

Book Review



Song of the Shaggy Canary, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pa.: 1974, 155 pp., \$8.95. Get a Little Lost, Tia, Westminster: 1978, 173 pp., \$8.95. Win Me and You Lose Westminster: 1977, 137 pp., \$8.95.

It is hard to find well-written Christian fiction for young people, but it is almost impossible to find such fiction arising out of an urban setting. Madeleine L'Engle's *The Young Unicorns* still stands alone, but her suspenseful story is set in upper West Side New York, and its children of the Cathedral School and private music lessons are hardly typical city kids coping with the usual problems of city living. Not many urban youngsters can identify with the individuals or crises in L'Engle's novel.

Westminster Press, in publishing Phyllis Anderson Wood's juvenile novels, is attempting to fill part of the gap. *Song of the Shaggy Canary* depicts the struggle a teenage mother (deserted by her teen-age husband) faces as she tries to finish high school, raise a baby and establish her own identity and wholeness. A hurting Vietnam veteran plays a major role in this journey toward self-esteem. *Get a Little Lost, Tia* presents two contemporary themes: a teenager's responsibility for a sibling in a one-parent household, and the tentative but growing interaction of an "Anglo" and Hispanic family in a California community. *Win Me and You Lose* is the most effective of these volumes. Two teenagers from separate homes learn to cope with life after their parents' divorce, including the "mundane" problems of learning to shop and cook. Simultaneously they handle a threat from a city prowler.

Frustration, misunderstandings, the difficulty of learning to trust others, the acceptance of responsibility for other family members—all of these themes are handled carefully and are presented with taste and restraint.

Wood's books are part of Westminster's

"Hi-Lo" series, designed for a "high interest, low-reading ability" audience. There is justification in such a format, but good readers will be ready for these stories years before the subject matter is particularly relevant. A much more serious limitation is that the wholesomeness and morality of the characters have no relationship to the Christian faith. Christianity is present only in the vaguest way as an element in the lives of over-middle-aged minor characters. Christ has no reality for the young protagonists. A reader can only conclude that urban young people have to meet their problems on their own. The Christian faith is irrelevant.

Finally, and of much less consequence, is the lack of a compelling urban "landscape." Where are the smells, trash, noise, constant press of people—that strong sense of place that never leaves the city dwellers? Perhaps, because Wood lives in California, and western cities are not like eastern cities, the amorphous environments of her stories do reflect a genuine urban setting. But the blandness of the settings is also matched by blandness of language. The reality of a living Christ would give some punch and bite to these tales.

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