



## Breathing Room

*Marsha Hayles*

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Evvy Hoffmeister is thirteen years old when her family brings her to Loon Lake Sanatorium to get cured of tuberculosis (TB). Evvy is frightened by her new surroundings; the rules to abide are harsh and the nurses equally rigid. But Evvy soon falls into step with the other girls in her ward. There's Sarah, quiet but thoughtful; Pearl, who adores Hollywood glamour; and Dena, whose harshness conceals a deep strength. Together, the girls brave the difficult daily routines. Set in 1940 at a time of political unrest throughout the U.S. and Europe, this thought-provoking novel sheds light on a much-feared worldwide illness. Hundreds of thousands of people died each year of TB, and many ill children were sent away to sanatoriums to hopefully recover.

This is a masterful novel—both eloquent and moving—that gives voice to those who fought hard to overcome the illness.

## Breathing Room Details

Date : Published June 5th 2012 by Henry Holt & Company

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Author : Marsha Hayles

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## From Reader Review Breathing Room for online ebook

### **Matt says**

A good quick read.

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### **Ellie says**

The young adult novel, Breathing Room, by Marsha Hayles takes place in a sanatorium during the 1940's. The main character, Evvy Hoffmeister, was thirteen years old when her parents brought her to the Loon Lake sanitarium to heal from her tuberculosis. At Loon Lake, Evvy was placed in a teenage ward. Evvy had to adjust quickly to the strict rules and schedule at Loon Lake. Scared and overwhelmed, she had to rely on the support of the other girls in her room: Pearl, Beverly, and Sarah, the shy Jewish girl who becomes Evvy's best friend. Throughout her stay at Loon Lake, Evvy realizes that some patients leave healthy, but others never make it out. This true story tells about the tragic and empowering life of a young girl who fights tuberculosis with strength and grace.

The young adult novel, Breathing Room, was written with an abundance of detail that left the reader feeling engulfed in the story. Marsha Hayes used figurative language to give details in the story. For example Evvy said, "My legs, which had felt fine in the car, now felt heavy, as if I had thick cough syrup instead of blood running through my veins"(9). While reading, I especially enjoyed the simplistic way the book was written. This writing style proved easy to understand and showed the innocent, childlike personality of Evvy. I found myself cheering for every obstacle Evvy passed, while feeling devastated every time something bad happened to her. For instance, when Evvy and Sarah were separated. This novel was based on a true story, and because of this, the plot kept me interested as I could remember that the events in the novel actually occurred in recent history. This story reminded me and other readers to be strong and never give up hope.

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### **Susan says**

Fascinating account of a young girl in 1940 rural America with tuberculosis, who goes to a sanatorium designed to help TB patients. Thank heaven we have passed the day when it was considered part of the treatment of patients to be harsh with them! (Thanks, Patch Adams, NOT part of this story, for your help in that direction!) Part of this story is how kindness went a long way with these already depressed patients, kindness from a nurse, a doctor, roommates, friends...and even how cruelty can actually kill.

I loved the use of poetry in the character development; I believe that is where poetry has its greatest influence - on the heart that needs it.

Quick, but valuable read. Would be excellent for junior high and slightly younger readers.

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## **Maya says**

I would give Breathing Room a 3.5. It was an okay book. The plot was very good, and I was very interested in the book in the beginning. But it then did not seem as interesting about halfway through. It was interesting to see this story from a girl's point of view though!

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## **Rachael says**

Book buzz is a capricious thing. A book gets a starred review or two, a word from the right blogger, and suddenly it's the It Girl of Publishing Year 2013. Last year it was *Okay for Now*. This year it's *Wonder*. Sometimes they show up in the Newbery pantheon (oh lovely *When You Reach Me*), but sometimes the committee looks further afield (*Moon Over what?*). If this year's committee has been casting about for neglected titles (as well they should be), *Breathing Room* may be up for discussion.

