



Running Wide Open (Full Throttle, #1)

Lisa Nowak

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Cody Everett has a temper as hot as the flashpoint of racing fuel, and it's landed him at his uncle's trailer, a last-chance home before military school. But how can he take the guy seriously when he calls himself Race, eats Twinkies for breakfast, and pals around with rednecks who drive in circles every Saturday night?

What Cody doesn't expect is for the arrangement to work. Or for Race to become the friend and mentor he's been looking for all his life. But just as Cody begins to settle in and get a handle on his supercharged temper, a crisis sends his life spinning out of control. Everything he's come to care about is threatened, and he has to choose between falling back on his old, familiar anger or stepping up to prove his loyalty to the only person he's ever dared to trust.

Running Wide Open (Full Throttle, #1) Details

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Author : Lisa Nowak

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From Reader Review Running Wide Open (Full Throttle, #1) for online ebook

Tara Chevestt says

I rarely read books with male leads or narrators, but this one has a female mechanic in it so I decided to give it a go. Though it was a bit too much testosterone for me at times, it is an enjoyable read.

Cody is 15 and a juvie... and he is an ungrateful brat. I didn't like him at first.. but as the story unfolds, I could see WHY he is the way he is.. full of anger, insolent, disrespectful, ungrateful, bitter. His family has made him that way. His mother is a nightmare, his father a wuss, and his grandparents are no better. So when the you know what hits the fan, nobody wants him and he goes to live with his uncle, Race, who's very into stock car racing. (He's got the lady mechanic.)

Funny thing I noticed.. When Cody gets his life together, his mom decides she wants him back. Hmph.

For full review, please click on the link below:

<http://wwwbookbabe.blogspot.com/2011/...>

Cat-sidhe says

This book to any of you skeptics out there was amazing. Lisa Nowak has a captivating way of hooking you into the story. This book follows a fifteen year old boy named Cody on his journey of understanding. His life is full of drama, humor, suspense, and life-threatening challenges. I don't want to say too much and give it all away. I'll just say this, Lisa Nowak's book needs to be read by anyone who reads YA or is looking for a great read. :)

Alice Lynn says

Seasoned with laugh out loud humor, Running Wide Open is also a tale of growth, suspense, loyalty, and family dysfunction. Cody is challenged to make a new life with his uncle Race, and in the process faces his own shortcomings. Stock car racing becomes a metaphor for achieving personal excellence. Believable characters and great dialogue keep things moving on and off the track.

Peter says

When Cody Everett and his graffiti artist friends get caught by the Portland police, it's the last straw for the boy's father who puts two choices to his son: military school or live with his mother's brother, Race Morgan, in a trailer park in Eugene. Cody's uncle is a race car driver so the choice seems obvious. Running Wide Open by Lisa Nowak is Cody's story about that episode in his life, which takes place in 1989.

Cody arrives at his uncle's ungrateful. He begins pulling endless, childish pranks that test Race's patience.

But Race's skin is thick and his passive tolerance proves frustrating to Cody. The two take a long time adapting to each other but gradually the frequency and intensity of Cody's pranks diminish as his interest in the racing world grows. It helps when Race's sponsor, the attractive Kasey, comes into the picture. Her sisterly / motherly influence on Cody is positive for everyone. Through her he learns lessons in teamwork and sportsmanship as his life begins to stabilize.

Then a serious injury at the track puts Race in the hospital, threatening to undo all the progress Cody's made. He's too young to live on his own in the trailer. His desire to live with Kasey goes against the wishes of his maternal grandparents, who live nearby, and those of his mother, who lives in California. All the Morgan family dysfunction—extending across three generations and simmering to this point—boils over when Cody's mother pressures him to come live with her. No one, least of all Cody, wishes for that. Amidst this adult cesspool of acrimony, Cody must choose his own paths, and stick to them.

It's a complex drama for a YA book, let alone for real life, and I liked how the story focused on these emotional aspects, rather than rely on the easy subjects of sex and drugs. I suspect all teens can identify with one or two of Cody's troubles, albeit not all of them. From my adult perspective, though, the intensity of the situations seemed to overwhelm the characters with whom I had difficulty associating.

The problem may be in the voice. Cody's first person voice is strong but the age and maturity is not consistent. I couldn't be sure whether this was Cody's fifteen-year-old reactive voice weeks or months after those events of 1989, or his adult reflective voice years later (at one point, he uses the expression, "the dating scene," which struck me as out of place and out of character). Furthermore, I had no idea whether to view Cody as a reliable narrator or not. It affected my ability to relate to the characters, and primarily the protagonist.

