



A Solitary Blue

Cynthia Voigt

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Jeff Greene was only seven when Melody, his mother, left him with his reserved, undemonstrative father, the Professor. So when she reenters his life years later with an invitation to spend the summer with her in Charleston, Jeff is captivated by her free spirit and warmth, and he eagerly looks forward to returning for another visit the following year.

But Jeff's second summer in Charleston ends with a devastating betrayal, and he returns to his father wounded almost beyond bearing. But out of Jeff's pain grows a deepening awareness of the unexpected and complicated ways of love and loss and of family and friendship -- and the strength to understand his father, his mother, and especially himself.

A Solitary Blue Details

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Elsa K says

Another 4.5 stars. I didn't think I would enjoy this one as much as it focuses on Jeff Greene, a friend of the Tillermans. But I got so sucked into his story I didn't even miss the other characters! Can I just say Jeff's mom gives me the creeps? I enjoyed getting to see the Tillermans more in the end, but thought the story stood alone well without them. These are powerful stories and themes for young adults (and grown-ups too)!

Josiah says

Okay, after reading this book I was forced to come to the wonderful conclusion that Cynthia Voigt could do no wrong and she was, in all likelihood, a perfect author and perfect human.

Well, I nearly felt that way after reading through A Solitary Blue!

I never thought that any additional book in The Tillerman Cycle could surpass Dicey's Song, and perhaps this one did not surpass it, but it did come shockingly close.

In my thinking, this is one of the fullest and most richly resonant novels about the power of feelings that has ever been written, by ANYONE. My heart broke a dozen times (and more) while reading this as I experienced the pain that Jeff felt from loving his mother and slowly coming to realize that her love for him was just not the same. This book will resound in the mind of anyone who has ever had their heart broken, or even been sad (so, everyone).

The storyline was almost unfathomably deep and fully realized, par for the course when it comes to books written by Cynthia Voigt. As is the case for Dicey's Song, A Solitary Blue truly ranks up there with the greatest books that I have read in my entire life. It is a special journey that I urge everyone not to miss.

Lisa Findley says

This is possibly my favorite book of the Tillerman Cycle. As ever, Cynthia Voigt's story and language are beautifully interdependent. Jeff's growth from terrified little boy to self-assured young man is by no means easy or without twists and turns, and he reaches that point after heartache and several reevaluations of himself and the other people in his life -- so it's like real life, something Voigt writes about with assurance.

I also like A Solitary Blue because I first read it when I was just starting to want to be a hippie (back at age 12), and Melanie was a warning to me to focus on being a decent person first and an activist second, because if you can't love the people in your daily life, you can't be fully committed to the people you're trying to help in far-flung corners of the world.

Alex Larsen says

Jeff was abandoned by his beloved mother when he was only seven years old, and spent his life with his father whom he calls the Professor. The Professor is aloof and for most of his life Jeff is left on his own, until one summer his mother invites him to come stay with her. He falls in love with mother all over again, but

when he goes to visit her again the following summer things change. Jeff then has to come to terms with his mother's abandonment and rebuild his relationship with his father. Along the way he meets Dicey and the Tillerman family, who end up teaching him a few things about family. This book is very interesting when read after *Dicey's Song* because it tells part of the same story from the perspective of Jeff instead of Dicey. Jeff's character is very well-developed and easy to relate to, but part of me thinks that girls will enjoy his character and story more than boys due to the fact that the novel focuses on Jeff's inner thoughts, while the plot moves slowly. Voigt manages to create very real and captivating characters, and Jeff's coming of age is well integrated with how he manages to come into his own family.

Colin says

This was not a book I read in childhood, but re-reading the first two in this series, which were childhood faves and are still really great, made me want to read this series all the way through.

Voigt is really good at writing about children and abandonment, and also about the complexities of family. I felt so sorry for Jeff, the narrator, but then felt really proud of him when he comes into his own by the end of the book. I was totally invested. And of course, even though it's pretty rare to find them, I always like re-reading the same scenes from the POV of different characters, so the repeats from *Dicey's Song* were enjoyable. Next!

Lars Guthrie says

The third in the Tillerman Cycle and the third I've revisited in audio. It looks like there are no more in audio, which is disappointing.

It's the first in the Tillerman Cycle to turn its focus away from Dicey Tillerman and her family, and previews the way Voigt will interweave the different stories, for it is here we find the beginnings of a concrete 'Dicey's Song.'

That's not the only connection to the first two books, but this one is a far more stand-alone project. It tells Jeff Greene's story. He's a friend Dicey makes in her first year in school in Crisfield, Maryland. But Voigt takes us back long before then. Suffice it to say that Jeff has had as interesting a life as Dicey's, with as many obstacles.

