with Betsy for falling for him. So yeah. Those are my gripes.

At the same time, I thought it was a fascinating, accurate, and a throughly, surprisingly modern potrayal of coming of age. There are sleepovers, there are b'girl parties, there are boys walking girls home alone(!), ouija boards, , they all get around the piano and sing the same songs over and over (pre-radio, pre-MTV, but still, a teenage culture ruled by musical romanticism). There are lots of kissings on the cheek.

Betsy screws up a lot and cries a little. In the end she realizes "the crowd" is for a time, but her writing is forever, and that she needs to concentrate on it harder. More power to you, Betsy.

AND she and her sister decide they want to be Episcopalian instead of Baptist! And their dad says, well, ok. It's a really well written, tense, and realistic scene. And then he makes coffee, because that's what the Rays do when they're stressed.

It all could have been so cheesy, but every feeling in this book rang so true. Man oh man, I know I'm giving it a three because I resented the Tacylessness, but I was super into it, clearly, and hope the quiet rift between Betsy and Tacy is addressed (sometimes best friends fight, yo) in a later book. Hill Street 4ever, yo.

Kristin says

I liked Betsy better when she was younger and having different kinds of adventures. Plus Tib has moved and Tacy isn't around much. Years ago when I stopped reading these books to my little girls I thought it was because Betsy was in high school and my girls were so young, but maybe I was just bored with Betsy. I'm curious to see what I will think of the 6th book.

Beth Bonini says

The Betsy-Tacy series was one of my 'comfort read' mainstays when I was growing up, but it has been many years since I had last read the older high school books. Over the next six weeks, I plan on rereading the last six books of the series: starting with this chronicle of Betsy's freshman year in high school and concluding with Betsy's Wedding.

Let me just say this: I've read literally hundreds of YA books (both contemporary and classic) in the last decade. A small percentage of them feature happy families and loving, loyalty friendships; the latter probably being slightly more common than the former. Part of the appeal of Lovelace's beloved books, based so closely on her own life, is that they give the reader a cosy, insider's glimpse into the world of turn-of-the-century small town Minnesota. (The fictional town of Deep Valley is based on Mankato, Lovelace's hometown.). But probably the most wholesome aspect of this series is that Betsy is a well-adjusted, (mostly) happy girl in a happy family. Dysfunctional families are a dime a dozen in realistic YA, but it is rare to find families who truly love and enjoy each other.

The book opens with a not altogether pleasant surprise for Betsy: her family is moving away from Hill Street on the edge of town - and just across the street from Tacy's house - to a bigger, newer house in High Street. There is a lot of change in this book: the new house, starting high school, boy craziness, Betsy's first real crush, religious conversion and friends coming and going. It's also the first time that her best friend Tacy is not absolutely at the center of her world. Although Betsy struggle with small vanities and some laziness, she mostly lives a charmed life - and is entirely happy within it. She is a sentimentalist who deeply loves her life and doesn't really yearn for the "Great Wide World" like her older sister Julia does. But she also dreams of becoming a writer - and by the end of this novel she has fresh resolve for shaping her future towards that goal.

Lisa Vegan says

I've been afraid to read/re-read this, and I procrastinated for a long time. I loved the first four books so much. I have a memory of reading this and Betsy in Spite of Herself when I was young (the only two in this series I knew about and read) and I never re-read them or searched out other companion books so I'm thinking I only liked them at best, and at worst thought they were just okay, and didn't really like or love them. I didn't remember this as I was reading so I'm treating reading this as a brand new experience.

Wow. I surprised myself by giving this book 5 stars. Through most of the book it was a 4 or even a 3 star book for me. It took a while to grow on me, but by the end I loved it.

What, in the earlier 4 books were charming slice of life episodes in the lives of 5-12 year old friends, the happenings here seemed more pedestrian when the events were about 14-17 year old high school students who care at least as much about boys as about girlfriends, and in Betsy's case, her storytelling/writing. The "crowd" of high school freshman friends didn't move me the way the friendship of Betsy and Tacy did, and I missed not having Tacy around as much. At the beginning of the book I liked Tacy better than Betsy. I preferred pre-boy crazy/boys crazy about her Betsy.

