

Book Review: Can you feel it?

By Pauline Findlay

BOOK REVIEWED BY LYNDAL CARTER

This is the story of Lola Lotus, a teenager with a violin named Bart and big dreams of music school in London. Her mother is a struggling alcoholic and her dad and poppa are Collingwood undertakers. Life is far from ordinary for Lola. And she has another challenge: hearing loss.

The author takes the reader inside the audiology clinic (a rare destination in the world of teen literature) but that is only part of Lola's story. This girl is not defined by her "dodgy" ears! The narrative digs deeper than the physical symptoms and audiological details of her condition.

The story is told by Lola. The words she uses to talk about her hearing loss have an awkwardness, which reflects not only the difficulty finding the "right" words to use – but also the importance of words in forming a sense of self. Lola implores, "I hate being considered disabled".

The setting is urban, contemporary and cool, with mobile phones, motor bikes, graffiti, and bad hair days. The issues of Lola's hearing are mixed up in the general chaos of growing up, first love, dysfunctional family, what to wear, school, corpses, and music.

Thematically, music is front and centre to the story, and to Lola's social and emotional world. The myth that hearing loss and musical appreciation (and aptitude) are mutually exclusive is turned on its head. Lola, and the reader, are also challenged to consider music beyond the usual boundaries of audition: to let go of pitch and precision and find a more expansive form of expression and engagement.

The book is only around 250 pages, in 25 short chapters, making it an easy read. The target audience is teens to young adults, but the story has wider appeal. The drama of adolescent relationships and deep feelings are frankly presented, but with a sensitivity that keeps the book suitable for teen readers. Lola respects herself and, in turn, others respect her. She is courageous, talented, and fun.

impairment into a fun and accessible medium. Some of her readers offered the following comments:

Lola is the kind of teen girl not often shown by the media, especially teen books. A realistic teen. Once I started reading, I couldn't put this book down. Never have I related more to a character and never have I ever wanted to steal a book character's style. **Niris Kaya (15)**

It was very enjoyable. The main character Lola had very similar experiences and challenges to the ones I have lived with. A great read! **Olivia Barnes (16)**

An amazingly accurate account of what it is like to live with hearing loss as a teen! **Bec Stewart (24)**

Since going on the journey with Lola, Pauline has become a strong advocate and now contributes to the mentoring program of "Hear For You". She is to be congratulated for caring so much, and taking the time to listen so attentively.

Most hearing professionals, hearing support teachers, and parents of children with hearing loss have not directly experienced the impacts of hearing impairment. Reading this book may give a little window into that world. For many of us, it may also be rather a long time since we were teenagers ourselves! In conclusion, this book is a great contribution to hearing (and teenager!) awareness. I encourage

Audiology Australia members to read for themselves. "Can you feel it?". ●



The book was well researched, which has contributed to its sense of authenticity. I know that the author, Pauline, spent a lot of time talking to teenagers and younger adults who wear hearing aids and cochlear implants and sought their feedback on the developing manuscript. Pauline has synthesized many of the challenges faced by young people with hearing