So you don't have to know 'Homecoming' or "Dicey's Song," to get swept up in 'A Solitary Blue,' but knowing them will enhance the book immeasurably, and made for some gasps of surprise and admiration on my part.

One of the marks of great fiction is characters who completely surprise you without going out of character. Another is sharp-eyed observation of just the right amount of detail to convey atmosphere. And language, evocative and lucid. Cynthia Voigt succeeds on all counts. Jeff, his family, and each person he meets, are recognizable but never stereotypical, and Voigt is a poet of shopping malls, and herons in flight. 'A Solitary Blue' will move you.

Highly recommended.

Alice says

From my back door I can see a pond. Sometimes a solitary blue heron will visit the pond, a reclusive bird that stalks along the edge of the water. If you approach the heron, it immediately takes flight. I find the bird fascinating. Now I realize that one of the reasons I find blue herons so fascinating is that I read this book 20 years ago.

Jeff Green is like the solitary blue heron. He was deserted at age 7 by his immature and manipulative mother, and left alone by his emotionally distant professor father. When his mother returns to his life, he is torn between the two as he tries to grasp who each member of his family is (including himself!). How can you tell who loves you? How can you protect yourself from manipulation, and still show love?

Weighty matters for a child's book, but grim as the subject may be, I suspect it is not an unusual situation.

Voigt is an excellent author. The book can be a stand-alone (I didn't suspect it was part of series when I first read it). However, those who are fans of the Homecoming series will appreciate seeing the character Dicey again, and from a new point of view.

Kathy says

This is a review tainted with my love and hate of this novel. At times I couldn't put it down and others I couldn't put it down quick enough and was reluctant to pick it up again. I really liked all the characters in this book except two, and the story over all was great. The antagonist, Jeff's mom Melody, was a full-blown narcissistic and manipulative witch like an evil stepmother of a fairytale. It made the end rather predictable and seemed over the top. The other character I didn't like was not nearly as extreme as Melody, but very predictable, just as cruel, and not really in the story very much. In addition, the edition I read had so many typos it was distracting. Where were the proofreaders! I would have given it 1 star based on those two characters and the typos; however, the story is so beautifully written.

The protagonist, Jeff, who is in second grade, comes home from school to find a note from his mother stating she has left him to fend for himself. Then she is out of his life for years, only to suddenly have him come to live with her for the summer. Thus begins the emotional roller coaster of her relationship with him. She does this some other times until he is near graduating high school. The author describes Jeff's pain, struggles, love, anger, and psychological/emotional growth so very well. He develops wonderful relationships with his dad and others, and eventually and painfully begins to see through his shallow mother's motives. All the other characters were so very well written, as were their surrounds, and that is what hooked me. So, I gave it a four stars.

Leslie says

A beautiful and sobering illustration of why isolation is so seductive in times of pain or brokenness; equally compelling in its call for healing through connections with others. This novel was probably the most genuine and nuanced piece of writing I read in my youth, and it taught me as much about character (both having it and lacking it) as any of the classics.

Kimberly Lavoie says

Solitary Blue is quite possibly one of the saddest stories I have ever read. The writing is solid, and the characters evolve in such a way that the reader practically folds into themselves to keep up. It is really the story of human tenacity and resilience, and the fragility of love.

Beth says

I was too bowled over by *Dicey's Song* to write much about it. I'm bowled over again, and I didn't think that was possible with a followup novel, so I'm going to try - probably unsuccessfully - to chronicle a little bit of Voigt's skill.

I suppose the place to start is the writing. It's spectacular because every single word is deliberate. When Voigt spends three paragraphs describing a room, it's not because she thinks she needs to elaborate on its setting. It's because she's allowing tension to build the way it might if you, too, were sitting in the room, and avoiding looking anywhere in particular by looking over a room's details. When she describes actions, it's because they're important: because someone is avoiding speaking, for example. Because there's a pause in which you might notice what's taking place. Nothing is simply "because that's what books do," or how she might be expected to write. Everything matters.

And because the story is so carefully told, everything is heightened: Jeff's horrific family situation - the way he's too young to figure it out initially - the way things become clear in retrospect - and the way he begins applying his hard-won knowledge to future situations. Voigt doesn't need to call this Jeff's coming-of-age. I watched it happen as I read. It's amazing stuff. *Amazing*.

