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Melody Carlson

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Sophie is starting a new school year. Shopping for it with her best friend should be fun, but nothing seems to fit, which is a major issue to a high school girl. But her biggest problem is the secret she's keeping. And she's about to find out that she won't be able to keep things under wraps for much longer. This page-turning novel explores the tangled web of choices, secrets, and love that all teen girls navigate.

Melody Carlson enjoys a huge audience of teen readers. Now, Revell presents another new stunning story from an author who understands teen girls right where they are.

Anything But Normal Details

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Author : Melody Carlson

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From Reader Review Anything But Normal for online ebook

Kelsey says

I wasn't sure what to expect when I dived into Anything But Normal, but I finished it in two days. I was pulled into Sophie's story. Although Anything But Normal was in third person, something that usually irks me, I really felt connected to Sophie throughout the novel. The summary on the back left a lot to be desired, but the main plot was actually quite original. Sophie's realistic character was interesting to read about. An honors student and big believer in God, she was the least likely candidate to get pregnant. But she did. The reader could understand all the emotions Sophie was feeling and the weight her secret had on her. As I have never been in Sophie's situation, and hopefully never will be at such a young age, I couldn't really relate, but there was something about the raw and personal aspect of Sophie's story that made me feel like I was in her world, even friends with her.

A big aspect of the novel that I couldn't relate to was the religion/God aspect. Both played rather large roles in Anything But Normal. I am not a religious person so at times I didn't understand Sophie's reliance on God, but Anything But Normal really opened my eyes to religion in a positive way. Purity pledges and pro-life were just a few of the things discussed. All of these ideas and views are things I've never really been involved in, but this novel definitely made me see a new perspective. Carlson definitely didn't push religion on the reader, but rather explained it so the reader could understand Sophie's faith in God even if they were non-believers.

It was especially interesting to read how Sophie changed over the course of the story. She became a stronger, more open minded person. Teen pregnancy is a topic rarely tackled in YA Literature and Carlson presented it in a unique, and interesting way. Sophie's views on the pregnant girls changed when she stepped into their shoes, and her whole life was affected by her mistake over the summer with the wrong boy. The characters were cool, and it was really easy to hate the bad characters and like the good ones. Wes was awesome, he took Sophie under his wing and even allowed himself to be called the baby's dad when he really wasn't. He encouraged Sophie from the start and helped her stay strong. Carrie Anne, Sophie's best friend, was nice, but I always felt like she was making Sophie feel bad about herself. Sophie was already overweight and struggled with the fact that her best friend was a size 2 and always dieting. Dylan was such an awful person, it was easy to realize he was never who anyone thought he was. The girls at the teen center were mainly likable, too, and it made you realize the impact the ridicule they received had on them. Overall, the pregnancy center added a lot to the book. Sophie was able to meet girls dealing with a similar problem to her own as well as learn about the hardships she was going to face when her secret came out in the open. As her due date drew closer she would have to make some difficult decisions and work hard to get her life back on track.

Melody Carlson showed that teen pregnancy is definitely not the right choice, but she also explained that you can't just push these girls away like lepers, they're still people.

In the end, Anything But Normal was a quick read with an important message and branched into subjects I've rarely read about (teen pregnancy, weight problems, and religion). Sophie was a unique character and her story will remain in my head for a long time. I'm looking forward to reading more by Melody Carlson in the future, especially her other novel, Just Another Girl.

Also- did I mention there was a character named Kelsey in this book? I've never read about a Kelsey! :)

Overall: 4 out of 5 stars

Cassidy says

This book was very good. A christian girl goes through daily life. She is a reporter and was asked to write an article about the building for pregnant girls in their school. Her article comes off in a bad way to the pregnant building so she had interviews with the girls in that building and rewrote the article. Then the parents didnt like what she wrote because "it made it seem like being pregnant was okay" in their oppinion. Her friends ditched her, and she had many more problems. I loved this book!

PhobicPrerogative says

A good view into a teen coping with pregnancy, but...I found it ridiculous that the author made Sophie such a victim.

Even though Sophie wasn't ready to have sex, she should have taken responsibility for the pregnancy. It appeared to me that she was blaming Dylan for her getting pregnant, and so did a lot of people. I would have wished for the author to play things out such that Sophie realized that she wasn't blameless at all.