However, the book is so well written and the story ended up being done so well, although certainly the reader could see what was coming, but that was fine, even fun. So many moments were so perfectly captured and the descriptions of everything and everyone were beautifully created.

I enjoyed the warm family home where friends enjoy gathering. I appreciated that the father said he didn't think a child's religion should necessarily be decided just because of the religion of the parents, but should be a personal choice. There are so many more examples of things I liked about this story.

It's true that I was disturbed about the change in Betsy (although by the end of the book I was fine with what had transpired) but given that this novel is based on Maud Hart Lovelace's life, I guess this was part of her development, and I do know she became a writer, a very good writer.

Also, the food in these books always sounds incredibly delectable.

I did deliberately avert my eyes from this horrible cover art! The art inside is lovely.

Matthew Hunter says

Both daughter and Dad were less enchanted with *Heaven to Betsy*. We both missed the illustration style of Lois Lenski. Vera Neville's work is polished, like something out of the New Yorker. It's difficult to tell one character from another in the drawings. Maybe Lenski's drawings better conveyed the childhood innocence of the pre-teen phase. Now that Betsy, Tacy and the group are in high school, their lives require a more refined illustration style. Whatever the case, Siggy was disappointed, as was I.

Growing up also means goodbyes and changes in relationships. Betsy's family moves from Hill Street to High Street, putting distance between her and Tacy. Tacy plays a secondary role now as Betsy adds a slew of high school friends - "The Crowd". And Tib's family moves back to Milwaukee before the book's beginning, so we never got to catch up with our somewhat blunt pixie-ish friend.

With her dearest childhood friends relegated to the sidelines, Betsy's attention shifts to boys. Tony (aka Tall Dark Stranger), Cab, Herbert, Joe, and other young men take center stage. Lovelace does a great job of depicting the pain and relational angst connected with budding high school romance. I don't know about you, but I was pretty uncomfortable and awkward in my 14-year-old skin. I could relate to Betsy's bouts with the blues. Of course, Sigourney couldn't relate. Her preschool experience had her asking repeatedly "Why is Betsy so sad?"

Most of my comments above aren't indictments of the book so much. As Betsy and Tacy get older, the books age in tone and style as well. The imaginative games of the first four books give way to the struggles of young adulthood. With each successive installment, the *Betsy-Tacy* series becomes less and less of a read along candidate, and more of a story for 10-plus-year-old girls to read and cherish alone.

Putting all the above comments aside, I can't ignore MHL's masterful job of storytelling. She continues to find the right mix of bittersweet and fun. The existence of Betsy-Tacy conventions and Lovelace Appreciation Societies prove she's got the stuff. By all means, put these books on your shelves for the younger generations to enjoy. And they're not bad reading for adult's either. Have fun!

Carmen Maloy says

This is the first book in the series of "older" Betsy even though it is actually the 5th book in the series. *Heaven to Betsy* is one of the most characteristic of this loved series. If you haven't read any of the others, you'd still enjoy it! Betsy and Tacy enter the wider world of the Deep Valley High School, the "Crowd," sings around Julia's piano, fudge, Heinz's . . . full of gentle humor, vivid characterization, and affection. It's Betsy Ray's freshman year at Deep Valley High School, and she and her best childhood chum, Tacy Kelly, are loving every minute. Betsy and Tacy find themselves in the midst of a new crowd of friends, with studies aplenty (including Latin and--ugh--algebra), parties and picnics galore, Sunday night lunches at home--and boys!

There's Cab Edwards, the jolly boy next door; handsome Herbert Humphreys; and the mysteriously unfriendly, but maddeningly attractive, Joe Willard. Betsy likes them all, but no boy in particular catches her fancy until she meets the new boy in town, Tony Markham . . . the one she and Tacy call the Tall Dark Handsome Stranger. He's sophisticated, funny, and dashing--and treats Betsy just like a sister. Can Betsy turn him into a beau?

An entertaining picture of school clubs, fudge parties, sings around the piano, and Sunday-night suppers in Betsy's hospitable home.

The Betsy-Tacy books were highly autobiographical and Lovelace perfectly captures the innocence and magic of childhood. If you read this book and love it, please read the series. It will be books that you will never forget as long as you live. I also recommend the "Betsy-Tacy Companion" which is an amazing book that dissects each book and compares it to its real-life counterparts, including pictures of the "real" Betsy, Tacy, Tib and all the gang.