Indeed, I didn't care much for Cody, in my opinion a self-pitying, spoiled brat desperately needing some tough love. I cared even less for the adults around him who nurtured this behaviour by kowtowing to his mood swings. Yet his troubles, while at times overly dramatized, are not uncommon today, and probably weren't in 1989 either; as such, I can appreciate this novel for its plausible portrayal of a societal situation. But if we are to cheer for Cody then we are kind of compelled also to champion the entitlement trap teenagers and parents fall into and even encourage. I wasn't willing to do that and that bias on my part certainly affected my reading experience.

I do wish more had been done with other younger characters such as Tim from the amusing opening scene, the bully from a tense scene by the river, and Kasey's younger sister, Brooke, who appears only for a single scene of exposition and never again. Otherwise, Cody is only with adults. While his evolution in relating to adults and authority figures is central to the novel, a reunion with Tim, a re-encounter with the bully, or an awkwardly romantic situation with Brooke, would have given a broader and probably more positive perspective on our protagonist.

I also wish more had been revealed about Cody's private passion for writing and what he wrote about, as this is such an important aspect of his character. We only see him writing stories but, with one exception, have no idea what they're about:

There was only one person I'd talked to about my writing—my English teacher last fall. After he'd shoveled on the praise about the first couple essays I'd turned in, I mustered up my courage and showed him one of my stories. It took him most of fall term to get it back to me. Even then, he didn't give me any real feedback. He just corrected the spelling and grammar in hateful red pen, taking all the art out of it. And he put the dialog in proper English, not getting that I wanted to write it the way my characters would really say it.

When I tried to explain that to him, he said, "You have to learn the rules before you can break them, Cody." The memory of it made me feel like I'd been caught walking buck-naked through the school auditorium.

The writing itself is fine. There could be more showing of emotions through action than description, a lighter touch on the similes, and just some plain old pruning of text. The middle dragged a bit with too many pranks and scenes that only restated character, rather than enhancing it or moving the plot forward. Still, it's a polished product, as one might expect from an author with Nowak's experience.

While I didn't like everything about *Running Wide Open*, I did admire it. The racing environment is depicted wonderfully and its atmosphere of sportsmanship and camaraderie is inspiring. It's a great backdrop for this admirably complex drama and ought to make this a YA favorite to be read multiple times.

Book_magic says

Totally Amazing. Story line is intriguing and something that I can relate to; not like those impossible thing. The book draws you in and grasps you with both hands not letting go long after you are done reading it.

L.E.Olteano says

I'm not much of a fan of racing; I like bikes and cars, and the feeling speed gives, but I'm not much for racing. I think that's the main reason why this isn't a 5 butterflies, a lot of the time we were focusing on this thing that isn't that interesting for me. Now, that being said, this was one awesome book.

For starters, I loved the fact it has a male MC, namely Cody. He's a disoriented, sort of bitter young man, with less than stellar family history and some behavior issues (minor compared to how bad they could have been, all things considered), he's fun, he has awesome T-shirts that I just love him for, a great sense of humor and he interacts with people around him in the funniest way, especially with his uncle, that I adored, Race. As a character, Cody is all that he could be and then some, and as a person, he's sort of awesome. His uncle is even more awesome, and the both of them make for a lot of great reading.

I wouldn't say I liked the female characters in the book that much, not even Kasey. And I would have loved to strangle Cody's mom, but in that I wasn't alone, basically everyone that mattered wanted that too, so it's a very popular club.

As far as the plot goes, this is a bildungsroman, rich with all the elements that you'd expect; conflict, tension, hurt feelings, gaping wounds, and love. A lot of the action revolved around racing, as I've said before, Cody's uncle Race being a racer and all. It was fun, and entertaining, but I wouldn't go as far as saying I was riveted. That's for the first half or so of the book. Then came the second half, and it blew me away. For various reasons that I obviously won't blab about and spoil your read, the second part of the book was a shocker, and sort of demanding, almost emotionally draining at some point. It was the real-growing-up part of the book, really, and it was done beautifully. The second part of the book is the reason this is a 4 butterflies and not a 3 butterflies read.

The writing is really good, it's fun and light overall, and it glides well through the tense, emotionally charged parts. The characters have their own voices, and they're strong voices, something I always enjoy fully in a

book. It makes them realistic, charming, and a pleasure to read about, it's a great crowd to be in for as long as it lasts.

