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# Whistling Past The Graveyard



## Synopsis

In the summer of 1963, nine-year-old spitfire Starla Claudelle runs away from her strict grandmother's Mississippi home. Starla hasn't seen her momma since she was three - that's when Lulu left for Nashville to become a famous singer. Starla's daddy works on an oil rig in the Gulf, so Mamie, with her tsk-tsk sounds and her bitter refrain of "Lord, give me strength," is the nearest thing to family Starla has. After being put on restriction yet again for her sassy mouth, Starla is caught sneaking out for the Fourth of July parade. She fears Mamie will make good on her threat to send Starla to reform school, so Starla walks to the outskirts of town, and just keeps walking.... If she can get to Nashville and find her momma, then all that she promised will come true: Lulu will be a star. Daddy will come to live in Nashville, too. And her family will be whole and perfect. Walking a lonely country road, Starla accepts a ride from Eula, a black woman traveling alone with a white baby. The trio embarks on a road trip that will change Starla's life forever. She sees for the first time life as it really is - as she reaches for a dream of how it could one day be.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"My daddy says that when you do somethin' to distract you from your worstest fears, it's like whistlin' past the graveyard. You know, making a racket to keep the scaredness and the ghosts away. He says that's how we get by sometimes." "I thought about how me and Eula finding out each other's secrets had made us both better, and how we both had our own way of whistling past the graveyard." "These two quotes pretty much sum up this wonderful story of a little white girl growing up

in South Mississippi in the sixties when racism in the deep south was rearing its ugly head. I had many thoughts as I was reading this book and the two that came to surface most often was how people often treat children as if they are invisible. And, the dangers of keeping secrets and the damage they can cause. That was Starla... she didn't know it but she was surrounded by secrets and these secrets sent her on a wild goose chase to Nashville to fulfill a dream. Starla felt invisible to everyone around her and had come to believe that she was un-loved, un-wanted and not special... just nothing but trouble. She lived on the dreams that most children have when important things are missing from their lives... like loving parents, siblings and the feeling of being special, needed and important. So, when things hit bottom (at least her idea of bottom) she did what any un-wanted kid had to do... she ran away. On her way to Nashville she meets a colored woman named Eula. As they travel Eula teaches Starla that she has gifts, that she is special and most of all she is loved. Starla and Eula begin to need each other, lean on each other and love each other as family. Starla learns some valuable and often frightening life lessons on this journey that will inevitably change her forever.

Let's get that I absolutely LOVE this book out of the way. *Whistling Past The Graveyard* is a heartwarming, endearing coming of age story about a feisty 9 year old girl who decides it's high time she flew the coop in an effort not to be sent to boarding school. It's the summer of 1963 in Cayuga Springs, the Fourth of July, and a pocket full of penny candy that puts the wheels in motion for a life-changing experience for two unsuspecting lives that intersect on an abandoned road. *Whistling Past The Graveyard* is narrated by Starla who's often described by her grandmother Mamie as a girl who can't stay out of trouble. Starla's personality is as red as her hair and Mamie does not for a second allow Starla to forget that she's a stone's throw from being just like her mother. Mamie is probably one of the characters I like the least but it's probably also because I only have Starla's point of view in her assessment. Not long into Starla's jailbreak she meets Eula, a colored woman with a set of her own problems. Susan Crandall does an excellent job at so many things in this novel such as character development, being true to the era, and all the things we love and hate about the south. Starla and Eula are an unlikely pair being their race differences as well as age differences. Starla is not afraid of anything and even when she is she doesn't back down. Eula on the other hand has been treated poorly her whole life. They both compliment and complete each other and give the other what they both need most. I love their relationship and readers will appreciate it as well. Crandall really captures what it friendship and family mean. A lot of blurbs are comparing this novel to the bestseller *The Help* and I don't think that's a fair assessment.

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