



## Summer at Forsaken Lake

*Michael D. Beil, Maggie Kneen (Illustrations)*

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With their father en route to Africa for Doctors Without Borders, city-kids Nicholas and younger twin sisters Haley and Hetty are off to spend the summer with their Great-Uncle Nick at his house on Forsaken Lake. Despite some initial doubts, Nicholas is right at home in the country: he learns to sail, learns about his father as a boy, and makes fast friends with a local-girl, the tomboy Charlie.

The summer takes a turn toward the mysterious, though, when Nicholas discovers an old movie that his father made as a boy: it tells the story of the local legend, The Seaweed Strangler, but was never finished. Before long Nicholas wants answers both about the legend, and about the movie. Together, he and Charlie work to uncover the truth and discover some long-buried family secrets along the way.

In this lovely middle-grade novel, Michael D. Beil has invoked one of his own favorites, *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, as well as other great summer books of years-past.

## Summer at Forsaken Lake Details

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Author : Michael D. Beil , Maggie Kneen (Illustrations)

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## From Reader Review Summer at Forsaken Lake for online ebook

### Rebecca McNutt says

*Summer at Forsaken Lake* is everything you could ever want in a story. Nostalgic coming-of-age tale one minute, thrilling mystery the next, it would be right at home on a shelf between *The Hardy Boys* and *Goosebumps*. For three kids spending the summer in their uncle's small town homestead, the vacation becomes a rush to unravel a strange urban legend surrounding Forsaken Lake, with the help of a great new friend. I absolutely loved the setting; the quaint summer village scene was very similar to the small town Oregon setting in the 1980's film *The Goonies*, and in fact the whole book had sort of a vintage feeling to it, leaving behind the modern and trendy and instead diving into the endearing realm of swift bike-riding, ice cream licking and mystery solving. It was also great to see some unconventional main characters, especially Charlie. The book sort of loses momentum partway through the middle, easily getting itself sidetracked from the original plot, but still it remains a compelling middle grade story with Nicholas and his gang destined to uncover more than just the truth behind the bizarre Seaweed Strangler story.

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### Katie Fitzgerald says

Nicholas and his sisters - twins Hayley and Hetty - are spending the summer with their great-uncle Nick at Forsaken Lake while their father, Will, works for Doctors Without Borders in Africa. While there, they uncover The Seaweed Strangler, a film started by their dad during his childhood and left mysteriously unfinished. Together with their uncle and a local tomboy named Charlie, Nicholas and his sisters try to learn the truth about Will's past and work to finish the film he began long ago.

The final line of the NetGalley blurb for *Summer at Forsaken Lake* reads, "In this lovely middle-grade novel, Michael D. Beil has invoked one of his own favorites, *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, as well as other great summer books of years-past." The reference to a novel by Arthur Ransome, whose first three *Swallows and Amazons* titles I have read and reviewed, was all it took for me to click that "request" button. Somehow I got the idea into my head that invoking a Ransome novel would be enough to make this novel great as well. I soon realized that my expectations were too high and destined to be dashed.

My first major problem with the book is that it spoils so much of *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea*. It would be fine, I think, to refer to many key plot points if *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea* was a book commonly read by Michael Beil's audience. But I don't think most readers are as familiar with it as the author obviously is, and his characters' constant references to it got old after the first chapter and became downright irritating as the book went on. I would have appreciated the homage to Ransome much more if it hadn't been so pervasive and so obvious. It's fine to give a subtle nod to a beloved book from childhood (as Rebecca Stead did in *When You Reach Me*); it's not okay to essentially ruin that book for other readers.

The other major issue I had was that I never became immersed in the world of the story. A well-written children's story is woven in such a way that the reader cannot see the seams. This book lacks that artistry, and instead feels like a collection of ideas pasted together haphazardly. I was always aware of the author's attempts to manipulate my emotions. I do want to be manipulated when I'm reading a book; I just don't want to be so hyper-aware of the author's tricks that it detracts from my enjoyment.

Finally, I think kids might have trouble engaging with this book because so much of the action revolves

around the adult characters. It almost felt like the story would have been more exciting if it had been set in the past, when Will was still a child. Nicholas, Hayley, and Hetty do learn quite a bit from their experiences staying with Nick, but the story really belongs to their father, and the reader's emotional connection to that story is severed by the decision to distance the reader from Will by a generation.

