



The Lovely Shoes

Written by Susan Shreve

Arthur A. Levine Books, 2001, 252 pp.

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What is more difficult than being a 9th grade girl living in Ohio in the 1950s? How about being a 9th grade girl living in Ohio in the 1950s with a birth “defect” that causes her to limp and wear heavy orthopedic shoes. Drawing from her own personal experience, Susan Shreve weaves a tale of the bonding between a mother and daughter in a journey across

the globe to search for comfort within custom-made footwear. With an overprotective, optimistic mother and a pessimistic father who tells her to focus on finding a profession, Franny begins to wonder about her future.

When Franny tries to fit in with her high school friends, her mother teaches her how to dance and they shop for the perfect dress and shoes for the first dance of the school year. However, after an embarrassing incident at the dance, Franny hides in the girls’ restroom and makes the decision to hide in her room for the “rest of her life.” Secluding herself for eight days, her only communication with her family is by writing notes under the bedroom door to her younger brother, Zeke. Franny’s mom derives a plan to help her cope by writing a letter to Signor Salvatore Ferragamo, a shoemaker from Italy, asking if he will make shoes for her daughter’s “crippled” foot. The story ends with a flight to Italy, a portrait, a childhood romance, a pair of soft, black leather shoes, and many school dances in Franny’s future.

The authenticity of this book is easy to assess as it is inspired by author Susan Shreve’s own painful childhood. She caught polio at 18 months, was paralyzed for several weeks, underwent multiple surgeries, and never fully regained muscle function in both legs. Not letting this hold her back, Shreve became a high school cheerleader, attended many school dances and has written more than twenty fiction books for adults and children. Her work for young readers is touching and entertaining, with stories often portraying a character’s coming of age under difficult circumstances. Two of her most current books, *Blisters* (2001), an ALA Notable Book and a Publishers Weekly Best Children’s Book and the currently published sequel *Kiss Me Tomorrow* (2006), depict a young girls’ resiliency when her mother loses a baby, her father moves out, and she begins her own quest with dating.

The Lovely Shoes might be paired with *Slippery Willie’s Stupid, Ugly Shoes* (Larry Peterson, 2011). In this children’s book Willie had to wear special shoes because his feet were so slippery and like Franny, Willie was made fun of for wearing different shoes. Both stories teach children about differences and how we treat others and would work well in a classroom setting.

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