I had the pleasure of visiting "Deep Valley" (aka Mankato, Minnesota) for a Betsy-Tacy convention back in 1996. It was incredible to step back in time and enter Betsy's world. We toured the city and I was actually able to step foot in "Tacy's" bedroom and sit on the famous bench at the top of the big hill. It was truly a life-altering experience. I have to thank my sister, Julie for introducing these books to me and changing my life.

It's obvious how much these books mean to me. My first born child was named Tacy Kelly Maloy. Please read and enjoy. They are a treasure!

Kati Polodna says

Betsy's growing up and paying attention to boys! Loved that.

Jess says

BETSY RAY IS A FLIRT AND I LIKE IT.

Tracy says

When I can't find anything to read, I often pick up this series and read it again. I always feel the same delight I felt when I read these books as a girl. They were published in the 1940's, the setting is the 1900's, and they are quite dated now.

My favorites are the first three books, the childhood books. This is the first of the High School books, which are longer and at a higher reading level. When I first read these books, I seriously thought High School was like this, and was sad when I got to real High School and discovered that it wasn't at all.

Debbie says

Maud Hart Lovelace is one of my all-time comfort authors. I discovered the Betsy-Tacy books when I was high school, so I never read the younger books - I just stuck with the older ones, which follow Betsy through high school into her world travels and then marriage.

Betsy Ray and Tacy Kelly met at Betsy's 5th birthday party and have been best friends ever since. They live in the picturesque small town Deep Valley, Minnesota in the early 1900s (high school class 1910). Part of the charm of these books are the illustrations that pull you right into the period. Over Betsy and Tacy's progress through high school, you can follow their corresponding change in fashion from sailor suits to full-skirted ball dresses to slinkier sheath dresses. Style-conscious Betsy starts putting up her hair in a fashionable pompadour, but Tacy insists on keeping her hair in coronet braids. They see movies for a nickel at the Majestic. They travel in buggies pulled by horses until autos become more common.

The books tell of Betsy's struggles and triumphs and general good times. Supporting her unfailingly through it all is her family - her social, pretty mother, her devoted, benevolent father, her ambitious older sister, Julia, and her stately younger sister, Margaret. Family traditions include Sunday night lunches for which Mr. Ray makes his famous sandwiches, trips to the lake where Mr. and Mrs. Ray first met and fell in love, and muffins on the first day of school.

Betsy is a friendly, outgoing girl, and she makes lots of friends in her high school. If the only things I knew about high school came from the Betsy-Tacy books, I would want to go. Lovelace wrote a separate book, Carney's House Party, about Betsy's friend Carney Sibley.

Emily says

I remember well how appalled I was on first reading this seventeen years ago (at age 30). Betsy had turned boy-crazy and the new illustrator made all the characters look like vacuous dolls. I recovered from these twin blows enough to persevere with the series, and even managed to enjoy it, especially the later books, which

were the only ones I reread.

Still, it's been a surprise, a very nice one, to reread the books now, after letting them lie fallow for a good long time, and to find I appreciate them far more. Somehow, I am more willing to be tolerant of Betsy's silliness over boys this time around, more willing to be amused and to recognize that Lovelace doesn't necessarily mean for us to find it admirable! I was also far more willing to be interested in Betsy's new high school friends, especially Carney (originally, I agreed with Betsy's first assessment of her as "a stick"), having gotten to know and really like her in one of those later books, Carney's House Party.

I still dislike the illustrations as much as ever, and tried not to look at them.

A note on the edition: I was surprised and a little saddened to find that the copy of the book I read this time around (an older one, a 28th printing of the original hardback) is the *only* one the Queens library system owns (and this is the library with the largest circulation numbers in the country, I've been told). Worse, they don't have any of the books that come later! And the New York Public Library, which I also use, only has them in electronic versions. O tempora, o mores! I'll never be among the most fanatical of the Betsy fans, but it still makes me sad to think these books aren't as readily available as they should be for the rising generation.

