

*More Like Not Running Away*

Written by: Paul Shepherd

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A review by Jorri Heil

When twelve-year-old Levi Revel is not preaching on roof tops or hearing voices coming from walls and trees, he is admiring and journeying with his imaginative and violent father, Everest. Paul Shepherd's debut fiction novel, *More Like Not Running Away*, is centered around the troubling relationship between this father and son and the detrimental affects it has on the entire family. After moving to Michigan, one of the many places the family has fled while dodging Everest's violent past, Everest decides it is time to settle down. He dreams up a grand house and obtains financing after angered talks with the bank. While Everest builds and teaches Levi the construction trade, the family is unable to make the payments and must run away again. This time, however, Levi's mother and sister move to Seattle, but Levi admires his powerful and often enraged father and chooses to travel to Florida with him.

In Florida, Levi takes care of himself and the house while his father finds more dilemmas at his construction job. Everest, who must escape again, decides he is going to put his family back together; so, he and Levi begin a troublesome journey to Seattle. The closer they come to Levi's mother, the more Levi realizes how dangerous his father actually is and the more frightening the voices become.

The first part of this novel—suitable for readers of all ages—builds slowly to the departure of Levi's mother. Shepherd uses the voice of Levi, which is so accurate that the recurring pain he suffers resonates in the mind long after reading the novel, to portray the boy's

search for himself and a way to escape the voices and his troubles. The author's desire to draw readers through the novel with strong, realistic characters is successful. Through the characters and their story, readers get a detailed look at the struggles of the working class and a family falling apart; Levi is bullied at school and his parent's fights end with Everest pushing tables over. Yet, after misunderstandings at the bank, they obtain a loan to build their dream home, which requires Levi to work long hours and makes him fall behind in school. The family's elation ends as Levi's father destroys the house they can no longer afford. By the conclusion of this section, readers start to see how troubled Everest is, even though Levi is still oblivious to his father's faults.

Part two of the novel, which is divided into the three main stages of the boy's youth, is the life-altering journey Levi takes as he and his father travel to Florida and then Seattle. Levi transforms from a boy who idolizes his father into a boy who fears for his life as well as the lives of his family in Seattle. By this point, Shepherd has readers so attached to Levi that one struggles with the challenge of not being able to rescue the boy. This section also presents one of the main themes, running away, in a multifaceted way. Levi not only runs from his family's financial troubles and from his mother's protection but possibly his mental health. Part two has the most dramatic and adventurous events of the entire novel. One such expedition's intense details could make any reader sweat at the slightest discomfort as Levi ventures into the forest that is undergoing a controlled burn:

It stung, between my legs. And then it stung again, on both legs and my ankles and then my groin. I looked at the ashes on my boots; something moved. Fire ants. I saw them in a rough line coming up my left leg, and along my groin, to my stomach. I started swatting

hard at them, knocking them from my thigh, and my pants fell the rest of the way down to my ankles and I saw dozens of them and they bit and bit until my skin burned. (175)

The third part of Shepherd's novel shows the detrimental results that Everest has had on Levi. Some readers may not be satisfied with the ending; however, it is suited for the characters. Unlike the common chronological fiction novels that end with a precise blurb about the protagonist's future or a quick summation of the finale, *More Like Not Running Away* alludes to the character's future in a unique and effective way. Throughout the book, Shepherd has page-long anecdotes that involve the main character as an adult. These breaks offer a refreshing change from the sequential events and enhance the reader's knowledge of the influence Everest had over Levi, which carried on into adulthood. Overall, this story flows more like a classic novel than like event-filled books, such as *The Da Vinci Code*. The characters are ingeniously crafted and the narrator's voice is young, yet intelligent, which makes him reminiscent of Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mocking Bird*.

The two main characters provide the theme of father-son relationships, but the mother and sister are not rounded, complex characters like Levi and his father. Some may view this as a flaw, but it could be the author's way of representing Everest's neglectful tendencies towards his wife and daughter. By the end of the novel, Levi's mother and sister are still vague, but Levi and Everest have been described so fully that readers may feel personally acquainted with them.

Readers who desire well-crafted fiction that creates memorable characters placed in a story filled with the plethora of emotions that face one troubled boy should read Paul Shepherd's *More Like Not Running Away*. Shepherd, a Writer in Residence at Florida State University, employs successful and often poetic writing. He has published a book of poetry and articles in many magazines, including *Prairie Schooner*, *Omni*, *Portland Review*, *The Quarterly*, *Fiction*,

and *St. Anthony Messenger*. *More Like Not Running Away* also gains realism from Shepherd's own experiences as a member of Rainbow Rehab, a nonprofit construction company, and as a volunteer at family ministries. The author gives a true picture of the time, labor, and pain that is inherent in construction. Shepherd's debut novel will hook all readers with its characters and its journey that reveals so many secrets about young Levi and his family.