



## Nowhere to Call Home

By Cynthia DeFelice

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Unable to cope with the financial ruin caused by the Great Depression, Frances's father has taken his own life. Sad and bewildered, Frances cashes in the railroad ticket that would have carried her to her aunt's home, trades in her dress for trousers and a cap, and hits the rails as a hobo called Frankie Blue. With Stewpot, another young hobo, as her guide, Frankie learns to sneak on and off trains, find food, and protect herself. Then Stewpot gets sick, and Frankie realizes that the reality of life on the rails is far different from her romantic notions.

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## Nowhere to Call Home By Cynthia DeFelice Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1428804 in Books
- Brand: HarperCollins
- Published on: 2001-05-22
- Released on: 2001-05-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.63" h x .42" w x 5.13" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 208 pages

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This realistic rags-to-riches (and back again) tale set in the time of Hoovervilles and bread lines follows a girl who takes up a hobos life. Sheltered, wealthy Frances Barrows world is thrown into chaos when her fathers factories go bankrupt and he kills himself during the Depression. When she hears a servants plan to become a hobo and ride the rails, 12-year-old Frances sees a way out of being sent from her home in Philadelphia to live with her stern aunt in Chicago. She gives the slip to the adults, cashes in her train ticket and disguises herself as a boy, leaping into a dark boxcar headed for Pittsburgh and freedom. DeFelice (Clever Crow) convincingly depicts Frances transformation to boy vagabond Frankie Blue, as well as the heroines blossoming friendship with Stewpot, the seasoned 15-year-old who takes her under his wing right from the get-go. By disguising Frances as a boy, the author cleverly evades graphic details of the dangers to frills, or girls on the move (alluding to the dangers through a few cameo appearances by other down-and-out females). Details of the Depression get more weight than character development; while readers will have a clear sense of the destitution that characterized the era, they may have less of a sense of who Frances is. Nonetheless, they will likely be relieved that she finally decides to leave a life on the streets for the safety of her aunts home. Ages 10-up.

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 5<sup>^</sup>-8. Despite the ongoing Depression, 12-year-old Frances leads a life that's comfortable, orderly, and a little dull--until the night her father puts a bullet in his head. Suddenly she must pack a bag and travel by train to her aunt in Chicago. Instead, Frances, who has heard a little about hoboes riding the trains from one of the servants, cashes in her ticket, buys some boys' clothes, cuts her hair, and sneaks aboard a boxcar. Frances, who now calls herself Frankie, quickly realizes that hoboes live in a completely different society with its own rules, routines, and language. Fortunately, she finds a friend to guide her--Stewpot, a 15-year-old boy. Of course, there are a number of books with a similar theme, including Mary Downing Hahn's *The Gentleman, the Outlaw, and Me--Eli* (1996), but De Felice's historical novel is so real that every bump of the train can be felt. The smooth, vivid writing makes us experience the unfolding events and the nitty-gritty details right along with the characters, so as Frankie becomes increasingly horrified by the squalor and inhumanity she sees along her journey, we get a powerful sense of history. The ending is at once optimistic and poignant: Frankie will appreciate the comfort and security of her life even as she remembers the grim conditions she witnessed, and readers will feel sure that she will take advantage of her privilege to try to improve things for others. *Susan Dove Lempke*

From Kirkus Reviews

For readers who can swallow the notion that a 12-year-old newly orphaned girl from a wealthy, sheltered upbringing would run away to become a hobo, this is a gratifying adventure from DeFelice (*The Ghost of Fossil Glen*, 1998, etc.). A year after the Great Crash, Frankie's widower father has lost everything and commits suicide. The girl is to go to live with her aunt in Chicago, but Frankie cashes in the train ticket, disguises herself as a boy, and hops a freight to freedom. Luckily, she meets a boy who knows the ropes; Stewpot, as he's called, with a cough to foreshadow his eventual demise, has been riding the rails for a long time. Frankie soon realizes how hard life is, for they are always cold, hungry, or both; train-hopping is dangerous and illegal. They persevere until Stewpot becomes too ill to travel; with the little money she has, Frankie attempts to get medical help, but no doctor will go out of his way for a hobo. When Stewpot dies, Frankie understands that her real life is with her aunt in Chicago. DeFelice gets the details of the period right, with especially well-realized scenes of what it means to be a hobo, even though much of this is just one more

girl-disguised-as-a-boy story. Those seeking out tales on unfamiliar aspects of the Depression or a different kind of survival story will find it engaging. (Fiction. 8-12) -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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