Elaine says

I liked this book about Betsy's freshman year in high school. She is a bit boy-crazy, but it is old-fashioned-innocent boy-craziness. The biggest problem for me is the use of a ouiji board. At that time, it was considered an innocent parlor game, but I think much of the time people aren't aware that something popular and seemingly "innocent" actually can be quite dangerous. However, I think this is a good way to introduce this topic to your girl and discuss choices we make. Betsy has a great relationship with her family and her friends. Betsy learned a hard lesson that year, which all of us that love Maud Hart Lovelace can be thankful for. I plan to have my daughter wait until she is 12 to read this book due to the boy interest.

Erin says

Re-read 1/08 (well, I've re-read this book TONS of times, but now I'm going to start keeping track here, I think).

Re-read 4/11.

Re-read 7/12.

Re-read 9/13.

Re-read 10/16.

Jess says

So I was going to give this three stars, until I remembered that I gave Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown four stars. Then I remembered that we were introduced to Joe Willard in this book, so I said "screw it" and lobbed

on another star.

It gets a bit exhausting to read pages and pages of how Maud Hart Lovelace based every single thing that happened in the Betsy books on aspects of her own life, which is something I am treated to every single time I finish one of these books. She is definitely bragging, however subconsciously, about her perfect, idyllic early life, and sometimes I want to scream at her for having next to no imagination, since it seems that nothing in these books is made up, except the characters' names. (And she named the hottest guy in school *Herbert Humphreys*, so I wouldn't call that totally successful.)

Nevertheless, the four stars remain: firstly, for the wonderful narrative voice, which strikes the balance between being opinionated and being funny perfectly. Secondly, the characters are vivid and rich and so much better than they were in the earlier books, although I suppose you should expect that if they're based on real people. And lastly: Joe Willard. He's enigmatic, intelligent, hardworking, a little arrogant, a little awkward. I would dearly love to quote everything he says in this book, because it is all gold, but that would rob *you* of the joy of reading them in context.

Anyway, I won't even try to act ashamed for only being in this for the romance. I only wish I'd discovered these books earlier.

Alison says

i got my first Betsy-Tacy-Tib book from my next door neighbor. i was in the fourth grade. she only had sons.

i've read almost all of the books in the series but i really only care about the one's that cover betsy's high school years.

these books are amazing because they were written in the 30s and 40s about a girl in the 1910s, yet the family was pretty progressive. one of their daughter's went through a religious conversion, one of their daughter's went off to europe to sing opera and wear rouge, and they encouraged betsy to become a writer.

i also liked that they explored some emotional commonalities of young woman in their teens. now don't get me wrong, these books are light reading: the kind of concerns are mostly limited to "who am i?... especially since my best friend is 'the sweet one.'" "how do others see me?... especially that cute brainiac guy who doesn't talk to girls." "am i successfully meeting my own goals? ...like being a world famous writer."

one of the things that amazed me was that betsy's family was very progressive: i also love all the stuff about pompadours and shirtwaists. plus, the action is set a small city in the midwest.

Courtney says

Lovelace did a tremendous job in transitioning the books from Betsy's childhood years to her high school ones. Also, as I amor Tony, I have to recommend the book since it is when he is introduced.

Logan Hughes says

This fifth book in the Betsy-Tacy series is the first of Betsy's high school years, which are AMAZING. As charmed as I am by the books about her childhood, her high school years are my #1 favorite comfort reading. Each high school year gets its own book, and they each weave fun slice-of-life incidents skillfully into a separate lesson for each year. Although Betsy, like her author Maud, attended high school a hundred years ago, from 1906-1910, her experiences ring just as true (or truer!) for me than books written contemporarily with my high school years in 1999-2003.

Here's what makes Betsy's high school life just heavenly:

1. Her friends. She has just a ton of them. Unlike most brooding, semi-autobiographical literary heroines, Betsy is bubbly and popular. Her life amongst "The Crowd" will either remind you of your own high school hi-jinks, or it'll become the teen years you wish you had. Or both.

As idyllic as it is, Betsy's friend group is also the most realistic in all the high school fiction I've ever read. Most middle grades/YA protagonists either have exactly one Best Friend and one Love Interest (the Wonder Years model), or they have a formalized club with a set membership (the Baby-sitters Club model). What's great about Betsy's Crowd is that it's at least a dozen strong at any given time, and the membership organically shifts over the years.

