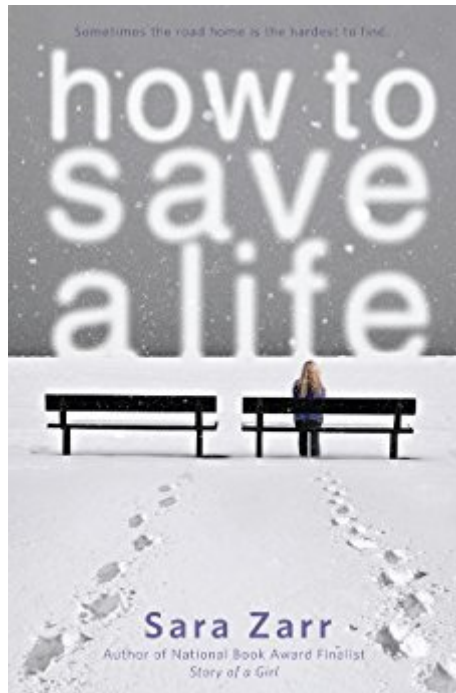




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# How To Save A Life



## Synopsis

Jill MacSweeny just wishes everything could go back to normal. But ever since her dad died, she's been isolating herself from her boyfriend, her best friends -- everyone who wants to support her. When her mom decides to adopt a baby, it feels like she's somehow trying to replace a lost family member with a new one. Mandy Kalinowski understands what it's like to grow up unwanted -- to be raised by a mother who never intended to have a child. So when Mandy becomes pregnant, one thing she's sure of is that she wants a better life for her baby. It's harder to be sure of herself. Will she ever find someone to care for her, too? As their worlds change around them, Jill and Mandy must learn to both let go and hold on, and that nothing is as easy -- or as difficult -- as it seems.

## Book Information

File Size: 1093 KB

Print Length: 345 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0316036064

Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers; 1 edition (October 18, 2011)

Publication Date: October 18, 2011

Language: English

ASIN: B004QX0796

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #294,017 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #22

in [Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Adoption](#) #27 in [Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Pregnancy](#) #33 in [Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Children's eBooks > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life > Adoption](#)

## Customer Reviews

This book was awesome in so many ways. I know I say this a lot. The cover and the title caught my attention a while back. I forgot about this book, but somehow came back to it not long ago. I'm so glad I read it. The way Jill deals with her loss, by being angry, cynical and by pushing everybody

away is pretty much how I felt about my own. Putting holes in my body, dressing in black, using make up, dark nails, angry stares. But always showing that I'm not tough to the core, never been never will. And Mandy, so innocent and naive, but so damaged in her own way. It's easy to not trust everything that has been given to her just by reading the things she's been through. These characters are so beautifully damaged it's so easy to be on the same page with them, watching as they think they're strong, as they fall apart, and as they put themselves together. I was scared Sara would make me hate Dylan, because from the start I came to love him as Jill's wall, her strength. But it was obvious it was a relationship that wasn't going anywhere. And just like that, things you have for certain, first things, will eventually go out of your reach. Nothing is forever. Not even grief. At first I was a little bothered because I'm not used to reading two-narrators stories, because I think sometimes details are left out and so. But this one delivered everything, and it was exciting getting from one to another. Mandy had me laughing from the moment she was talking to that man on the train, saying that their age gap wasn't that big. She's a funny, looking for the bright side girl. And with Jill it was slowly, and then all at once. They're both easy to like, easy to relate to. And even though they have bigger problems, you still find them struggling with boys, and love, and mothers. It's a beautiful story.

To say that I adored this book falls short. I wish I had written it. The story is told by Jill and Mandy, two teenagers who would have probably never crossed paths had it not been for the tragedy that changed Jill's once-perfect family and made her mom decide to adopt a baby. Mandy's having a baby and her family life makes her certain she can't have it anywhere near them and she's not even sure she wants to keep it. So, Mandy goes to live with Jill and her mom while they wait for the baby to come. Mandy keeps a lot of secrets from them and under less experienced hands would have come across as a manipulative, callous character but in reality, she's just a girl, too innocent for her age in one sense and too broken for her age in another, who is doing her best to survive. She never wants to hurt anyone, especially the people that took her in when her own mother cast her out. Jill doesn't so much hate Mandy as doesn't trust her or the change that she's bringing about. She hasn't moved on from her loss and her life has been a bit of a mess, last thing she needs is a total stranger coming to live with her. Over the next few weeks, they learn more about each other and about what it means for someone to be family. I loved how different these characters were, how their voices sounded completely different, how their stories complemented each other. Sara Zarr did a beautiful job with them and also with the supporting characters. All characters in the book moved the plot forward and helped the protagonists. Highly recommended!

Wow...so I could title this post, "Must Read"..the book is just that wonderful. Told in alternating chapters, by Mandy and Jill, it is story that deals with love, loss, hope, tragedy, evil, good...well...life.Both Mandy and Jill are dealing with intense issues, and as they gradually come to understand each other, through their alternating chronicles, the reader falls in love with both of them; with their stories, with their perspectives. Caring about all of the characters in this novel, is one of its' draws. (well, truthfully, two characters are awful, but described in a manner that allows you to picture them in a holistic manner).I titled the review, "Try a Little Tenderness" because it is a central theme to the book, and the song plays an important role in Jill's life. Whenever she and her late father were arguing, one would say to the other, "Try a Little Tenderness" and the fight would stop..wow, kind of a perfect sentiment, right?So, with Otis singing in the background, I plowed through this book. Yes, crying at the end, but these were tears of joy.Jill's mother states about life, "be prepared for detours"...and again, how true that is. Some detours we are happy to encounter, others are tragic and throw us for a loop. The death of Jill's dad, throws her family into turmoil, but the detour they ultimately take will have you too crying tears of joy.I can't recommend this book highly enough.

Sara Zarr's writing style is clear and uncluttered, yet sometimes devastating in its emotional honesty. She weaves together an interesting story; each chapter alternates between the two teenagers whose lives have been completely different. Jill is brought up in financial security by loving, attentive parents but is grieving because she has recently lost her father. Mandy is brought up by a single mother, was sexually abused by her mother's boy friend, is pregnant and completely lacking in self esteem. Their lives are intertwined when Jill's recently widowed mother decides to adopt Mandy's baby and Mandy comes to live with them until the birth.Both characters are flawed and not immediately likeable. Jill is angry and frustrated because she is unable to express her grief. She shuts out the people in her life who would reach out to help her. Mandy is a clingy, sticky label. The type of person who will tell her life story to complete strangers she just met minutes ago on the train. The story is propelled by the interaction of these 2 main characters, both internally and with each other. By the end, they bring out the best in each other and, thankfully, it is a happy ending!This is a short, very easy read. I would recommend it for female adults and teenagers alike.

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