



The Last Days of Summer

Steve Kluger

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May 15, 1940

Charlie Banks

New York Giants

Polo Grounds, New York

Dear Mr. Banks:

I am a 12-year-old boy and I am dying from malaria. Please hit a home run for me because I don't think I will be around much longer.

Your friend,

Joey Margolis

Dear Kid:

Last week it was the plague. Now it's malaria. What do I look - stupid to you? You're lucky I don't send somebody over there to tap you on the conk. I am enclosing 1 last picture. Do not write to me again.

Chase. Banks

3d Base

Dear Charlie:

Nobody asked for your damn picture. I never even heard of you before. And you can forget about the home run too. The only reason I needed one was because the bullies who keep beating me up somehow thought you were my best friend and the homer was supposed to keep them from slugging me anymore. Thanks for nothing.

Can I go on a road trip with you?

Your arch enemy,

Joey Nargolis

Dear Joey:

"Somehow" they thought I was your best friend? Where did they hear that from? A Nazi spy? J. Herbert Hoover? Franklin Delano Biscuithead? And didn't I tell you not to write to me anymore? Go bug DiMaggio.

Charlie

P.S. And just because there's a spot open for a bat boy this summer doesn't mean your going to get it. Even if we ARE chips off the same block. May 15, 1940

The Last Days of Summer Details

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From Reader Review The Last Days of Summer for online ebook

Lady Ozma says

The Last Days fo Summer by Steve Kluger is not the sort of book I would normally pick up and buy to read. You can probably fill my knowledge of baseball on the page under the title. However, a good friend recommended this to me and even went as far as to get me a copy.

I could not put the book down. It was excellent and captured my mind and my heart as I followed through roughly two years in the characters lives.

Seldom do characters come so alive as they do in this book. I found myself laughing at the hijinks, worrying, and in the end even crying.

The story is told in the form of news clippings, letters, and even a few Q and A's. The correspondance goes between an early teen boy from Brooklyn, a baseball player, the White House, and a few other people.

I'm not sure what I liked more, the creativity of the boy in his correspondance or his tenacity to get what he wanted.

If you want a darn good book, here it is. It would be an excellent read for any book club. Just be prepared to laugh and cry and lose a day reading it because you cannot put the darned thing down.

Thank goodness I didn't have other things to do like Christmas cards or something.

Eva Gogola says

Baseball is great and I have enjoyed a number of books about the sport. Back in December 2007 I finished Game of Shadows: Barry Bonds, BALCO, and the Steroids Scandal that Rocked Professional Sports, but never reviewed it. Then there was Bernard Malamud's novel The Natural I read in 2008. In 2009, I started Red Smith on Baseball and finished it in December of 2009. I still have fines on my account from forgetting to renew that book. Obviously, I love reading about America's past time and do so each year.

This year I read Steve Kluger's novel Last Days of Summer. This was a novel that moved fast and was really easy to take a few quick notes on. The style is interesting. The entire book is a delightful mash of letters and short conversations, secret notes passed in a classroom, ephemera and newspaper clippings that cut off without warning. You don't mind the choppy style. There is lots of white space so you feel like you are just zipping through the pages. You don't care the articles cut off in the middle. You read on because it's that good.

Read more: <http://knowledgeiscool.blogspot.com/2010/12/the-last-days-of-summer-by-steve.html>

Tracy Fleming-Swehla says

If your copy of this book has Author's Notes written 10 years after the original publication, read them. After getting a handful of pages into the story, I was kind of lost and started over after reading the Author's Notes. I appreciated the Author's Notes for the extra insight into the author's life and hints that this may or may not be based on some true events.

I'm so disappointed that this book was published in 2011 and was never required reading for me in middle/high school (since I'm so old). It's a great story and while it features baseball, politics and war it's not a baseball story, it's not a political story and it's not a story about war. It IS a story about a scrappy 12 year old boy badgering his baseball hero into becoming a father to him. The story plays out in letters back and forth between Joey Margolis and Charlie Banks, 3rd baseman for the NY Giants. Other letters between Joey and his best friend, the principal of Joey's school, the President's Secretary, and a few others help the story unravel.

