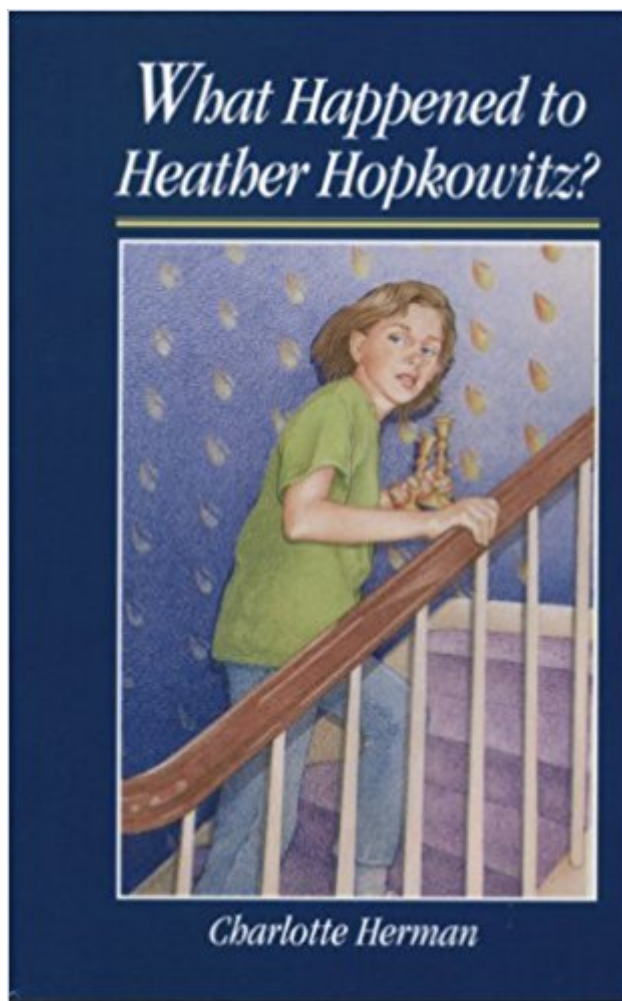


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What Happened To Heather Hopkowitz?



Synopsis

Ages 8 and up. Fourteen-year-old Heather Hopkowitz can't imagine life without bacon, cheeseburgers, or bowling on Friday nights. But she gives them all up when she spends an entire month as the guest of an Orthodox Jewish family while her parents are away on vacation. As Heather begins to appreciate the traditional rituals, she considers becoming observant. What will her friends think? What will her parents think?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

extremely pleased, thanks!

A good read for the 10-12 age group. However, some of the characters were fairly unbelievable stereotypes. I wish they had been given more depth.

What Happened to Heather Hopkowitz? is a young adult book that would most appeal to ages 11 and up. Ninth-grader Heather spends a month with a neighboring Orthodox family (Modern Orthodox from the context, not any variety of Hassidic) while her parents are away, and goes from anxious about all the things she won't be able to do (she likes her cheeseburgers with milkshakes, Friday night bowling, and bacon) to genuinely enjoying the deeper Jewish observance of her friend's family. Ultimately Heather decides to become more observant herself, setting up a conflict with her own unobservant parents as she secretly tries to keep Shabbos and kosher without letting on to her family and friends. This is a compelling story, well told, that will mostly appeal to Jewish

young readers but also has parallels for any young person feeling compelled to go deeper into a religious or spiritual practice that might alarm their parents who are comfortable at their own level--it even has resonance for the many kids who would like to become vegetarian in a carnivorous family. While I don't mean to demean the significance of the spiritual side of Heather's Jewishness by such a comparison, it actually was striking to me how much of Heather's interest and ultimate observation had to do with the forms rather than the meaning of the practices. Much of her interest in observing Shabbos has to do with finding an appealing group of friends to attend shul and youth activities with rather than any deep spiritual experience--Heather spends more time scoping out a cute boy at the synagogue than she does learning the prayer service (although it's clear that she is learning more of the prayers as well). She begins to keep kosher after a month at her friend's house more because she simply loses her appetite for milk and meat together or non-kosher meat than because of any grasp of mitzvot or the meaning of the practice. Which is okay. The overall purpose of the book is to show the appeal of deeper observance, and to explore the more universal theme of the call of one's own conscience vs. desires of family and friends, and the story does that quite well. The characters are appealing and it's a quick read that doesn't get preachy, although after all of Heather's inner angst, everything does get resolved pretty quickly and neatly. As an adult reader I found myself wondering about and wanting to know more about Heather's parents--her dad, raised more observant who became non-practicing as an adult, and her emphatically non-observant mom who is ethnically Jewish but has a dislike and critical view of anything "too Jewish." The story focuses where it needs to for a young adult book, on the inner life of the teenage protagonist, but the hints of the adults' inner conflicts were intriguing and left me wanting to know more about them. On the whole, a well written, compelling and quick read that might not have a huge audience but which certainly should appeal to many young adult readers.

When Heather, from a non-observant Jewish family, spends some time with a friend from a religiously observant family (despite her mother's hesitation about the idea), she discovers there is much to respect and admire in a more religiously observant lifestyle and starts to follow it at home, trying to keep her secret from her parents. This book is good reading for high school students and advanced readers of junior high age, as well. Watching Heather discover more about her religious background can be quite enriching for Jewish students, from observant and non-observant backgrounds. Non-Jewish readers may enjoy the book as well, but may not find themselves identifying with the characters and situations quite as much. However, if they have ever had questions about their religious background, they may find Heather's journey quite intriguing.

Heather desires a more Orthodox life after she lives with an Orthodox family for a month, while her parents are on vacation. This book emphasized the struggle between Heather, who wants to become an Orthodox Jew, and her mother, who couldn't stand the idea of no twinkies, lard, frappes and hamburgers etc. If anything was faulty about this book it was the fact that it slightly over emphasized. The only other fault I could think of is that the end is too happy go lucky, too fast. This was a great book for roughly 5th or 6th graders.

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