

JUNIPER TREE BURNING

a novel



GOLDBERRY LONG

"Passionate . . . vibrant . . . [written] with rich, rueful, hard-won wisdom . . . [a] big, sexy howl of a book . . . powerful."
—JANET MASLIN, THE NEW YORK TIMES



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Juniper Tree Burning is a dazzling meditation on legacy and legend, rebellion and renewal.

When Jennie Braverman, formerly known as Juniper Tree Burning, gets news of her brother Sunny Boy Blue's suicide, she flees her new husband and embarks upon a mad dash across the American West toward the site of Sunny's death. Forced to confront the past, Jennie must face the shame of the childhood name she has been so happy to shed. Only after she weaves her way through a tapestry of family sorrows -- poverty, a spider-infested adobe house, and the legacy of her hippie parents -- will Jennie be able to take on her greatest challenge: accepting love.

Juniper Tree Burning Details

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Author : Goldberry Long

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From Reader Review Juniper Tree Burning for online ebook

Kirk says

A solid if somewhat predictable coming-of-age novel. Some wonderful landscape and character descriptions with an interesting structure that goes back and forth in time. Overall for me the book was hampered by three things: 1) the interiority of the narrative voice made Juniper (or Jennifer as she calls herself) seem whinier than she should; 2) the ending resolves a little too neatly; and 3) the book seriously needed an editor---the story is a good 100 pages too long.

Desiree says

i did not want to put this book down. others have commented on this protagonist being too close to home... i think jennie represents the insecurity plus strength of anyone who has been through a really difficult childhood and i think many of us relate to that. so it can be hard to read, at times. an amazingly well-drawn cast of characters and events that seems likely to be highly autobiographical, but perhaps goldberry long just has a great imagination.

Chana says

Born to hippie parents from Seattle who have settled in New Mexico, Juniper Tree Burning has a difficult life from the beginning. Her parents quickly become wanna-be Indians involved with a church that uses peyote as medicine and meets in a tipi. At home in their adobe they have no running water, no indoor toilet. They haul up water from a well, they have an outhouse. For a long time they have no heat until the father builds a fireplace that sadly cracks the house in half. When Juniper is about 9 her brother Sunny Boy Blue is born. Juniper loves him and takes care of him as best she can but it is very hard. Sunny is also his mother's favorite and Juniper is one lonely, dirty, sad little girl. She is teased terribly at school for her weird name, for being the child of hippies, for being dirty and poor. Her parents fight all the time and her father is always leaving for days, even months, at a time. Juniper retreats into a world of stories that she makes up and tells to Sunny, about grandparents in Seattle, about the house on the highest hill where their mother grew up. There is some basis in fact for the stories but it is pretty bare bones. Sunny is very attached to Juniper but Juniper can hardly stand herself, hated child that she is, and when she starts to separate from her child self, when she starts becoming an angry teen and leaves home, she wants to be Jennie and leave Juniper behind. Sunny; dirty, sick, skinny, scared, needy...reminds Jennie too much of Juniper and she leaves him behind as well. 14 or so years later Sunny jumps off a ferry and drowns. Jennie, not normal at the best of times, falls apart completely here. She is horrible, a very unlikable character. I got sick of her and I was basically on her side. I lived through the 60's and look back in confusion. It was such a mess and whatever mess adults are in they have children and those children are stuck in the mess as well.

For a novel this is a very dense book; tense, unhappy, angry, tragic with occasional bright spots.

sylas says

I'd actually like to give this book 3.5 stars. Maybe even four. I need to ruminate about it some more, I think.

This book was very difficult for me to read. I mean, it took me quite a long time. I really struggled with the negativity of the main character. Her self loathing was so intense, it was almost triggering for me. I think I related too much to Jennie. In ways that I didn't want to.

This is a story about family. About choosing the way your past will impact your future, and - really - every moment of your life. I adored the way this book ended. I think I had to really hate Jennie to love her.

This book took me a MONTH to read. If you know me, you know this is unheard of. Proof of my struggle, I suppose.

Kate says

A difficult read. I was able to follow passage between decades of childhood and adulthood and the implications of both but wondered if the writing was too complicated for the story. I certainly appreciate the authors: expert development of the main character and that character's struggle when a troubled childhood and a new trauma converge. I would recommend if this is your genre but finishing will take some stamina

Jessica says

Possibly 1 1/2 stars. I skimmed far enough into the book and began reading again. I just couldn't relate to the main character. I am glad that she worked out some of her issues and was willing to begin loving and trusting at the end of the book. Seems a little drastic that Sunny had to die in order to do so.... I just did not enjoy the story and could not relate to the characters. Or much of anything.