What could have improved my read was if, say near the end, Cody's mom was kidnapped by aliens. Or nibbled on by wildlife. Or, you know, tied to a tree in the wild and left there. She was so annoying, I felt like taking a break from reading for a few minutes each time she made an appearance. Really, really annoying creature, her and her father. Tie them up together and set them free on a small boat in the ocean. :D Anyways...

I say read this book, it's fun, it's beautiful, it's about racing a lot (now that's not something I get the chance to say that often), it's a very cool read that will give you a feel-good state of mind. Awesome read.

Ashley says

I enjoyed reading this e-book. I loved that there was a chance of growth, suspense, and loyalty as well as family dysfunction. The characters were believable plus the dialogue was excellent. The book definitely drew me in and it was a great read.

Kelly says

More like 2.75, but the voice won me over. Would have been a solid 3 if not for the unnecessary 1980s setting. I'm really over that trend, 2011 YA novels. Teens today don't relate, and it's not historical fiction. Stop, please, stop.

15-year-old Cody got in trouble with the law, and he's been sent to live with his uncle to get his act together. Except his uncle is weird and lives in a trailer and races stock cars. Then things take a wrong turn, and it's Cody who has to step up and take care of himself.

Nowak's novel had great voice and great lines throughout. Cody was realistic to me, though at times he could come off a little more intelligent than a 15-year-old trouble making guy should. But I think for a lot of guy readers, that might be the appeal. Also, he's a big reader and writer (a story line that didn't quite flesh out as well as it could have).

That said, it was REALLY LONG and unnecessarily so. I think it could have been cut by 70-100 pages and tightened up to be stronger. The middle drags, and Cody actually loses a lot of what's appealing about him in terms of his internal thought processes about this time, and it almost disappears completely in the end. What was so strong at the start fades, and while it's proof of his understanding of change in himself, it's still losing his voice, which shouldn't change that much.

I enjoyed the stock car racing more than I thought I would, though I found the Kasey-Race story line to be underdeveloped, particularly where it came to her running the shop and being a bit of a bimbo about it. She was a strong female character, one which Cody found himself surprisingly respectful of right from the start of the story, but in making her sort of an idiot when it came to paperwork, I felt she became a stereotype of everything he'd already believed in. As the only decent female in the book (because mom and grandma suck), it was disappointing to see that.

Lauren says

No one said being a teen is easy. Cody Everett is that one punk everyone remembers from high school as "trouble". That kid who sneaks out for a smoke, graffiti's buildings, and says things just to watch people squirm. Would you take him in after the police pull him over, again? I don't know if I would, yet that's exactly what his uncle Race does. After testing his uncle, multiple times, Cody begins to realize that maybe Race does care, and he starts to let down his guard. Then tragedy strikes, and Cody is left wondering why he ever bothers and thinking it might be time to just give up for good...

This book is an emotional rollercoaster. I start out thinking Cody is just some disrespectful punk who has some major anger issues, but now I am happy to say I was totally and completely wrong. Cody has baggage, sure, most of us do, and past experience definitely accounts for his trust issues. At the beginning of *Running Wide Open*, I want to smack Cody every time he's rude or belittling to Race, but the more I read, I realize that it's his defense mechanism kicking in. Then, I (im)patiently wait in anticipation for that moment when he will cave in and completely trust Race.

Typically, I love books that have romance in them; they appeal to me as a teen and connect me to the story. *Running Wide Open* doesn't have any major romance. Actually, with Cody there is NONE. Truthfully though: I don't even notice. This book catches and holds my attention so well that I'm not even worrying about when or if a girl will come into Cody's life, I just want to see if he will unintentionally drink rotten milk again. Yeah, you read that right.

Running Wide Open is a MAJOR character-building book, and it ties me to the characters: all of them. Normally, I feel a connection to the main character, but here I feel connected to not only Cody, but also to Race, and even to Cody's dad! I really feel like I am a part of the family and completely, emotionally connected to the story. I will admit that I cried. Twice. Yes, it is that moving. Yes, it is that touching. Yes, you should read it.

The Cover:

This cover has many bright colors that all work well together to make this image interesting. The car, the stadium, the guy, all of these elements perfectly fit into this story. Personally, I really want to reach into the cover and force the guy (Cody) to turn around so I can see what he looks like!

I give this book 4.5 out of 5 stars: Very Highly Recommended

For more of my reviews visit www.epiloguereview.blogspot.com

Arla (Leave Mommy Alone) says

Thank you to Lisa Nowak for providing me with a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review...

