

Breathing Soccer, Debbie Spring

CM, Volume XV Number 3, September 26, 2008

Breathing Soccer is the story of Lisa, a 12-year-girl who suffers from acute asthma. She is scared that this medical problem will mean that she will not be able to play soccer, something she wants to do more than anything else in the world. After a severe asthma attack, Lisa ends up in hospital where she meets Emily, another asthma sufferer, who becomes a friend. Lisa needs this support as her family doctor is a traditional man who issues a stern warning against playing soccer or even pursuing outdoor activities. The story continues as Lisa persuades her parents to send her to Dr. Bellows, a female doctor who specializes in allergy-related illnesses. Dr. Bellows gives Lisa hope and allows her to play soccer, providing that she always carries her Epi-pen and takes care to do her special exercises if she is ever short of breath.

This novel is very direct in its aims. The author wants to make the point to young readers that having asthma, if it's treated sensibly, need not be a life-threatening condition. If the right precautions are taken, a girl like Lisa can live the active, sporty life she has always wanted. Silken Laumann is used as an inspiration for Lisa. She was the Canadian rower who suffered a catastrophic accident just weeks before she had hoped to compete in the 1992 Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona. Even though it took a tremendous amount of courage and hope, Silken was determined to heal and recover in time to compete. Lisa has to learn to draw inspiration from Silken's tremendous effort and to achieve her potential in spite of her physical challenges. She also has to overcome her friends' reluctance to accept her as a normal part of their group and to overcome her grief at having to give up her dog.

Debbie Spring covers all the basic facts concerning treatment for asthma and does seem to address some of the challenges that a young teen might experience as a result of having a medical problem involving allergies, a condition that is becoming very frequent. The social and family challenges are handled in a very perfunctory way, and the brevity of the scenes seems quite preachy. The basic situations and information are covered, but the emotional challenges are more prescriptive than emotional, and the feelings experienced by Lisa seem forced, as though checked off from a medical dictionary. The character of Lisa is also something of a cardboard cutout, with little individuality or nuances to her experiences. A heroine needs to be more convincing and multi-dimensional to be fully persuasive, and the writing needs to be at a higher level to draw in the teens of today who require an instant connection to their peer group.

Breathing Soccer attempts to provide a novel that provides hope and comfort to young girls affected by severe allergy problems, and it attempts to show them that they can still achieve a great deal of their potential. This book has good goals, but I would like to see a novel on the same subject that provides more rounded characters and is less preachy and politically correct.

— Wendy Williams

Recommended.

Wendy Williams, of Calgary, AB, is a teacher-librarian and self-confessed book worm. She recently returned from a month in England where she pursued, among other things, all sorts of literary connections and places.

Subject Headings: Asthma-Juvenile fiction. Soccer stories.

Grades 5-7 / Ages 10-12

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Booklist

Following a severe asthma attack, 12-year-old Lisa awakens in the hospital. A talented soccer player, she is devastated to learn that she will have to restrict her physical activities in the future. At first, she finds it difficult to watch others play, and she feels left out. Then she finds inspiration in stories of athletes who have overcome physical challenges. With the care and supervision of a doctor who adjusts her medication and treatment and the help of a new friend, Lisa shows herself and others the rewards of perseverance and a positive attitude. Despite some message-heavy scenarios, this inspiring story explores with warmth and authenticity the challenges of living with asthma, as well as the importance of vigilance, support, and education for the whole family. Soccer buffs will appreciate the abundant game specifics, and readers will find the facts about asthma eye-opening. — Shelle Rosenfeld

Resource Links, Volume 14 Number 1, October 2008

Breathing Soccer reveals the difficult life of Lisa, an asthma sufferer. Lisa struggles with her desire to play soccer and the refusal of both her over-protective parents and doctor to allow her to engage in physical activity. Unfortunately this activity could render her breathing lethal.

As soon as her coach learns of her illness he too will not permit her to play her favourite sport for fear she will reduce the team's chances of winning.

Lisa's life begins to spiral out of control. Her friends begin to desert her as she cannot go outside to play. She is no longer invited to parties as parents become concerned she will have an asthma attack while under their supervision. Her self-esteem diminishes. When there doesn't seem to be any hope. Lisa learns about the heroic story of Olympic Rower Silken Laumann. Silken was told her Olympic career was over due to a terrible accident. Silken defied her doctors and won the Bronze medal for Canada at the Games.

Lisa becomes determined to achieve her dream of playing soccer. She pushes her parents to take her to see an asthma specialist. With her new doctor's help Lisa feels hopeful. She enrolls in a soccer camp and with the encouragement of camp counsellor. Giant, Lisa finds she has the courage to overcome the obstacles associated with her illness and prove to everyone she is capable of controlling her asthma and being a great soccer player.

This novel speaks to anyone who has had or knows of someone who battled stereotypes associated with an illness. Having the courage to persevere and achieve your dreams despite the concerns of those around you is powerful. This novel shares the struggle of asthmatics who desire the challenge and thrill of sports, but who must temper that desire against serious health concerns. — *Anne Hatcher*

Thematic Links: Health; Medical Issues

SWON Libraries

- Grade Ranges: 4 5 6
- Use: Recreation
- Format: Chapter
- Illustration Types: Reference Aids:
- Appendix

- Genres: Coming of Age, Realistic, Sports
- Literary Merit: Very Good
- Characterization: Very Good
- Recommendation: Recommended
- Level: Elementary

Summary:

Lisa loves soccer. She lives and breathes for soccer. Suddenly, the sport is taken away from her as are her friends when she collapses in public from an allergy and asthma attack. Her coach will not let her play because he is afraid she will have an attack and Lisa's friends' parents will not allow her to visit because of the same fear. Lisa's parents treat her like an invalid leaving her feeling completely alone. Lisa must learn to help her friends and family learn to cope with her illness while still allowing her to lead a full life.

Evaluation:

This book offers a realistic look at how allergies and asthma can affect the lives of athletic children. Sports heroes who have dealt with similar issues are included in the text allowing readers to realize they are not alone and that they can be successful athletes even with an illness. Lisa is a four dimensional character who feels loneliness, anger, and joy. Spring's detailed description of Lisa's experiences allows the reader to feel right along with her. Breathing Soccer is a joy to read and I recommend this for all readers ages 9-12. This book will be a good purchase for both public and school libraries.

Reviewed by Kim Thomspson, MLIS, M Ed
Kenton County Public Library
Reviewed on 2009-05-12