

But Can the Phoenix Sing? by Christa Laird

Subjects: World War, 1939–1945—Jewish resistance—Poland—Fiction; Jews—England—Fiction; Interpersonal relations—Juvenile fiction; Stepfathers—Juvenile fiction

Award: Best Books for Young Adults

Book List: Europe

Props: Letter in an envelope



Richard, 17, felt that his stepfather, Misha, a school teacher was straight-laced and unjustly strict. His real father wasn't around very much but when he did breeze into town he wasn't concerned with Richard's bad grades, wild friends, occasional drinking bouts or the fact that he skipped school now and then. Richard's father traveled all over the world reporting on terrorists, unrest or injustice wherever it was found. He was fearless and he didn't spend his time trying to reform Richard. Richard wished with all his heart that Misha was more like his real father.

The school year was about over. Richard was relieved when Misha left on a 6-week-trip to Australia. He was looking forward to having the time just with his Mum. Much to his dismay, though, he found in his room (*Bring out large thick envelope*) a large, thick envelope addressed to him. He immediately thought it was some huge list of rules or a lecture on his behavior that Misha had left behind for him. When he said as much to his Mum she was rather annoyed and suggested that he at least keep an open mind. (*Set envelope down*)

He wanted to just let the envelope sit on his desk and he managed for awhile but curiosity got the better of him and he opened it. (*Pull papers out of envelope and look at*

them) His stepfather began by saying how sorry he was that their relationship had deteriorated. That, in itself, was a surprise to Richard. What followed was an account of Misha's teenage years, thirty years ago. He had never talked about them partly because of the pain of reliving those years. But he was willing to do so now in the hope that it would bring them to a better understanding.

In 1942, Misha was 14-years-old and living in the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw. No longer was anyone safe there. He had seen other members of his family die or marched off to death camps. He managed to escape by crawling through the sewers. Although constantly in danger, he found his way to the forests outside the city where he became the youngest member of a band of partisans who risked their lives daily to sabotage the German conquerors any way they could. Richard was soon absorbed in this remarkable story of a Misha he had never dreamed existed. (*Hold up book*) *But Can The Phoenix Sing?* by Christa Laird.