My first thought when I finished this book was, "Whoa! Lisa Nowak can WRITE!"

One might think, from the the cover of this book, that it's about racing. Although there's racing in it, it's SOOO not about that. It's about relationships, acceptance and overcoming adversity. It's told from the point of view of a 15 yr. old troubled kid named Cody.

This story takes place in Oregon in the 80's. Cody is sent to live with his uncle, who goes by Race, when he gets busted for vandalizing a zoo wall. His choice is either live with an uncle he hardly knows or go to military school. Who would choose military school? No one.

What's Cody's story, why is he troubled? To say Cody's family life is messed up, would be an understatement. His mom, Sandra, is so self absorbed that she is completely out of touch with who Cody is and what he needs from her. She's recently walked out on him and his dad to pursue her dream of becoming a bartender. But, realistically she checked out of the mother role years ago. His dad is spineless and has never stood up for him. Both parents are pretty much useless. It's easy to see why Cody is lashing out, feeling angry, abandoned and full of resentment. His belief that ALL adults will eventually let you down, given enough time, is challenged when Race turns out to be the person to teach Cody the true meaning of family.

This book is a good example of why I love to read, the story touched my heart. The characters were so well written, I became easily invested in them. I identified with Cody the most, having been an angry teen at one point myself. I felt like he was teenage me, but with a Y chromosome. I was touched by his journey to self-control and self worth, love being the catalyst, as in any good story. It was satisfying to witness his transformation as he was finally accepted for who he was and encouraged to embrace his talents, surrounded by people who genuinely loved him.

But, Cody isn't the only one who is changed by circumstances. Unconditional love, acceptance and learning that who you were isn't who you always need to be, is the shared lesson. I enjoyed watching the relationships between Cody, Race and Kasey blossom. It's a beautiful example of how the distinction between family and friends can often blur.

One of the surprising things to me was how the author describes things in such a way that anyone can enjoy the thrill of what's going on on the race track or learn to appreciate all the work that goes into preparing a car for such a thing. At the end of this book you might find yourself giving NASCAR a chance next time it's on, if you haven't already.

In case you hadn't guessed, I highly recommend this book, because you don't have to know what's it's like to be an angry teenage boy or know a SINGLE THING about stock car racing to get something out of it, you just need a pulse.

Follow my blog:

<http://www.leavemommyalone.blogspot.com>

David King says

"Running Wide Open" by Lisa Nowak is a YA novel that for once doesn't involve paranormal events, love triangles or female protagonists. I know that some of you are probably dumb struck that a YA novel like that could actually exist but this book honestly is different to the norm. Instead the book involves stock car

racing, a troubled male protagonist and an emotional plot about overcoming the challenges of the past. I found the entire novel to be a refreshing change in addition to being an enjoyable and interesting read.

The story follows a 15 year old boy named Cody who does not have the healthiest of family lives. When, his rebellious ways leads to minor brush with the law he is sent away by his father to live with his uncle name Race, in order to avoid being sent to a military school. Cody is initially unable to take his uncle seriously as he eats Twinkies for breakfast, is dedicated to racing cars around in circles every weekend and has the most ridiculous name ever. Over time though, Cody learns to understand and respect his uncle and allows him to become the mentor and friend that he has been missing most of his life. However, when his uncle is involved in a terrible accident, Cody is suddenly forced to choose between reverting to his old ways or stepping up and showing loyalty and support to his uncle who faces the possibility that he may never race a car again.

In all honesty I am not a big stock car racing fan, I have never really seen the enjoyment in watching cars drive in circles. The only racing I really do follow is Formula 1 and it is pretty much in a different world to the racing portrayed in this book. However, Lisa Nowak has done a superb job in ensuring the reader is brought up to speed on the racing world as you get to discover the racing rules, car types and parts alongside Cody. I had no issue understanding what was going on and it was easy to get caught up in the thrill of the race.

The actual racing and car elements of the novel however aren't actually the main aspects of the book. There is a much deeper story here with the second half of the book really delving into Cody's growth as a person. It can at times be quite emotionally draining as Cody strives to accept both his past and current challenges and tries to become a better and wiser person. I felt that it was quite a complex area for a YA novel to enter, but I enjoyed the fact that the book did explore these elements amongst the backdrop of the racing world.

As this type of novel is based primarily around its characters, it was therefore not surprising to note that the characters were all quite vivid and memorable. I was able to gain a good understanding of most of them and could actually see things from their individual points of view which meant I was really able to get into the book. I think Cody himself was an interesting enigma, the regular bad boy aspects were all present but there was also an intellect and creativity that came out well. I did find it a little bit difficult to like him though due to his obnoxious streak but he did have an enjoyable sense of humour present and it was nice to see a deeper side present in this type of character.