I absolutely loved this wonderful, hilarious story, and I'm looking forward to discussing it with my bookclub.

Heidi (Yup. Still here.) says

4.5 stars. Loved this book! Despite the entire book being comprised of letters and newspaper clippings, once I got to know all the main characters it was really easy to follow. What a great story about a young man who befriends a pro baseball player by basically being saucy towards him. I loved the humor and was really rooting for the two main characters. Highly recommend.

03/2015 - changed star rating from 4 to 5 because I still love this book 5 years later!

Karen says

Wow, Heidi! What a gem of a book! I really loved it. I was snorting out loud at parts, giggling like a fiend, and then of course, here come the tears.

I'm so glad I trusted you to pick a book that you knew we'd love! Thanks, my friend! I'm getting a kick reading everyone's postcards too! What a fun "around the world" book!!

April says

Frankly, I was skeptical when I picked this up but went in with high hopes given positive reviews. At a glance through the pages, I wasn't sure I wanted to jump in. I felt like a series of letters and news clippings was going to take away from a cohesive narrative, and I wasn't sure about a story of a kid writing to a baseball player... Really-- where could it possibly go?

Within just a couple of pages, I was hooked. The characters are real and compelling. It was laugh out loud funny (I got looks when I was reading in public), and also brought me to tears-- something that very few books have been able to do in recent years. The characters arc so seamlessly and naturally that it's hard to

believe where they started. Truly a book that was hard to put down at night that went beyond just action and story... I resided in the world with the characters.

* **Jennifer says**

This book is a brilliant example of epistolary novel writing - definitely the best example I've ever read myself. Sublimely funny, poignant and timeless. If you like baseball at all, and enjoy reading about the 1940's era, this book about growing up in NYC is a must read. Serious, keep-on-the bookshelf-forever-and-force-others-to-read-it brilliant.

Full review: <http://jenn.booklikes.com/post/113072...>

Steph (loves water) says

I truly love this book. I have lent it to important people in my life and they've all raved about it. It's my son's favorite book. Joey reminds me so much of my son, he could be the reincarnated Joey! It's been a very long time since a book made me laugh so hard and cry as well. To this day my son will read me select passages from the book and we will laugh hysterically. I recommend this book for everyone, baseball fans especially.

Coleen says

I wondered if The Last Days of Summer would hold up to a second reading. As I wipe away the tears I realize it has. For me this book is an old friend I will revisit every few years.

The Last Days of Summer is written in epistolary style and could be a quick read on the surface but it's one to savor.

Joey Margolis is a 12 year old growing up in Brooklyn in the 40's. He's trying to figure out how to navigate the recent changes in his life and has an incredible imagination only surpassed by his unfailing dedication to reaching his goals. He focuses his attention and imagination on the 3rd Baseman for the NY Giants - Charlie Banks and from there the antics ensue.

This book isn't for everyone I'm sure, but it hit all of my sweet spots! New York, World War II, Coming of Age, friendship, loyalty and love.

If you're looking for a great Summer read, this is it. To quote Joey's irascible Aunt Carrie - if you don't read this book "let it be on your head".

Mimi Smith says

5 stars

Loved it. Maybe I'll be able to write a review after I stop crying. Maybe Such a beautiful and touching story...

Steve says

Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack... ?

OK, so it's not health food. But what we consume doesn't always have to be good for us. This book was full of empty calories, processed to a point where pretty much every bit of literary goodness was gone. And I ate every bite.

A Jewish kid with an absent father moved with his mother and aunt into a tough part of Brooklyn just prior to Pearl Harbor. He and his Japanese-American friend got pummeled on a regular basis. But this kid had moxie (a word more common at that time, I gather). He started writing to the Giants' up-and-coming star third baseman. These exchanges evolved from wise-ass banter to a sort of charming surrogate father-son relationship – one where a phrase like “I've got your back” had real meaning. Then the bombs began to drop. It's a promising storyline.

