

READERS AND WRITERS

Two to grow on

Young readers are invited to enjoy two new novels — one a heart-tugger, the other a nail-biter — by Minnesota authors.

Minnesotans Jane St. Anthony and Terry Hokenson are celebrating publication of their debut young-adult novels this week with separate readings at the Red Balloon Bookshop.



MARY ANN GROSSMANN

Both stories center on girls, and both are well written, but they are very different in tone.

"The Summer Sherman Loved Me": St. Anthony tells the gentle story of 12-year-old Margaret, who's confused by attention from cute neighbor Sherman. On a magical summer night, Sherman and Margaret ride their bikes to the park and have a good time, until Sherman pulls a stupid prank. Margaret almost forgives him when he brings her a perfect rose, until she finds out he might have taken it from the neighbor's yard. But then she melts again when Sherman cares for a baby squirrel he calls Little Margaret.

Besides trying to sort out her feelings for Sherman (is he a boyfriend?), Margaret has to deal with her tired mother, who always seems to be judging her, even when she takes care of her 3-year-old twin sisters.

Every teenage girl, and her mother, will recognize the tender scene in which Margaret confronts her mother by saying, "Tell me what a big disappointment I am."

Her crying mom replies, "I just don't understand you. When I was your age, I was such a good girl. I was afraid of boys. I was afraid of everything ... sometimes you scare me. I just don't want you to get hurt."

Someone does get hurt in this story, but in the end, Margaret and Sherman face a promising future.

One of the charms of "The Summer Sherman Loved Me" is its timelessness. The author never says precisely when all this happens, but there are no cell phones or computers in the story. Margaret's mother wears different hose for day and evening, and the women hang laundry outside on clotheslines. So it's probably sometime in the 1950s.

Parents concerned about letting young teens read novels that raise gritty social issues don't have to worry about "The Summer Sherman Loved Me." St. Anthony's writing is lovely, perfectly evoking the first feelings of adolescent caring, and there is not a single offensive thing in her story.

St. Anthony, who grew up in South Min-



Title: "The Winter Road"
Author: Terry Hokenson
Publisher: Front Street/Boyd's Mills Press
Cost: \$16.95
Author reading: 7 p.m. Friday, Red Balloon Bookshop, 891 Grand Ave., St. Paul

neapolis, completed her novel during a residency at the Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Red Wing. Like award-winning Kate DiCamillo, St. Anthony was encouraged to write by Minneapolis children's author and teacher Jane Resh Thomas, who's rapidly becoming the godmother of Minnesota children's and young-adult authors.

"The Winter Road": Terry Hokenson's novel centers on 17-year-old Willa, who's more concerned with making things in shop class than she is about boyfriends. Kirkus Reviews was right in saying this book could be paired "with Gary Paulsen's 'Hatchet' in a thematic unit on survival."

Willa, who's smart and brave, has to fly her drunken uncle's plane to a remote native village in northwestern Ontario. When a storm forces the plane down, Willa must survive below-zero temperatures with little gear. Thanks to her interest in how things are made, she's able to fashion what she needs from the plane's wings and the metal plates along the sides. When she



Title: "The Summer Sherman Loved Me"
Author: Jane St. Anthony
Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
Cost: \$16
Author reading: 2 p.m. Saturday, Red Balloon Bookshop, 891 Grand Ave., St. Paul

leaves the plane to try to walk to safety, the reader goes with her on a heart-stopping journey.

As Willa fights for survival in the wilderness, she thinks about the death of her older brother and why her father ignores her. So, although this resourceful young woman is alone for almost the entire book, Hokenson widens out the story so it never seems insular.

On the Children's Literature Network Web site (www.childrensliterature.net), Hokenson tells of creating a newsletter that he put in his daughter's lunch bag once a week. "After reading a book about a boy's wilderness adventure, I wondered why there were so few books about girls having such adventures," he writes. So he wrote a 12-issue story for his daughter about a woman who crash-landed a plane. That was the beginning of "The Winter Road."

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