Mr Morris [Dylan's father], when Sophie and Dylan's families met to discuss the matter said, "I understand that you had made a purity pledge to God and that you had kept and intended to keep that pledge. But I also understand that *my son pressured you to break this promise...*and I cannot even tell you how much that shames me. This is not how we raised our son."

Dylan's mom went on defend that even though Dylan had made a purity pledge, too, it was "harder for a young man" because "girls pursue him relentlessly". (So it wasn't his fault that he impregnated Sophie, and neither was it Sophie's fault that she had sex with Dylan.)

The pastor added that "in all fairness, Dylan instigated the mistake".

As a reader, I was left wondering: was Sophie brainwashed into having sex with Dylan?

Come on, now. The book may revolve around Christianity, but there were some really warped things about the situation.

I felt as though the last chapters were so rushed that I wasn't convinced that Sophie took responsibility for her actions.

Jaime Atkins says

Ummmmm, well, how do I start? There were parts of this book that were realistic and parts that left me saying, "I don't think so." Sophie's fear and doubt, her denial and depression, all of that was very realistic. How do I know? Well, because I was in her shoes once. I was also a good girl that "made a mistake" and got caught. So yes, there was a lot of things in this book I could relate to. However, there was a whole lot I could not.

Given the fact that it was a short book and everything needed to close up nice and clean, I understand that things had to move quickly. But....that doesn't happen in real life. More than 2/3 of the book focused on her life while in denial. However, believe me, the drama goes up 10-fold once the word gets out. I know Melody Carlson showed some of that, but just as quickly as it exploded, it calmed down. It just doesn't work like that.

Overall, the book had a good theme, a good set-up, but the execution of it just felt flat to me. Not enough emotion, not enough detail, not enough follow-through. To truly get people to see teenage pregnancy, you must present it from all sides. Carlson really tried to do that and I applaud her, but it just didn't resonate true enough to me.

Lori Twichell says

The story's writing is an easy read, but with this subject matter, it's nowhere near easy. There aren't really any big surprises or dramatic twists and turns, but that doesn't mean it's not entertaining. Carlson has created a beautiful glimpse into the dramatic and frightening world of a teenage girl struggling to deal with grown up stresses on her own. It's a very riveting story and will draw you into sympathy for Sophie. She never once blames someone else for her actions. She's very realistic in accepting what got her to this point and that the situation was of her own making. At the same time that she isn't excusing herself for these actions, she's not rocked with blame or overdone guilt. It is what it is. Sophie needs to handle it.

There is a passionate debate argued throughout the course of the book. It is a chicken/egg concept that revolves around the very serious topic of teen pregnancy. What is the best way for a Christian to deal with a teen pregnancy? Is it by providing resources and loving the kids through their trials? Or will doing that provide an environment of acceptance that will create more and more teenage pregnancies? The heart of the debate is the central core of the story and really, these questions can be asked of a variety of other social issues facing teens and their families today.

I was disappointed that in some places, the story felt a little empty. By the time we meet Sophie, she's already slept with Dylan and there's really not a lot of discussion of their relationship. There's no connection whatsoever. It makes it a little harder for us to understand why she did what she did. The glimpses of their relationship are too short and hollow for us to feel like there ever really was a relationship. I don't know if this is what Carlson intended or not. There's a complete disconnect from emotion regarding Dylan other than just an uncomfortable desire to run whenever he's around.

The end of the book crashes in on the reader without much fanfare or resolve. One moment she's pregnant and the next she's not. After the in depth examination of Sophie's feelings throughout the pregnancy, it feels too quickly dropped at the end of the book to be comfortable. I would have loved to learn more about what happened with Sophie after her choices were made and find out a little more about where these decisions led Sophie in her life. Still, it was a fascinating glimpse into a more common problem than most people realize and Carlson captured the mind of a teenager brilliantly. It was a well crafted journey and I was happy to follow Carlson through this difficult topic.

**Review copy provided by Revell

Eva says

Whew. A heavy read. I will say, though, that Wes was a dear and Pastor Vincent was JUST what a pastor

should be.

Kapri says

I'm not sure what I was expecting when I started Anything but Normal, but I know I didn't expect to like it so much. This book was amazing, and I loved it. It was very real and honest about what Sophie is going through as a pregnant teen.