And then there's the way it interplays with *Dicey's Song*, which took the novel from amazing to stratospheric. (I kept thinking, as I read this, about the Newbery committee, which had to consider this book on its own. Their loss.) There's not only the way Jeff shares a teacher with Dicey, a teacher immediately identifiable (Voigt must have known she had a great supporting character there; some of this series' most powerful moments happen in that English class). There's also the impression of Jeff I had from the previous book, of someone really decent and uncomplicated who'd balance Dicey out. Well, it's obvious from the start that Jeff isn't uncomplicated, but that impression stuck so strongly that I was sure he'd worked out his family situation by the time the Tillermans showed up. That he hadn't - that the story kept going when the Tillermans showed up - that Jeff managed to be the Jeff from *Dicey's Song* and the Jeff from *A Solitary Blue* with his family dynamics - is nothing short of spectacular.

I'm not doing this justice at all. Take Chappelle and his essay, where Jeff stays cool as a cucumber, as Phil puts it, despite what he calls his knowledge of how fragile he is - because he clearly identifies what's making Chappelle tick, *just the way Melody does* - I have no words. There is such skill here. Someone needs to write a thesis on coming-of-age and how teenagers make decisions: because they learned what to do from the adults in their lives, and because they learned what *not* to do. Because they remember mistaken impressions from when they were younger, and how those impressions changed when they got a little older. That's what this book is about.

Incidentally, Phil is great; his analysis of Chappelle as someone who should have outgrown his behavior is precisely the sort of flash of insight teenagers come out with all the time.

Jeff also finds out about his father over the course of the book, because his father is learning, too. Jeff's initial impressions of his father from the Jasons, who don't like his father's head-of-department role, being contradicted by the publication of his book -

I don't know how Voigt nails these details, but her books are emotional powerhouses as a result.

A couple of other guys, one from English, the other from science, struck him as more interesting than the rest. He couldn't have said why, precisely. Phil Milson, in English, was pretty funny, without being a clown about it. They were talking about stories by then, and Phil usually had some unusual angle on a story, which the teacher didn't appreciate. But Phil was funny in a subtle way, which Chappelle, the teacher, didn't always get, Jeff suspected, along with most of the rest of the class. Then Andy Barrows in science always had questions and questions and questions, why and how. Listening to his questions and the answers he got, Jeff learned a lot more than the book taught. He wondered how Andy figured out what questions to ask. He didn't talk to either of those two, they had their own friends, but they made his school day more interesting.

I don't know how she does it: she talks about Jeff just as much as his friends here, and she does it so subtly. Then there's the way she interweaves Dicey in (it's not just through the shared teacher, and it's not just through actual interaction):

Jeff took six classes, five academic courses and mechanical drawing. He hadn't wanted to take mechanical drawing, he'd wanted to take home economics - after all, the way they lived, that would have been really useful to him, cooking and sewing. But the guidance counselor told him he couldn't recommend home ec, not to a boy and new to the area, there was an unwritten policy.

I read that thinking, DICEY WAS RIGHT. And that paragraph has so much more impact if you know Dicey was refused a spot in mechanical drawing.

And then there's Jeff's mother. I've managed to go paragraphs without mentioning her, and the truth is I'll never be able to capture her as well as Voigt does. I'm not even going to try. But the way you, along with Jeff, realize the extent of her manipulation - I mean, by the time she tries to denigrate the Professor because he didn't notice Jeff was sick, she's so clearly so much worse than the Professor's neglect that the contrast is jarring. Back when Jeff got bronchial pneumonia, he hadn't even been to Charleston yet. And the way Voigt describes her lies in passing, through comments other people make - and the way they often go right over Jeff's head, first because he's too young to pick up on the nuances, and then because he's too hurt over them - but the way they're so clear to the reader, especially if you're looking for them -

The decision he makes in the end, to finally say goodbye, as it were, is bittersweet, which feels appropriate; after all, there are years and years of dashed hopes and elation and betrayals, and shutting the door shouldn't be simple (and isn't; he gives up a lot). But he's right, and it demonstrates the significance of the decision he makes: he knows what real treasure is. And he makes his choice.

One last thing: the way Voigt describes those solitary blue herons, those changing descriptions? Also spectacular. This book is a miracle of perfect construction.

Amanda says

this is one of my favorite books of all time! I have read it over and over and never tire of it. I love the way Cynthia Voigt writes and enjoyed all the books in the Tillerman series!

Cherie says

I really did like this story. After-the-fact, it turned out to be a re-read for me. This story starts out with a shock and breaks your heart with wave after wave of uNina Gina be happenings, for me at least. I could not believe a mother could do what she does to her son in this story.

The young man and his father in this story really wrapped themselves around my heart. It was so sad in the beginning. It took a long time, but the story unfolded so wonderfully, and the characters grew into such wonderful people that it was hard to let them go at the end.