One strange aspect of the novel though was in regards to it being set in the 1980s. I didn't really understand the need to utilise this period as all the issues that Cody faces are just as common today as they would have been in then. I had no real issue with this time period but I just found it to be an odd choice for a YA novel as I can't see many teens relating to the novel as much as they would have done had a current period been utilised.

Overall, I found "Running Wide Open" to be an admirable book that contained a complex and deep drama that many young adults should be able to relate to. Lisa Nowak has quite simply written an enjoyable and interesting story within a racing environment that has been depicted wonderfully so that anyone should be able to enjoy the book no matter their knowledge of stock car racing.

Kenya Starflight says

I picked this book up because of the description's comparisons to the work of Rainbow Rowell, a favorite

author of mine. While I wouldn't say this book is identical to her writings (though much like her work "Eleanor and Park" it does take place in the '80s and includes some nostalgic references to the decade), it's an unexpectedly powerful book that charts a young man's journey from angry, resentful teen to a more mature and balanced young man, coming to grips with his troubled family and forging bonds of friendship along the way. And it's an unexpectedly fun look into the world of amateur stock racing to boot.

Cody is a teen boy who finds himself in constant trouble with his parents, especially his domineering mother, and the last straw comes when he and his friends vandalize a zoo. As a final alternative to military school, he's shipped off to live with his eccentric uncle Race, an artist and stock-car racer who eats Twinkies for breakfast and takes Cody's pranks, anger, and snark in uncharacteristic stride. Slowly, Cody finds himself warming up to his strange but laid-back uncle, and finding his own niche in Race's world... but when disaster strikes, threatening to shatter the world Cody's just managed to piece back together, can he hold his anger in check long enough to help his uncle and decide what's best for his family?

This is an unexpectedly powerful book, well-written and with well-developed characters. I enjoyed the complex cast of characters, each with their own flaws and strengths, and even those set up to be obvious villains are shown to not be entirely "evil" but do have positive aspects. Cody himself could have been an obnoxiously whiny protagonist, but even early on it's easy to see that despite his anger and resentment he's a sensitive and driven young man, and it's satisfying to watch his journey unfold over the course of the book.

On an aside note, I also enjoyed the book's setting. I grew up in the '80s and have spent quite a bit of time in Oregon, and so it was nice to see a book set in this era and this state. It also explains certain plot elements that otherwise can be jarring for the reader, such as "why don't the characters just e-mail each other or call on their mobile phones?" I don't know much about the world of amateur racing, but it was fun getting a glimpse of it via this book, and I imagine it was fun for the author to either share her love of the sport or to do the research needed to depict it realistically.

A powerful and highly enjoyable read, both for teens and for older readers who enjoy seeing a character's journey to a better self. Probably not for kids, as it does contain swearing, sexual references, and some frightening moments.

Rachele Alpine says

I never ever thought that I would be into racing. I've never watched one on TV, don't know the first thing about how everyone is able to race around a track without crashing into each other and when I'm in my own car, drive under the speed limit. I'm usually the one that other people are racing past!

However, I fell in love with this book. Lisa creates a world of racing that totally makes sense and is developed organically. After getting in trouble at home, the main character, Cody, is sent to live with his Uncle Race. Race is named after his talent racing cars. Cody starts to spend a lot of time at the track. We learn about racing as Cody does, so we see it through his eyes. Lisa writes in a way that doesn't sound like she's just telling us the rules, the parts of the car and how it all works, instead we're discovering it just like Cody is. She makes it exciting and interested and find yourself rooting for the races and hoping your favorite character will win.

This book isn't all about racing, though. There is a deeper story to it. Lisa explores the idea of family and what a family is really made up of. Cody is estranged from his parents and not able to connect with anyone

very well. He slowly lets his walls down with Race and eventually learns the importance of allowing yourself to care for someone. Race is such a great character; his relationship with Cody cracks me up and Lisa creates little quirks for each of the characters that makes them very realistic.

I teach high school English and have recommended this book to many of my student, both male and female. I tell my girls that there is some romance (between Race and Kasey) and it's always fun to see inside the head of a male boy. The boys usually connect to Cody instantly. I'm so impressed by how well Lisa writes a male character; Cody reminds me of a lot of teen boys I've had in my classes. We can all see a little bit of ourselves in Cody and you really do come to care for these characters.