I loved Sophie. She was a very genuine character. At times I wanted to yell at her, but I can't blame her for most the things she did. She was sweet and I felt sorry for her. I did not like most of the other characters, but I loved Sophie.

I really enjoyed Anything but Normal. Melody Carlson did a beautiful job writing this and I look forward to reading more of her books.

Kaylea says

In less than 250 pages, Melody Carson has crafted a story that features a realistic and view of teen pregnancy - from the vantage point of a normal, average high-school student who attends church and gets good grades.

The novel opens with Sophie returning home from summer camp, ready to begin her senior year. At first she's only dealing with a broken heart. Later, as events unfold, she discovers that her summer choice has led to an unplanned pregnancy.

Through her struggles and decisions, Carson has captured the emotional turmoil that high school senior faces when the unexpected happens.

Through the various storylines, Carson explores the various choices a young, teenage mother may find herself facing including abortion and adoption. The teen father's role is also explored, along with a church's reaction to a pregnancy in the midst of a youth group.

Without being preachy, Carson also takes a look at how people treat teen mothers - while often ignoring the teenage boy's role in the pregnancy.

In all, the book could launch an interesting series of discussions in a teen reading circle, within a youth group or at home between a mother and daughter.

The character of Sophie seems real, honest and just like "the girl next door." She could easily be a member of your youth group, hiding behind her pain.

A Teen Endorsement

Several teen girls I work with on a regular basis fell in love with Carson's "True Colors" series last summer. So I wanted to see what at least one of them thought about her newest book.

So between homework assignments, CA, an eighth grader, took time to read and give me her opinion of Anything But Normal.

She handed the book back to me with a huge smile, saying "it's awesome."

In fact, she enjoyed it so much, and talked to her fellow co-horts, that several girls in the youth group are lining up to read this book - as well as asking me to find a way to purchase the True Color series for the church library (and any other book I can get of Carson's.)

The only reservation I had in initially handing the book to one of my girls, is thinking of how I would explain to the parents about how Carson attacks controversial topics. (I figured I needed to say, "I'm giving your daughter this book, by the way, it talks about teen pregnancy in a frank way," for a variety of reasons.)

But honestly, most parents I've talked with, on a one-on-one basis, are excited that their daughters are interested in reading Christian novels. The fact that Carson approaches hot button topics through a Christian lens is a bonus. One mom told me she'd rather her daughter read the stuff at church - and find out the Christian take on an issue - than in a non-faith-based setting.

So, it's a win-win situation. The girls get a good book to read (that gasp, isn't about vampires), and the parents have a chance to talk to them about hot topics with a non-threatening tool.

Cricket Muse says

Sophie Ramsay is seventeen and a senior, but is not looking forward to her last year of high school. It could have been a fabulous nine months of enjoying her friends, her great classes, her journalism interests, yet her nine months are spent living out the secret of last summer. Melody Carlson, a veteran YA writer, who specializes in teen girl perspective covers the consequences of sexual pressure in *Anything But Normal*. Sophie, an active, committed Christian, strayed from her abstinence pledge and now faces the emotional, physical, spiritual dilemma of that decision. Presented with honesty and realism, teens will no doubt read with compassion how Sophie tries to deal with mistakes from the past and how they collide with her present.

Melody Carlson knows how to present topics that apply to teens today, especially girls. It's not difficult to guess that Sophie's secret is being pregnant, and the book doesn't offer too much in the way of originality. On the positive side the book presents an honest, realistic portrayal of a "good" girl who made a bad decision and how that decision now affects her present and future. Unfortunately, the plotline gets bogged down at times with a moralizing tone. Sophie often laments how she only had sex twice and didn't like it either time and doesn't want to have sex again until she gets married. Sophie also chastises her friends for dressing like "sluts" considering they have made purity vows. Overall, the book offers a frank expose of sorts about a young woman who desperately wants to avoid the truth of her situation. Most of the book centers on her trying to cope alone with her pregnancy and she doesn't even reveal her situation to her parents until she is five months along. From there the book rushes towards her having the baby without much more exploration on how her pregnancy affects her life. The confrontation scene between the two families could have been developed more with a focus on Dylan, the baby's father, and his reaction since he also broke his purity vow. His motivations are not explored nor are his feelings about the situation truly developed. A book to consider more for its frank approach to teen pregnancy than for its originality in plotline.