Like I said, though, don't go into this book expecting anything truly substantial. The kid, 12-year-old Joey, was never really credible – writing and receiving personal letters from FDR, performing in night clubs, formulating war strategies, and so on. And the ballplayer, Charlie, was never completely real despite the author's attempt to take an inherently big-hearted guy and give him a few rough edges to make him seem plausible. The hero worthy of worship was never far beneath the surface, despite the concocted lunk-headedness. After a while, I decided just to go with it. Snobby as it may sound, I felt that stooping to their uncomplicated level was worth doing, with disbelief duly suspended.

Does this have anything to do with the Cubs having the best record in baseball? You bet your sweet Astroturf-free ballpark 3 miles up the road it does. Aside from the fun baseball lore, there was a strong supporting cast: the Japanese-American kid who (no surprise here) had a difficult war, the singer who was sweet on Charlie and helpful to Joey, the aunt with the wisdom of an old soul, a love interest for Joey (think puppies), and a buddy for Charlie from the Giants, famous briefly for the first unassisted triple play in decades. The plot and all its staging were entertaining enough to hold my interest. And it moved about as fast as Tinker to Evers to Chance. (For those who don't know baseball history, please imagine I just supplied the perfect metaphor for quick and graceful movement.)

So no, this wasn't the edifying read many Goodreaders (myself included) might typically seek out. But if you're in the mood for candy-coated popcorn, peanuts and a prize, this may be just the thing. Much like the Michelin Guide in rating the concession stand at Wrigley, I couldn't quite justify four stars for the book, though there's a simple pleasure in both. Finally, in what you may consider the *raison d'être* of my entire review, let me say this:

Go Cubs, go!

Karen says

I love a good book sale. I love to chat with other readers and find gems among the fodder at the suggestion of strangers. That's how I found *Last Days of Summer* by Steve Kluger. I would never have chosen this book--sports stories usually aren't my thing--but I was standing in line waiting to pay for my two-foot stack at the library's \$1 book sale this spring when the woman wearing purple scrubs in front of me picked it up from a table, asked me if I'd read it, and told me it was one of her favorite books ever. She said she never would have chosen it, got it in a book exchange, and read it when she was desperate for something to read. Oh well, what's another \$1? As she balanced it on top of my stack, she assured me I'd love it.

Her instinct was spot on. What a delight! Thank you, thank you, Scrubs Lady! I just finished reading *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* last week, a book that took a lot of thought, concentration and time, so I was ready for something lighter and funnier. When I saw this in my stack, I remembered Scrubs mentioned "quick and fun," and who doesn't think "baseball" when it's the middle of summer? If only I liked hot dogs and had some apple pie... Oh well...gobbled this book up in two nights, and laughed out loud almost the entire time! The main character, Joey Margolis, is funny enough, but his hero, Charlie Banks, 3rd baseman of the NY Giants, is a scream--and my hero, too! Every human should be a Charlie Banks.

I won't give away the ending, but I was glad everyone else was in bed. Written entirely in epistolary form using letters, postcards and newspaper clippings, you'll read this in a snap, and you'll be so glad you did, even if your copy costs more than \$1!

Peggy says

Epistolary novels are hard to pull off. By ditching conventional plot structure, the writer focuses all the attention on his characters. If the writer doesn't get the voices just right, readers lose interest in the story being told.

Luckily, Kluger is dead solid perfect in *The Last Days of Summer*. Whether we're hearing precocious 12 year-old Joey Margolis or irascible New York Giants third baseman Charlie Banks or even any of the myriad other voices we're a party to, it just sounds **right**, and consequently we buy the story. Once we're bought in, occurrences that should seem far-fetched become possible, as they do when you're listening to a really good storyteller.

There's a lot of humor here, but there's more, too, as you would expect in a book dealing with a young boy's coming of age and set during wartime. It's a short book, and it reads really quickly, making it a great summer read.