All in all, I didn't enjoy this book, even though I really wanted to. Sailing fanatics will find much better storytelling in the original Ransome books, and mystery readers have so many other wonderful choices it won't hurt to skip this one in favor of a classic Hardy Boys or Boxcar Children tale.

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## **Patty says**

Summer At Forsaken Lake  
by  
Michael D. Beil

My" in a nutshell" summary...

Nicholas and his twin sisters are sent to live with their great Uncle Nick for the summer in his house on a lake. Adventure and mystery are par for the course!

My thoughts after reading the book...

This is such a lovely wholesome book...the opportunity to spend the summer with a really wonderful uncle on a lake with access to sailboats and bikes and diners and new friends and animals and ice cream parlors and onion rings! Big baskets of them! Yum!

It's my belief that the heart of the story is when Nicholas finds a notebook, an old film reel and some other cool clues that set off his own island adventure. He finds Charlie...the daughter of his father's island love...and together they set about solving this mystery.

What I loved about this book...

I grew up in Ohio and I think this takes place around Lake Erie so I loved that part of it. I also loved the various relationships...they were sweet and inspiring and felt very true.

What I did not love...

Absolutely nothing...I loved this book!

Final thoughts...

I am not revealing much of this book...on purpose...it's a delightful family story...a friend story and an adventure story. I recommend it to all families!

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### **Kimber says**

Lovely young adult geared book. Just a good story. Makes me remember the fun of being young and the amazing potential of summer.

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### **Kelly Adamcik says**

nice story  
quick easy read  
kept me interested from the beginning

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### **Brandi Nyborg says**

Once in a while I love to grab a middle grade mystery or fantasy book for a relaxing and enjoyable read. This book certainly fit the bill. I really enjoyed all of characters. The author is great at developing them. The setting and other descriptions were wonderful. My only complain would be is the mystery is a little too easy and drawn out. I would definitely like to see this book turned into a mystery series! The ending definitely left me wanting to see more.

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### **Beth says**

Good lightweight summer read. Coming of age story set on a lake during summer vacation.

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### **Matt Peterson says**

Loved this book! It has the right amount of mystery, action, character development, friendship, and family relationships. I really like the setting, which is a small lake town in Ohio -- makes me want to go somewhere like that right now. It is also a great introduction to sailing, as the author uses many terms to teach us about sailing in a way that doesn't alienate us "land-lubbers." Again, makes me want to go buy a sailboat. I thought the relationship between the main character and his friend (who happens to be a girl) was perfect for the age range. Nothing was forced and it was very believable. The dialogue between those two was spectacular. You'll love this book, it's the perfect summer read!

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### **Leah says**

This is a perfectly charming book, enjoyed during a short road trip by teen, preteen and mother alike. While my son pretended to prefer listening to his iPod, several times I noticed he removed the earbuds so he could hear the story.

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## Richie Partington says

Richie's Picks: SUMMER AT FORSAKEN LAKE by Michael D. Beil, Knopf, June 2012, 256p., ISBN: 978-0-375-89791-7

“Seldom stumble, never crumble  
Try to tumble, life’s a rumble  
Feel the stinging I’ve been given  
Never ending, unrelenting  
Heartbreak searing, always fearing  
Never caring, persevering  
Sail on, sail on sailor”

--The Beach Boys (1973)

“On the mound, the girl took a deep breath and let go. The pitch was chest high and well inside, and Nicholas instinctively jerked his head back—just in time to watch something extraordinary happen. A few feet before reaching him, the ball took a sharp left turn and gracefully crossed over the center of the plate, leaving him standing there open-mouthed. A perfect, big-league quality curveball, unlike anything he’d ever seen in New York.

“Steee-rike three!” the catcher yelled.

“Yerrr outta there!” the shortstop added unnecessarily.

“Nicholas let the bat fall to the ground at his feet, which were still frozen in place. ‘Who is this kid?’ he asked no one in particular.

“She’s your worst nightmare, son,’ the coach answered. ‘A cute girl with a wicked curveball. Remember the name, kid: Charlotte Brennan. Charlie. You’ll be hearing it again.’