Kelly Boggs says

I really wanted to love this book. The book's main character Sophia struggles with her image and her place in life but is witty and funny. It tackles a real life problems like premarital sex, teen pregnancy, and people who are judgmental. And it is all told from a Christian worldview. These are makings for a realistic and positive book for young people.

However I couldn't love it for several reasons. Although some changes occur, the main character's BFF was flat and whiny. I didn't care for her personally and felt she was a lame friend. Some of the friends could have been developed more. For instance Jenny, the girl who doesn't take the purity pledge and was born to a teenage mother. She sees situations from an alternative side than the goody goody Christian girls and could have offered much more to Sophia and the story. The ending was somewhat meh to me as well. It was rushed and not as heartfelt as I think the author wanted to be.

Overall, I might give this author another chance but I feel like this novel doesn't reach its potential.

Natasha Polak says

I was looking for a quick last-minute read to finish off the month, and decided to give Anything But Normal a try. Even though it is a YA novel, it definitely piqued my interest! But then, I already am a big Melody Carlson fan, and own plenty of her books I've happily reviewed. I have to give her credit - no matter the audience for whom she writes, Ms. Carlson has a way of telling a poignant story.

Anything But Normal is about one teen girl's struggles as she faces some difficult choices that rock her faith, and leave her questioning who her real friends are. As a mom of a teen daughter, this story hit home for me in how girls just like her will have their purity tested during the next handful of years. What I liked best about Anything But Normal is its brutal honesty - in telling of human nature between boys and girls, the conflicts that exist between the views of the church versus the community. Overall, it gives you something to consider, as to what is important, that there is no one right answer, and faith and forgiveness can take many paths. Great theme with an even greater message by the book's end.

Brandi says

Anything But Normal - Melody Carlson

(*SPOILER ALERT!!!*) 3.5stars

From the few Melody Carlson books I've read, I've seen that she writes about problems. The certain subjects that desperately need to be dealt with but no one wants to write about for fear of offending others. This was another one of those books. It dealt with teen pregnancy.

Don't worry. I'm not really spoiling much. You only have to be a couple chapters into it to discover what it's about.

Sophie was a sweet and understandable character. Her turbulent emotions about her pregnancy were tragic and yet endearing. It's hard to imagine how I would act in that kind of situation. I think I would be strong, and tell my parents right away, and be happy 'cuz I love babies, and be a good mother. But in reality... I don't think so. Who would react like that?

I'm so glad Wes was there. He was so kind and understanding and sweet. He was so perfectly wonderful. But his reaction was so... mild. He was just mad at Dylan. He didn't seem to be mad or hurt at Sophie. Then again she was pressured into it.

Dylan was such a selfish coward. He just wanted to get his pleasure and get out. Sophie's dad is right, he is a coward.

Carrie Anne was a good friend. She was a bit annoying at times and her reaction to Sophie's pregnancy wasn't so nice, but I can certainly understand it. I know I'd definitely have a reaction if my Christian best friend suddenly told me she was pregnant.

I'm not so sure about the school pregnancy care center. I can see how it can be a cushion for pregnant girls and how some would be more likely to get pregnant with that kind of protection. But at the same time, they'll get pregnant whether the center is there or not and it's better for them to go there than to an abortion clinic. That was another thing too. I first assumed the topic was abortion. But Melody didn't really deal with abortion. She just lightly mentioned that it was murder and Sophie believed it was wrong. She could've done a lot more on it.

I didn't really like how Sophie gave up the baby. I'm not against adoption or anything. I just wouldn't be able to do something like that. To give away your own child. I know it was hard for Sophie. I can't imagine doing that. I don't think I'd be able to do it - whether it was better for the baby or not.

This book was good, but I think she could've done better. And so much more with it too. Oh well. It was a good novel.

Hannah says

This was a great book by Melody Carlson. The main character has a huge secret that won't be able to be kept hidden. Soon everyone will know. During this book she struggles to keep her personality and appearance while everything else changes around her.

Sandra says

What is it with me and books that deal with teenage hormonal issues?

This would have to be the second book I read that dealt with premarital sex and the first that dealt with teenage pregnancy.