Sam gave it a rave review, and Kirkus and Horn Book reviewed it quite favorably as well, but no one else seems to be talking about it. Personally, I don't think it's gold medal material, especially in such a strong year, but I think it's at least as good as *Three Times Lucky* and better than *Summer of the Gypsy Moths*. The writing is quietly elegant, and the story unfolds gracefully, holding my attention even as it (necessarily) lacks action. The sanatorium setting is vividly portrayed. The conflicts are all interior ones, but Evvy's development as a character is still believable and poignant.

There are flaws, of course. In a Goodreads review, one of my friends points out that some of the characters feel stock (the saintly sick girl, the rebellious sick girl, the young nice nurse, the old mean nurse, etc.). That's a fair critique, though I think they are more fleshed-out by the end. And there is the question of age level - Evvy is thirteen, and the coming-of-age narrative is pretty clearly YA - but it still falls within the Newbery range.

In any case, whether or not the committee has taken up its cause, this is a book worth noticing (if nothing else, it will fill that huge "Tuberculosis Sanatorium Fiction" gap in your collection).

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## **Ellise says**

Beautiful, moving, realistic. *Breathing Room* was perfect in pace, voice, and meaning. Hayles' demonstrates incredible skill for a first-time novelist in crafting her story to get a deeper meaning across. She used the words of William Ernest Henley's *Invictus* to state that despite any higher forces, man is the captain of his fate: "*It matters not how strait the gate / How charged with punishments the scroll / I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul.*". This message was beautifully argued, a surprising content for a children's novel. Nonetheless, I couldn't help but think of rap artist Lecrae's words in his song *Background* which state "*I had a dream that I was master of my soul / I was captain of my fate / Lost control and then I sank. / So I don't want to take the lead / Because I'm prone to make mistakes...*". I only wish Evvy, Dena and the other girls could have had true reassurance because of belief in God, not left to be sadly struggling alone to steer their souls away from death and towards joy.

I didn't shift from the couch in the 2 hours I read it. It drew me in well, informed but didn't preach, felt realistic but not dismal, and hopeful but not falsely fluffy. I have no ill feelings towards this book and ones

like it that argue a Godless world; only sadness for the characters inside. It was well worth my time.

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### **Libby May says**

Wow guys. I read this book twice in the last three years. The last time I read it was about a year ago and still, today after lunch my sister looks at me with a hollow look in her eyes and says "I can't believe Dina died." And so together we suffered, still in denial.

I do recommend this book. Read it. :D

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### **Pages For Thoughts says**

I learned a lot about tuberculosis and I was shocked at some of what the girls went through. Old forms of medicine consisted of risky surgical procedures. We should be truly grateful for the extent and power of medicine today. I loved the backdrop of WW2 and the elements of Judaism and fear, a nice opening into the past. I have not read many books like this one and I was captivated with the girls' journeys of getting better or getting worse. The book was sad and alarming. The book contains a great theme to always keep fighting for your life and always look ahead into the future and be positive. This is a unique read for girls of all ages! Read more of my review at <http://pagesforthoughts.blogspot.com/...>

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### **Jessica Haight says**

Eveleyn's father drops her off at Loon Lake in May of 1940. Although she is thirteen, she is scared to be left at a sanitarium by herself. What is worse is that she is only allowed to bring a few items with her, and her stuffed animal gets taken away from her because it could contain germs. Evvy has tuberculosis and in order for her to get better she must be separated from her family and follow the rules. Because she has tuberculosis breathing isn't easy. Being alone is hard too, and Evvy has trouble making friends. There are a few other girls in her room, but she is the youngest. Not to mention that the staff isn't very kind to the patients. Imagine being exposed to the cold Minnesota air with only a water bottle to warm you up. As a treatment for tuberculosis, Evvy is exposed to lots of cold air to help her clear her lungs. Will Loon Lake help her to get better? Will she get see her brother, Abe, again? Will Evvy ever make some friends to make her days brighter? You will enjoy finding out what is in store for Evvy in this interesting historical fiction book for middle grade readers.

