

Reader Views

Book reviews, for readers, by readers.

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An Inmate's Daughter

By Jan Walker

Raven Publishing, Inc. (2006)

Reviewed by Kim Peterson for Reader Views (2/06)

Jenna MacDonald didn't mean to do anything wrong when she plunged into Puget Sound to save a little girl from drowning. She just reacted on instinct. She had been rescuing her rather hyper younger brother in their neighborhood swimming pool for years without her mother knowing.

But Jenna's mother is upset because her actions have called attention to their family. The rescue occurred at McNeil Island boat dock during a visit to Jenna's father who is serving time in prison. Now, the paper wants to run a story and the McNeil Island Corrections Center wants to investigate how it happened.

When her dad was transferred to this site, Jenna's family moved, too. Now they live with her grandparents and Jenna is adjusting to a new school. She feels confused by her mother's anger and insistence that they keep her dad's situation private. Jenna wants to talk to someone about it. She wants to feel like she belongs to a whole family.

Jenna's grandparents encourage her to make friends and to enjoy life. But junior high is tough and Jenna, who is half Native American, struggles to find her niche. When she tries to join one of the racially-mixed "in" groups, they ask questions about her family bringing the tensions between Jenna's need for acceptance and her mother's desire for secrecy to a head.

More than two million American children wrestle with the stigma of an incarcerated parent. Few of these children receive the assistance they need to cope with their situation. Walker's book takes on a tough topic. Her book informs and encourages young adult readers so they can support their peers.