Sophie Ramsay was starting her senior year with a secret. Sophie was a strong Christian girl who had a purity pledge that she had to break because of Dylan Morris. Dylan told her that he loves her and Sophie believed him. Now she finds out that she was pregnant and is left with a very big decision to make. What will she do? Who will she turn to? Will she continue with the pregnancy or have the baby aborted?

Anything but Normal is a book after my own heart. Teenage pregnancy is hard. It becomes even harder when you feel that you cannot share what you are going through with anyone.

Sophie was a very realistic character for me. I was actually pretty surprised how close Ms. Carlson was in showing us how a teenager will handle this type of situation. I know because I was in that same situation when I was 19 too. I fell in love and thought that he does too. I got pregnant he left me with a baby in my stomach and a pretty hard decision whether to get the baby aborted, give the baby up for adoption or keep the baby. I had the same struggles as Sophie did. It may not be the same for everybody but for me it was so damn close.

This book is not just about teenage pregnancy but there was also a part of the book that dealt with religion. I honestly love the author's take on how even Christians make mistakes. Sometimes Christians could be closed minded and judgmental. This book teaches us to forgive despite how bad someone has wronged us. It also shows how important other people's love and acceptance would mean to someone who is going through a hard time. Despite the mistake and wrongdoings we must accept and forgive one another because that is

something God would want us to do.

The characters that the author made are pretty realistic. I liked Sophie, Wes and Pastor Vincent. They were my favorite characters in this book. I liked Sophie because she was strong and despite all the wrong things that happened to her she still had faith in God. I admire her for that. I may have not agreed with her decision but that doesn't make it wrong. Wes was one of those guys that I'd love to have. Seriously, how often would a guy be willing to be called a baby's daddy even if he's not? Not much right? But Wes was okay with that. He was the support that Sophie needed along with her parents. Pastor Vincent was fair and he understood what happened to Sophie and didn't judge her based on that one mistake.

I seriously loved this book!
It teaches you a lesson without being preachy.

It definitely deserves **5 stars**

Crystal says

Teen pregnancy, we all have an opinion on it. Whether we believe it's from teens with totally lax values, to teens who make a one-time mistake we all have feelings on this heated subject. I know I had certain ideas going into this book and after reading it I have definitely been rethinking where I was coming from.

Sophie is a good girl, she attends church and has made her purity vow and despite all the wishing to the contrary she is pregnant. What Anything But Normal gives the reader is her story. We see the world through her eyes from her own beliefs about pregnancy and the girls who are pregnant at her school to how others begin to see her. We see all the sides. Should we cast out a pregnant girl or should we support her. If we support her are we supporting looser morals. All of these questions are looked at and handled in a wonderful way.

Whereas this subject is heavy (and the book definitely treats it as a heavy subject), the book reads quickly and I could not put it down. It was interesting seeing it from Sophie's angle and how not everyone fits into our slots that we decide to put them in. Sophie struggles quite a bit and her struggle is fascinating to watch. The reactions of those around her are too. I absolutely loved the character of Wes and how he is a great male character. This book doesn't make either gender out to be the bad one. All make mistakes and like in life - we all make mistakes, just some of them are seen more than others.

The Biblical basis behind Ms. Carlson's work stands true and her message is one of love and forgiveness just as Jesus did. It's also one of responsibility which is something that often gets shuffled out of the way these days.

All-in-all Anything But Normal is an amazing read. Sophie, her parents, and her friends make great characters and hardly any character in the book remains the same at the end as they were in the beginning - there is growth and learning in all of them. Don't expect preachiness in this book at all - it's straightforward and believable without being over-the-top with the message - I truly believe the message you come out with

from this book is what you make of it. I took a lot away from it - especially the you need to walk a mile in someones shoes to understand what they are going through. Another one that comes through is how wrong it is to judge others. These are wonderful messages that should control our life more. And again responsibility is also a big part of this book so it is not lost amongst the lessons of love and forgiveness.

I think my only real problem with this one was things were a little hurried at the end, I would have liked to have known more, but everything was tied up really well, so the ending is left completely up in the air.

Read it and see, but I think Anything But Normal will not disappoint if you want a thought-provoking and entertaining young adult book dealing with a tough subject. Good for parents and teens alike - I can see a lot of good discussion points that can come out of this one.

Favorite Quote:

"I don't see why people have to label everything." Wes sighed. "I mean, instead of just being one thing or another, maybe we need to be better informed--and come to our own conclusions."