“You sure you don’t wanna try again, city boy?” the girl asked. ‘C’mon. You’re just getting warmed up.’ She seemed to want him to stick around, but Nicholas figured that was only because she wanted to humiliate him again.

“He smiled and shook his head. ‘Maybe another time. I’ve gotta go.’ Overhead, the rumble of thunder confirmed that he was making the right decision.

“Well, I guess we’ll see ya ‘round,’ Charlie said, smiling back.

“Charlie Brennan. Remember that name.”

As fate would have it, Charlie Brennan will turn out to be Nicholas Mettleson’s constant companion this summer, the summer that his divorced parents send twelve year-old Nicholas and his twin ten year-old sisters to stay with their great-uncle Nick at Ohio’s Forsaken Lake. Nicholas’s namesake is the same guy with whom Nicholas’s father spent summers as a teenager – learning sailing and film making in the process -- until certain events caused Nicholas’s father to abruptly leave the lake community and never return.

In a pitch-perfect summer read for 10-14 year-olds, these long-buried mysteries from twenty-five years ago are unraveled by this son of the boy and this daughter of the girl who were, themselves, inseparable all those years ago -- until something went very wrong.

In the process of unraveling mysteries, Nicholas, Charlie, and the twins will all become experienced in the art of sailing. Nicholas and Charlie will learn some fundamentals of boat building. Nicholas will struggle mightily to learn how to connect with one of Charlie’s curveballs. The young people will all get to take their own shot at amateur film making.

And we will all be wondering what might have been today, had fate not thrown a monkey wrench into things a quarter-century ago. Is it possible that some things long ago broken might actually get put back together?

And had I read this book back in my adolescence, might it be possible that I'd be an experienced sailor today?

Talk about a realm of possibilities. SUMMER AT FORSAKEN LAKE will make a perfect companion to long, hot days; ice cold root beers; and sand between your toes.

Richie Partington, MLIS

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### **Aidan says**

This was a good book. I liked how suddenly the events happened in the story-- it was fast-paced.

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### **Susan Dunn says**

This was a sweet mystery, perfect for those kids who parents don't want them to read anything with controversial topics. 12-year-old Nicholas and his younger sisters go to spend the summer with their great uncle at Forsaken Lake - something their father did for many years when he was a boy. During their stay they make new friends, learn how to sail, and discover and solve a mystery surrounding their father and a controversial incident that happened during his last summer at the lake.

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### **David says**

Meh. About a third of the way into this novel I completely lost interest. I debated at first whether this was because the book is geared toward a younger audience than many of the other books I've read this summer, and if that was why the stakes seemed so low in the plot. But then I remembered that I had just finished "Diamond Willow" by Helen Frost, and how much I love Jeanne Birdsall's Penderwicks novels, and that made me change my tune.

The big problem seems to be what I'm experiencing in another novel I'm trying to finish ("The Strain" by Guillermo Del Toro and Chuck Hogan, alas) that I'm debating how much I actually care to finish- a character(s) is introduced who seems interesting. But then the author(s) doesn't seem able to sustain what is interesting about that character. In this case, Nicholas and Charlie seem interesting at first, but then there was page after page after page of totally stock dialogue to make me lose interest in them almost completely. Add to that the fact that the 10-year old twin sisters sometimes seem 10 and sometimes seem 5 or 6, and my final verdict is still...meh.

Also, the stakes seem really, really low as far as the mystery in the novel is concerned. I know that if I keep

reading that is almost assuredly going to change and broaden, but I don't want to. There is a fine line between writing really effective, charming, "retro" children's novels, and for a good example of this, read the Penderwick novels, and writing something vanilla and bland. This just seems too blah for me at this point.

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### **Brevin says**

Spoke my love language. Sailing and Filming, plus some mystery and adventure!

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### **Mary Harmon says**

When 12 year old Nick and his twin sisters are sent to spend the summer with their great uncle Nick at Forsaken Lake he isn't thrilled about it. No television and none of the excitement of living in New York. What he doesn't know is that he will meet his new best friend, learn to sail, make a movie, and get a chance to solve a mystery.

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