Cynthia Voigt can create such beautiful settings for her stories, that you feel, hear, and smell everything right along with her characters.

Jenny Leiva says

I wasn't sure going in how I would like this book since the story was no longer about the Tillermans, but it was such a strong story and Jeff and his dad were such interesting characters that it didn't matter. Sometimes during the story I just wanted to shake Jeff (or the Professor or Melody) so they would change how they were acting, but since I couldn't do that, I had to let them figure things out on their own. I was glad when the Tillermans came back into the story, but I was also glad that the story didn't become about them; it was Jeff's story the whole time. I'm starting to think that I'll read the whole series now.

Pam says

Be warned, this is not a happy book. But it does give you something to think about and appreciate.

Jeff's mom left when he was seven. Afraid his dad would leave too if everything wasn't just right, Jeff goes out of his way to make sure the home runs smoothly and his father, the professor, isn't interrupted or inconvenienced. It isn't until he gets so sick he almost dies that his father realizes how much he's been holding in and contacts his mother. He spends a glorious summer with her and his grandmother. That's almost the only thing he thinks about the next year.

But when he goes to his mom's the next summer, she's too busy to spend much time with him. His grandma's had a stroke and her personality has completely changed. He spends the summer lonely and alone, realizing that his mother doesn't love him, she only wants him when it suits her purposes or she needs money.

The rest of the book goes through Jeff's journey to find himself, make peace with who he is and who his parents are, and make his place in the world. Despite it's often heartwrenching tone, I enjoyed the journey of discovery.

Xan West says

This book reaches into my heart and holds. It always has, from the first time I read it, when I was quite young. It is the closest I have ever come to reading a character's POV and voice that matched who I was, and how I thought, and how I felt, as a child and I treasure it for that. I wouldn't call it my *favorite* book--it's too painful a read for that. But it is the book that reflects me the most, on the inside, as I was growing up, essential aspects of what my childhood was like and how I survived it.

Books like that are important and rare. I continually look for mirrors and visions of who I am and who I could be in books, and almost never find them. I'm glad to have read it again, the first book I finished in 2016.

Chy says

There's a red "Scholastic" band at the bottom of the cover and a pretty silver coin that says "Newberry Honor Book" above that. You know what that means. Yes. Another young adult book. Kiss my ass; it's what I wanted to read.

The book kicks off with Jeff's mom, Melody, gone—having left a note to him about the work she has to do to save the world. Oh yes, hippy to the extreme. Then we meet Jeff's dad and he was cold. I did not like him. Despite Melody's abandonment, I wanted to meet her because she seemed full of the kind of love Jeff needed.

Then Jeff goes to spend a summer with her and it seems great. A couple of minor things happen that made me narrow my eyes at her, but she spent time with Jeff and that was the important part. I kept forgiving her for things that, in hindsight, should have slapped me in the face. I love that, because I think that's pretty much how Jeff ends up feeling as well. It's not until the next summer that we saw how crappy of a mom she really is, but in that time a friend of the Professor's (Jeff's dad) helps him become a better father.

After that, Jeff and his father move out beside the water, near the habitat of some blue herons like the ones Jeff was taken with during his second summer with his mom. Jeff really started his journey to self-discover that summer, when his mom and grandmother ignored him and left him to his own devices. He found himself an island—physically and figuratively—and it took his dad and a new life to bring him off it. Figuratively.

And I'll tell you what I really think:

Scenery/Setting: The house Jeff and his father live in up until they move to the cabin is always dark. I don't know that Voigt saw it that way, but that's how she showed it to me. I really felt it. And I really felt Jeff's great-grandmother's mansion, where his mother lived.

Hell, I felt it all. Even the inner island that the physical island helped Jeff create. It wasn't the richest of feelings, but it served its purpose. I can't complain.

Characters: Yay! It's not in first person! But it is a third person that's limited to Jeff. Which was good. It let me see his mom and dad the way he did. And it let me see him grow up. Unlike Pelzer's nonfiction, I never wondered how old Jeff was. I had an idea of it all the time. How silly is that? I guess it's not silly at all when you take into stock that I'm a woman and this book is written by a woman. There must be subtle things at work there I'm not aware of. I'm comfortable with that. Sure. I am. Honest.

I really liked this kid. His reactions and everything are very believable, if not a leetle swayed by the feminine touch. But even that's forgivable, because of the mom aspect.

Now, that mom is something else. I've known people just like her. She flits about, talking about saving the planet and the starving children of Zanzakanorbileansgoria, but she ignores the real people in her life. It's a weird form of selfishness in the guise of selflessness and it makes my chest burn. Bleh. But the portrayal is fantastic.