Trin says

An epistolary novel about a 12-year-old Jewish kid from Brooklyn who becomes best friends with a star baseball player in the early 1940s. This is utter pap, but...well, okay, I'm embarrassed to admit that I quite liked it. Joey is one of those impossibly clever and erudite 12-year-olds, and the premise is ridiculous—not just the becoming-best-friends-with-a-ballplayer part, but the fact that Joey and Charlie, the New York

Giants' 3rd baseman, also go on to meet President Roosevelt, Humphrey Bogart, etc. Like I said: *ridiculous*, and there are shades of *Forrest Gump* that make me gag. Yet...it's *sweet*, and very funny, and Charlie is just the type of character I tend to fall for: someone who puts a lot of effort into appearing brash and tough but is a secret softie. And I have to admit that the all-too-inevitable ending made me cry.

oliviasbooks says

Oh, boy. Large parts of the book were so funny and gut-warming, I could quote every second page. But in the end my eyes burned from held-back tears. So, so sad. It is a war-time story, I KNOW, but, Mr. Kluger, couldn't you just let him survive to humor me?

Oct. 18th: I've just re-read the last 40 pages and got wet eyes again. How can a book be so hilarious and so tragic at the same time? I just love Steve Kluger's style.

Tory says

Oh man.

I laughed, a lot. Then at the end I cried. Seriously. A lot of books SAY that they'll make you laugh and cry, but the books that have made me laugh out loud I could count on one hand... and I can only think of one other book that made me cry. The Catalpa Tree by Denyse Devlin (incredible book, by the way).

It's an epistolary novel, written through letters, telegrams, transcripts of sessions with his therapist, newspaper articles, etc. A story of a Jewish kid in Brooklyn during WWII - Joey Margolis. He gets sent to Juvy for peeing the in reservoir and is a pathological liar. The kid finds a hero in a rookie baseball player and tracks down his home address and his girlfriends address in order to make friends with him. He is in correspondence with the White House and ends up playing sax with Louis Armstrong.

There is all kinds of quirky aspects of the story that endears me to it further, yet are completely ridiculous, I like that sort of thing. But mostly, it's just sweet as fucking pie and it made me cry.

LOVED it.

Lena♥Ribka says

This book is amazing. A-M-A-Z-I-N-G.

I laughed out LOUD, really, I had to pay attention who were near me while reading it.

And at 94% I just HAD to STOP to read. I was at work, and I knew there were no way I can go through the last 6 % reading it in public. The first thing I did when I came home today, I read the last 6% and I cried. I am a mess now. Maybe I'll write some day a proper review, but from my experience I know that I am not able to write a review for a book that touched me in this way. No reviews can do it justice.

All I can say, READ THIS BOOK. If you're Jewish or Protestant, READ THIS BOOK, if you love baseball, READ THIS BOOK. If you DON'T LIKE kids in your books, read it. If you enjoy historical fiction, don't

miss it. If you are parents, lovers, friends, READ IT. If you want a book that makes you laugh out loud and makes you cry, READ THIS BOOK.

My Charlie Banks, New York Giants third baseman

Joey Margolis, a twelve year old Jewish boy

I LOVE this book so much.

Reading Challenge 2017 - 3. A book of letters.

Wendy F says

"Brother, If you can't feel it, I can't explain it."

Heidi! That was so beautiful! I absolutely LOVED this book! Thank you so much for sharing, because otherwise I would never have stumbled across it or picked it up. I'm grateful! :)

To all my other Goodreads friends, this is a MUST READ book. (And for those in YA-MA, it is a GREAT pick for the season challenge, hint hint!)

It's 1940 and Joey is a 12 years old Jewish boy living in Brooklyn after his parents divorce. Joey's had a rough start in the new area. He's being bullied pretty badly, made some bad decisions, and has come to the conclusion that there is only one way out of this mess. He has to get up and coming rookie for the New York Giants, Charlie Banks, to hit a home run and dedicating it to him, Babe Ruth style. All he's gotta do is convince him. This leads to one of the most special and endearing friendships I've ever read in a book.

