



The Sledding Hill

By Chris Crutcher

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Eddie hasn't had an easy year

First his father dies. Then his best friend Billy accidentally kicks a stack of Sheetrock over on himself, breaking his neck and effectively hitting tilt on his Earthgame. Eddie and Billy were inseparable. Still are. Billy isn't going to let a little thing like death stop him from hanging in there with his friend. And when Eddie faces an epic struggle with the powers that be, Billy will remain right there beside him.

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The Sledding Hill By Chris Crutcher Bibliography

- Rank: #253881 in Books
- Brand: Chris Crutcher
- Published on: 2006-09-19
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- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Crutcher takes the fad in authorial intrusion one better, inserting himself as a character in this metafictional novel with a heavy-handed message, a schizophrenic presentation and a highly entertaining plot. Eddie Proffit is the very definition of a sympathetic character, losing his Dad and best friend to violent accidents in the opening pages. His story is narrated in *Lovely Bones*-esque fashion by the dead friend, Billy, who, if not in Heaven, is in a very good place—free of pain and full of neat tricks to employ during his ghostly mission to help Eddie overcome sadness so deep he has stopped speaking. The exploration of death and of being silenced by grief takes a hairpin turn when book banning—a very different type of silencing—becomes the focus of the novel's second half. Eddie's elective mutism has his mother's minister, the villainous Sanford Tarter, convinced he needs to be baptized. Tarter also teaches English at the high school, but Eddie is enrolled in a class called Really Modern Literature, run by a librarian who prefers "books by authors who are still alive." She requires everyone read *Warren Peece* by the "relatively obscure" author Chris Crutcher. Naturally, this "good book with bad words" exercises Tarter, who incites a crusade to rid the library of all Crutcher's "irrelevant and only marginally well written" books. Plausibility is pushed aside for entertainment and moralizing—Billy's father loses his job as school janitor for reading the book aloud to students in the boiler room, a student comes out as gay at the public hearing, another admits openly that she cuts herself—but Eddie's cause, and his decision to speak out, is so honorable, these lapses are easily overlooked. The title – an allusion to a favorite spot the two friends enjoyed when both were alive—doesn't work but, despite its flaws, the story does. Ages 12-up. (May)

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From School Library Journal

Starred Review. Grade 7 Up—This clever, spirited post-modern meta-narrative is a quick read that is bound to be controversial. It has no profanity, sexual acts, drug or alcohol use, or bloody violence but takes dead aim at censors who can't get past counting swear words or the notion of a gay character who is still alive at the end of a book. Eddie Proffit, 14, is a prototypical Crutcher protagonist, a misunderstood teen who in quick succession has lost his father and best friend, Billy, in accidents. And he must deal with Mr. Tartar, who is both a feared English teacher at school and the minister to a flock of Protestant fundamentalists at the Red Brick Church. However, the author's approach to these familiar themes is fresh and fun, beginning when Billy, recently deceased, opts to keep his newly omniscient eye on Eddie, taking advantage of opportune "windows" to communicate, initially scaring Eddie into voluntary mutism but eventually working with him to bring about...the climax of the book. This centers around the use of Crutcher's faux novel, *Warren Peece*, in class and the community-wide uproar over it. The author's obvious delight in writing himself into the story (complete with e-mail address) does not diminish its effectiveness, though he occasionally gets his religious icons confused. Crutcherisms such as "When something seems mysterious and magical, it's because we don't have enough information" meld neatly with upbeat metaphysical speculation to give teen readers an involving story and plenty to think about.—Joel Shoemaker, Southeast Junior High School, Iowa City, IA
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From [Booklist](#)

In "Dead Boy Sledding; or, Why Things Happen," a chapter in his autobiographical *The King of the Mild Frontier* (2003), Chris Crutcher remembers being haunted by a childhood classmate's death. Another episode refers to his confrontations with censors for the provocative subject matter and raw language in his novels (Crutcher's books have been frequently challenged). When readers of Crutcher's newest novel wonder about its inspirations, they needn't look far: its themes of senseless tragedy and intellectual freedom serve as a

natural postscript to his memoir. But this isn't nonfiction. In fact, it defies categorization, offering up a tasting menu of literary devices du jour, incorporating selective mutism, a narrator from beyond the grave, and a plot in which the author himself plays a major role.

The summer before Eddie Proffitt's freshman year of high school, his father and his best friend, Billy, die in violent accidents within the same month. Eddie is the first to stumble on the grisly bodies--a "hurricane of calamity" that shocks him speechless. Billy, who always kept tabs on smart but flighty Eddie in life, continues to do so from the grave, documenting Eddie's struggles and serving as a mystical guide, appearing to him in dreams of their favorite sledding spot, and exerting metaphysical "bumps" that jostle Eddie toward healing actions. Most pivotal is Eddie's decision to speak out against a powerful fundamentalist church's challenge of a gritty YA book assigned at school, a nonexistent novel called *Warren Peece* that deals with homosexuality and abortion and whose struggling characters make Eddie "feel less lonely." The fabricated book's author? Chris Crutcher himself.

Most YAs will be drawn to this more for its paranormal premise than any burning curiosity about Crutcher or the issue of book banning. And, at least initially, Billy's creepy, detached narration doesn't disappoint. Telling stories "in [teens'] native tongue" (Eddie's librarian's words) has always been Crutcher's strong suit, and his gifts serve him well here; the juxtaposition of Billy's intimacy with eternal mysteries and his slang-inflected voice are inherently amusing (death is a "way different state"; eternity "a pretty cool place").

nce the controversy heats up, though, the ghostly narrator begins to seem less like a quirky emissary from afterlife than an excuse for Crutcher to channel philosophical and spiritual views through a YA character: "If humans are ever to understand one another, they will have to come to terms with the concept, and the reality of relativity. . . . see how things look compared to other things." For readers who question such articulate sermonizing from a 14-year-old, Billy begs their indulgence: "Death brings out the lyricist in me. I know words I never even *heard*. In every language." The fluid walls between authorial and characters' points of view are overtly apparent when Crutcher himself appears at the book-banning hearing, points to a character who has just made a fervent, articulate plea, and says, "What she said." The message, of course, is meant to be empowering, but it's still a message.

Avant-garde techniques such as authorial intrusions and "postmortality"--a recently coined term for telling tales through a deceased character--are common in literature for adults today, but have been slower to enter the universe of YA fiction. For this reason, *The Sledding Hill* is likely to attract attention for its rupturing of familiar narrative rules, and many YAs will certainly find the self-referential loop-de-loop at book's end a heady new experience. But ultimately Crutcher's agenda swamps his characters and their stories, resulting in a book that is more like a set of talking points for freedom of speech than one that, like Eddie's cherished *Warren Peece*, will inspire YAs to stand up and do battle. *Jennifer Mattson*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Louie Laforge:

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