This is a great read for someone who is looking for a little bit of everything. So what are you waiting for? Get a copy of the book! On your marks, get set...go! (or buy in this case!).

Michelle Cornwell-Jordan says

Story Summary

Lisa Nowak's *Running Wide Open* is about Cody Everett a teenager who is hot tempered, loyal and brave. He's protective of those he loves, but finds himself not afforded that same benefit. Cody lives with his ineffectual father; there in body but lost in spirit/mind; Cody's mother is a selfish, erratic woman who has left both father and son. The mother leaving has a profound effect on Cody, a little boy who still seeks the love of a mother, who appears incapable of truly expressing the nature of love, which is unconditional.

The story opens with Cody exhibiting some of his highest attributes which is loyalty, and bravery; Cody and friends are caught committing petty vandalism and Cody takes the fall for a friend with the police. His actions land him out of his home and on the road to live with his Uncle Race, whom he hadn't seen since he was a kid.

Gone was the only home Cody knew, even though it was dysfunctional, living with his Uncle was a huge adjustment. Uncle Race was kind to a fault; disorderly, but he had a major positive work ethic and view on life that Cody initially shies away from; Race tries to draw Cody out, but Cody pushes him away. Cody attempts to protect himself from fully trusting yet another family member, who he is assured to fail him.

Race introduces Cody to his world of down-home friends and Stock-car racing; Also Cody meets, (and at first crushes on Kasey, a friend-girl of Race) But soon it evolves into just familiar love and friendship between Cody and Kasey; This pseudo parental love is coupled with all the other emotions Cody has for the rag tag bunch that he finds himself in the middle. Through his uncle, Cody locates the ability to acknowledge his gifts (karate, reading), embrace them, and begins to evolve into the man he is destined to become.

REVIEW

I really wasn't sure how I would like a book that was from the viewpoint of a male character; and which was about stock car racing. But like it I did! Ms Nowak, has a clean, clear way of writing and immediately the reader is drawn into the story. Lisa Nowak's writing is remarkably strong and I was pleasantly surprised; I moved through the story like a hot knife through butter:). It was that effortless and easy.

Lisa Nowak has created a story that I believe is a superb model for young people to own the challenges from their past, and once acknowledging and working their way through the bad stuff(hopefully with a trusted adult); then moving ahead into life stronger and wiser. Ms. Nowak's has shown that "family" doesn't have to be the nuclear unit(Dad,Mom, kids and throw in pets) which is the traditional viewpoint; But family is where love, acceptance, guidance and encouragement is found.

I believe that the young and young at heart would love this book!

RUNNING WIDE OPEN is on it's way to becoming a new classic, coming of age story; residing in the company of other great stories such as S.E. HINTON'S THE OUTSIDERS and THAT WAS THEN and THIS IS NOW...

Nickie says

Running Wide Open follows 15 year old Cody Everett, a troubled teen who has crossed paths with law enforcement one too many times. His parents decide to ship him off to live with his Uncle Race, who is an avid stock car racer. At first, Cody is convinced that his uncle will fail him just like his parents did, and keeps his distance. As he learns more about Race, Cody realizes that a normal, happy life might actually be within his reach.

What I liked about this book:

Have you ever wondered how to write a great character arc? This is one of the most nicely done examples of character growth I have EVER read (I was taking notes while reading. Seriously). Cody is equal parts frustrated and frustrating, snarky and sincere, tender and callous. Nowak does an outstanding job balancing these character traits and creating a living and breathing character. These are the types of books I like best -- the sort where once I set down the story, I feel like I've known the characters for years.

As fleshed out as Cody's character is, Nowak doesn't neglect her supporting cast. Cody's parents and his uncle are also beautifully drawn. I also loved the focus on trying to handle a difficult family. So many YA contemporary books go right for the jugular, exploring drugs and sex and violence, but sometimes that feels over the top. Running Wide Open was accessible and relateable.

What I didn't like about this book:

I actually wasn't crazy about Kasey's character, actually. She was unrealistically young, in my opinion, which kept throwing me out of the story.

I would have liked to see more of Cody's grandparents and gotten a better idea of why his mother and Race were the way they were. Those two characters, uncle and mother, are basically polar opposites. I think it would have been helpful to understand what pushed those characters in their respective directions.

Final verdict:

I absolutely loved this book. It's a great coming of age story, and even though it's set in 1989, that more for the racing aspect than any other element in the story. I could just as easily imagine the same events taking place today.