"It is Joseph's opinion that he open his Bar Mitzvah speech 'with a few laughs to loosen them up'- more specifically, that worn-out routine chronicling Moses' descent from the mountain with the Ten Commandments, concluding with the epigram 'Adultery's still in.' Given the manner in which the two of them recited the punch line in unison, I gather that Mr. Banks and your son are a well-suited match. So, however, are Laurel and Hardy." - Rabbi Morris Lieberman

I have to warn you, this book is written entirely through letters, report cards, therapist notes, newspaper articles, and baseball stats. I was a little nervous going into it, thinking that it would make it difficult to get a feel for these characters and build a reader/character relationship. Yeah, not a problem at all. I loved each and every one of them just as deeply as one possibly could. Joey was so clever and fearless, even though he was only 12 years old (14 at the end) I truly admired his gumption. I laughed outloud at the boys antics. Poor Charlie never stood a chance, thank goodness. He could be a 'tough guy' all he wanted, but inside he was a big softy. (Don't even get me started on Craig, Aunt Carrie, Hazel and Stuke. They are all so well written and 3 dimensional.)

And the book was FUNNY. Laugh out loud funny, I'll have you know. There were wisecracks and one liners throughout the whole thing. Here's just a taste of one that had me laughing outloud!

This is Charlie quizzing Joey on the Torah before his Bar Mitzvah:

3. How old was Noah when God gave him the job?

76.

600.

Says who? And how come God thought an old fart like that could build a boat? He'd be lucky if he could still pee.

If you don't read this you're missing out, seriously. Sure it's about baseball, and if you're not into sports you may not understand the baseball stats. I sure as hell didn't, haha. It doesn't matter because love is what this story is really about. It's about love and everlasting friendships. I absolutely loved it. I can guaran-damn-tee that I will be buying this book for my bookshelf and I'll be reading it again and again. I can't wait to read others from this author. Beautiful and Brilliant.

"Dear Aunt Carrie and Mrs. M,

Hazel did some nosing around and found out that there are 19 million kids in the U.S. of A.

Only 10 of them are going to the W. House today. You can do the math yourself on account of I would not get near long division with a 10 ft. pole. But if you tell people that he is one in a million, you would be pretty close to the mark.

Charlie

Shawn says

This was such a nice story. It's sweet, it's funny, and it's touching. What I love most about the book is that there's really no detectable pretense. It's not trying to be some great literary masterpiece. It's just a story about a young boy and a young man who find their way into each other's lives and form a friendship that they both are in desperate need of.

It actually reminds me quite a bit of The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society: both utilize epistolary formats, both are historical fiction centered around WWII, and both are relentlessly delightful. If you're looking for something that's uplifting and fun but also leaves you with a little something to think about, I'd definitely suggest picking this up. As the title might suggest, it's a great summer read.

Laura says

I just stumbled on this in the library, and saw it's in a unique form (letters and such), which I'm loving lately. I just learned this is called an "epistolary novel" and stealing from a review below, I know why I am so drawn to this format. "...are hard to pull off. By ditching conventional plot structure, the writer focuses all the

attention on his characters." As I've said before, I'll pick good characters over a good plot if I have to choose. So I guess when the focus is totally on that, I get hooked. More to come...I'm about 1/3 in, and am struggling just a tad. It's just a very different style of conversation (because it's a little boy and baseball player in 1940) and sometimes I'm not 100% following the conversation. But I like them both enough already to keep truckin. I feel bad for Joey, as he was dealt a bad hand in many ways. And I'm fascinated by Charlie and how he keeps writing back...

Wow, this might just be an all time favorite book. I really did have many LOL moments, but then at the end I was bawling. I knew what was going to happen and I didn't want to finish reading. But I did, and the end was good in spite of what happened. This really was a great book that just jumped in my lap.