Breathing Room by Marsha Hayles is a wonderful book about a fantastic girl. Evvy has a quiet strength and she is brave even though she is fighting to stay alive. The characters in the story are all developed in such a way that I feel as if I know them. This is a super book for kids in fourth through eighth grade. Older readers will enjoy it as well! Be prepared to have history unfold for you as you read about Evvy's experience. Adding to the scene are the old photographs that are included at the start of each chapter. I learned a lot about tuberculosis and the way it was, and still is, treated. At the end of the book, the author includes notes about her research. I liked reading the notes because it helped me to see what was real and what was made up. This story touched my heart. I look forward to reading more books by Marsha Hayles! Take a journey

back in time with Evvy, and you will come back a little different.

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### **Annie K. says**

4.5 stars.

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### **Frances says**

Breathing Room by Marsha Hayles

Evvy Hoffmeister is a 13 year old girl who is put into Loon Lake Sanitarium in Loon Lake, Minnesota during the beginning of WWII to be treated for Tuberculosis. At first Evvy is afraid of her new, unknown surroundings, but as time wears on, she becomes close friends with her roommates. The 4 girls she becomes very close with are: Dena, a strong harsh young lady who is really quite kind; Pearl, who Wishes to one day escape this sanitarium and become a Movie star; Beverly, a quiet farm girl; and Sarah, a smart, quiet girl who becomes Evvy's best friend. Together, these girls fight their own war against tuberculosis while the rest of the world fights WW II.

This book is fabulous! It is about finding friendship and the struggle to keep it alive. Even with strict rules to follow, such as no talking, the friends still found ways to communicate. And even when tragedy struck they bore it together.

One of the many reasons I loved this book was that it was in a time period of interest for me. The historical pictures Hayles found to include made the whole experience complete. I was also Interested to learn more about tuberculosis and the true reason for sanitariums, besides being good place for a horror film to take place.

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### **Melissa says**

You wouldn't think a book about girls with tuberculosis in the 1940s would be really good, but it is.

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### **Kermit says**

4.7 stars

Loved this book! It was so interesting! It's 1940, 13-year-old Evvy lives in Minnesota, and has tuberculosis. She spends time in Loon Lake TB Sanatorium in order to recover. Sometimes people lived for years and years in the sanatoriums, and so many patients died. Evvy experiences

the typical TB care of the time which included lots of rest, lots of food, and strict medical care. She develops relationships with the other girls in her room, and not everyone has a happy ending. Be sure and read the Appendix section. I didn't know that Eleanor Roosevelt died from tuberculosis! And Betty McDonald, the author of the Mrs. Piggle Wiggle books, had TB as a child and wrote a memoir about her experiences in a sanatorium.

The book is a very fast read with short chapters. It has interesting historical images inserted throughout the book.

I remember liking the movie, The Nun's Story, with Audrey Hepburn years and years ago. She develops TB at one point and undergoes similar treatment---only it happens in Africa.

And then I think about the Brontes. Just about all of that family died from consumption (TB)!

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### **Eva says**

A well-written look about life with TB in the '40s. Wasn't overly impressive in terms of characterizations, but it did give you an excellent feel for what it must have been like living with 'the white death'.

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### **Amy says**

I picked this one to read because the setting sounded interesting: the story takes place in a sanatorium in the early 1940's. 13-year-old Evvy Hoffmeister has to go live there to recover from tuberculosis, and the story focuses on her feelings as she deals with being away from her family and as she makes friends with the other girls in her room. Evvy has a way with words (she loves poetry and later on discovers that she wants to be a writer in some capacity), and there are some really beautiful phrases that reflect her interest in language. I wish I had the book in front of me so I could quote some phrases! The other aspect of this book that I really enjoyed was the reproductions of actual period photographs and other realia. It makes the story a little more creepy when you realize how rudimentary medicine was in the 40's as compared to today. I might pair this one with the Humming Room - that one also takes place in a sanatorium, if my memory serves. But that story takes place in the present day, and the sanatorium has that creepy medical vibe, which is what really strikes my fancy. On a side note, when I was reading the acknowledgements, I found out that Hayles is a Rochester author- she even thanks MCLS librarians for helping her with research. Very cool!

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