Part of this is certainly because the story is based so closely on Maud's diaries from the time, so her life-based Crowd is going to trend more realistic than a set of characters that are completely made up. But I also think Maud should get a lot of credit for not being afraid to throw a lot of characters at us and trust us to keep them straight. It's never difficult, probably because she is able to imbue even the smallest characters with enough life and spark and realism that they couldn't possibly be confused with anyone else.

2. Boys, boys, boys! Just when you think you've figured out all the different boys Betsy is/will be interested in, another is introduced. I love this! As with The Crowd in general, Betsy's set of romantic choices is both idyllically and realistically wide. She doesn't have to keep vacillating between just two boys (the Twilight model). There are lots of boys out there!

3. Family. In these books we get more detail about the Ray family, as we (and Betsy) begin to realize that they aren't just "a typical family" but have their own unique in-jokes and traditions. Every family member has personality. Betsy's older sister Julia, an artist with ambitions to travel The Great World, emerges as a particularly likable and crackling character.

4. School life and activities. Homework and extracurriculars aren't the center of the stories (family and friendship are), but they provide structure and a source of anecdotes that resonated with me a lot as someone who had a similar attitude about school as Betsy did (of course I was pretty goody-two-shoes and wanted to get good grades, but I also thought it was unimportant and didn't put a lot of effort in). The annual Essay Contest, where Betsy is pitted against her writing rival Joe each year, provides a neat bit of structure that spans the entire quartet. The repetition is comforting, yet each year, her life intersects with the Essay Contest in a different way, resulting in a different set of challenges.

Okay, so that's what's so great about the Betsy high-school books as a quad. I think this one, Heaven to Betsy, her freshman year, is especially charming. If you only read one, I'd recommend this one wholeheartedly.

Betsy's family moves across town to a bigger house closer to the high school. She is unsure about her new neighborhood at first and petulantly avoids the other teens who live nearby, but within days of starting high school, she blossoms. Particularly charming is her quick formation of a "triumvirate" with sophomores Carney and Bonnie, who get a lot of joke mileage out of their limited high school Latin language and history knowledge in a way I found extremely realistic as a former freshman whose best friends were Latin-loving sophomores. The book doesn't fall into the cliche trap of pitting Betsy's old friends against her new ones; her childhood best friend Tacy continues to be her closest confidante, and she brings Tacy, Winona and her other Hill St. friends along with her into the new "Crowd." (Tib has moved away, but she'll be back.)

Betsy's life becomes whirlwind of social activities. She's still too young to attend formal dances, but she has plenty of relaxed hang-outs with the Crowd, singing and dancing at home; goes to a youth religious club; goes ice-skating and picnicking, etc. She jokes and laughs with the boys in the Crowd; just when you're wondering which one of them she'll date, a new Tall Dark Stranger enters, the handsome bad boy Tony Markham. Betsy falls in love at first sight in the way only a 14-year-old can. She's so distracted by these things that she blows off school, including the Essay Contest for which she was hand-selected, as well as her own personal writing. Betsy has not forgotten her childhood ambitions of becoming a writer, and I relate hard to her struggle to balance the fun of everyday school life with friends and the intensity of her desire for self-expression.

The book is just bursting with Betsy's silly jokes with friends, the joy and pain of first love, the excitement of flirting, the wonder of being at the precipice of adulthood when you have big dreams, and the warmth and comfort of being the center of a big group of friends and a loving family. It's one of my all-time favorites.

Melody says

7/2-2015 stet

9/2012 Lovelace is such a good writer. I did not notice the artfulness when I was a child reading these books, I only knew I loved them.

12/2009 Is it monotonous to start all my BT reviews with "I love this book"? Well, too bad, I LOVE this book. It's extremely well-written, but that's not why I love it. I don't think I even noticed it was made of words till I was out of my own teens.

Betsy is a freshman at Deep Valley High School, and in this eventful year she goes through some very traumatic times with less than the poise and ease she thinks she ought. Her first love is not smooth. Her first essay contest is sabotaged... by her own inattention. She has to decide if she wants to stay with the church of her childhood or change to the church which speaks to her heart. She learns a great deal about being true to herself, though, as we will see in the next few books, not nearly enough.