My favorite character is Jeff's dad. At first, I wanted to grab him and shake him because of the "it doesn't make any difference" attitude he was teaching his son, especially when I had the two of them saying that all the time. I wanted to hurl the book across the room every time I felt that phrase coming on. But then, a strange thing happened—I start to see him the way he really is. He's struggling and hurting and he really, really loves his son. It's the best change of impression I've seen in a long time. And it contrasts so well with the opposite change of heart in Melody. Really good stuff.

There are a couple of others that are great, too. Brother Thomas's presence is good for Jeff and the Professor. He shows them where they are blind and adds just the element of friendship the book needed. He's good people.

Then, there's Dicey. She doesn't come until later and her situation and family is an inspiring story in and of itself. I find it hard to go into her because she's such a rich character, she might actually take over the review. Upon looking up the ISBN number on Amazon for my WDC product review, I see that the other two books in this series are actually about Dicey, so I guess there's a good excuse for her nearly stealing the show. This also explains why a lot of Jeff's interaction with her family seems to be skipped over. I just found out I came in on the third book of Dicey's trilogy. Wups!

Plot: This is one of those where the plot is about the characters growing. I feel like I've gone over all that, but not the progression of it.

I really enjoyed the aspects of this book, but so much was fast-forwarded I kept getting frustrated. Just as I was settling into some new view of Jeff's life, it got ripped out from underneath me as we all got fast-forwarded into the future. I'd be looking forward to something that was going to happen, then Voigt would skip ahead and talk about how it had already happened and there was only a sentence's worth of explanation about it.

The main one that ticked me off was the Professor's book. I can't for the life of me remember what the Professor was a professor of. It's not important—the important thing is that I don't know what his damn book was about. I was okay with this at first. Because the Professor told Jeff he could read it when he was "old enough." Well, when the Professor gives Jeff a copy of the book for Christmas, I was all excited. Woo! I thought, I finally get to know this book that Voigt keeps bringing up is about.

Then, nothing. Jeff says he's honored when he sees the book is dedicated to him and then he reads it. But nothing. It's forgotten. I don't get a hint about its subject and I certainly didn't get to any reaction or thoughts from Jeff on it. It just gets dropped, after chapters of build-up.

The hell? I griped, scowling at the book. But no amount of complaining on my part changed the print—the reaction to the Professor's book was still missing. This is what I obsessed over. This is what has stayed with me even now.

Overall: There were some really good things about this book that, from a writer's standpoint, I really appreciated. If I were reading this as strictly a reader, I'd feel silly because it is geared toward younger readers.

I'm glad I read it, just for the change in perception of the mother and father. And the way Jeff grew page by page. That was good stuff, even if it was rushed and there were gaps here and there. I actually think it gets better the further away from it I get. If you catch my meaning.

Katy Ann says

It is very hard to write a review for this book. It is like writing a review of a point in my life or of a person you have been. This is the first book I read that really mattered. Not an escapist book but a book that reached down and saw me where I was in life and said "you are not alone." I have been Jeff and Dicey and part of me will always be them.

Misti says

I've read this book many times, and I still stayed up late to finish it. Really, that's all I need to say, right?

Theresa says

This third book in the Tillerman family series kept me riveted! I loved "Dicey's Song" and "Homecoming" and had to read this next one also.

Jeff Greene has a dysfunctional family (in the years when the term was not widely used). His mother abandons him when he is only in the second grade, leaving him a note to find (that he can read himself), when he gets home from school. (If that shocks you, just wait... there is more). Jeff is left with a scarred, emotionally distant father and an upbringing that causes him to rely on his own resources.

Some of the novel challenges reality, to be honest, as this young boy seems to do most of the cooking and cleaning (?) Those paragraphs are short, and deservedly so, as the author herself must have found it difficult to describe what the intervening years are like for Jeff. Most of the book is the story of Jeff's mother coming back into the picture once he is older, and her attempts at re-forging relationships, motives, and the interplay

of this broken family.

The author is very talented at getting into the heart of her characters! Dicey shows up once again in this story but this time we see her from Jeff's perspective. Jeff visits his mother's family during his summer vacations and has to make choices as he matures and begins to realize that everything is not as it seems.

Not just a coming-of-age story, this young-adult novel addresses so many issues; among them, what family is and is not, how we cope with emotional wounds, and how to find who we are when circumstances are less than perfect. Jeff finds solace and release as he is gifted a guitar and discovers he has a talent worth developing.

Loved it (even though I was so mad at Melody, Jeff's mother! :) and can't wait to read the next one in the series.