Melissa says

I really liked this book it shows how your surroundings and everything in life affects you in some way. The way they portray the main character as being very angry and mean when in actuality she is really scared out of her mind because she has to figure out who she really is and it takes her brother dying to realize all this. I really loved the book because it really taught me about some of the reasons I am angry.

Lori L (She Treads Softly) says

Juniper Tree Burning by Goldberry Long is a novel about the psychotic break of a woman who has always been running from her family and her past, but now has to come to terms with her younger brother's suicide. Moving back and forth in time from when Juniper was young to the present, we see the dysfunctional hippy family life she experienced growing up as Juniper Tree Burning in contrast to her current life where she is known as Jennifer. Juniper's parents use her and her younger brother, Sunny Boy Blue, as pawns in their own troubled marriage.

Long moves effortlessly between the present and the past, using first and third person narratives, as the story slowly unfolds. She paints a vivid picture when describing her characters and the setting while more and more of the story is revealed.

Having first read Juniper Tree Burning after it was first released, this is a reread for me. I'll have to admit that the second time was not a charm in this instance. While it is still undoubtedly a very good novel, this time around it felt overly long and Jennifer/Juniper was not quite as compelling a character and became a bit tiresome.

Highly recommended - reread; <http://shetreadssoftly.blogspot.com/>

Kelly says

It took me forever to read this book, mainly because I started it with a two week old baby. It was sad, in some ways sadder than any other book because the author showed intensely vulnerable sides of the characters. The book was well thought-out and organized, and everything that bugged me as being weird eventually turned out to be part of the master plan. For example, when Juniper/Jennifer ate a bowl of guacamole with a spoon, I initially thought that was a pointless detail that sounded unlikely to happen in the real world. Then as the book went on and I learned more and more about the character I realized what a perfect detail it was.

Holly says

From Reading Matters: I have so many favourite books it's difficult to name one here. Usually I nominate George Johnston's *My Brother Jack*, which is my all-time favourite, but I thought I'd go for something a little off the beaten track. I can still remember the day I bought *Juniper Tree Burning*, from the now-defunct Books Etc in Festival Hall back in 2003. It was a spur-of-the-moment purchase. I knew nothing of the author and can't even tell you why I thought the story of an angry young woman brought up by hippies in New Mexico would resonate with me so much, but it did. I raced through this book in a matter of days and even now, seven years down the track, I still think of the main character, Jennie, and her incredible upbringing and the emotional road journey she undertakes following the suicide of her younger brother. To find out more about the book please do read my review.

unnarrator says

It's a three-and-a-half star book, really, but I'm giving it four because when else did ANYONE write a book about growing up hippie white-kid in northern NM? An old acquaintance from El Rito shared this one with me--he'd grown up not knowing who his dad was, living with his mom (a weaver who sold stuff at the farmer's market) in a VW bus and/or squatting, and living from disability check to check--the working-class Hispanic kids at school mocking him (and hitting him) because his mom made him lunch with brown (whole wheat) tortillas instead of white ones. And because he read books.

I guess you had to have been there. Some of us were. In which case you'll want to give it four stars too. If

you weren't there, you'll think it only deserves three. She's not a great writer, not yet anyway. But the story is raw and visceral, and told flatly and with anger. I like this book. Scenes from it come back to me still.

Lucy says

this was a wonderful book! thanks to shrinkykitten for suggesting it! the main character wasn't always likeable, but i didn't really notice that since i could identify with her so much. i kind of wished i could use running as a coping mechanism like she did; it might not be psychologically healthy to literally run away from everything that bothers you, but at least it's physically better than my method of staying in bed eating ice cream.

R Grebbs says

A one-off novel from the outstandingly talented Goldberry Long. I read this a few years ago and it left a lasting impression on me. I have never read a book that so accurately describes the angst of the main protagonist and her difficult relationship with herself, her family and her partner. I wish there were more books from this author as I would snap them up. Well-written but not an easy read due to the subject matter, I felt though that reading this novel was an incredible journey.

Liz says

I'm about half-way through this book. I don't know that I can even describe my feelings for it yet. The narrator is a woman named Juniper Tree Burning. Her parents are blowout hippies who lived in an adobe house in the woods while she was growing up. It's her story of rejecting that life, but finding it a challenge to leave it totally behind her. I'll let you know how it goes!

I became much more inclined to like the protagonist of this book. She's sassy and messed up - something I can appreciate. I would definitely make this a rental instead of a purchase, but it's pretty okay for summer reading.

Melissa Stryffeler says

I had to stop reading it. It put me in a really bad mood. I hated the main character. The only person she ever thought of was herself. She really needed a mental institution. And there really wasn't any point to the story. It was so slow and drug out. At least the book looks good on my shelf.
