



## **Bear Season**

*Bernie Hafeli*

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A story of an eleven year-old boy and his rough-hewn uncle, both of whom cross paths with Wojtek, the legendary soldier bear of WWII.

## **Bear Season Details**

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Author : Bernie Hafeli

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# From Reader Review Bear Season for online ebook

## Brittany says

I won this book for free from the Goodread's First Reads giveaway.

I believe this book is moreso directed at teenagers (but it can be enjoyed by many adults). From an adult's point of view I would of rated the book 3.5 out of 5, but trying to judge from a teenager's perspective I would think 4 out of 5. I really did enjoy this book.

The book is based in 1951 and the main character is an eleven year old boy named Czeslaw. Czeslaw's father died in World War 2; Czeslaw lives in Detroit with his mother and his uncle. In the book, Czeslaw takes a trip with his uncle to Cleveland and then to Edinburgh to meet up with an old army friend, who happens to be a bear named Wojtek. This is a very unique story that started off very interesting from the beginning. I was a little sad with the end of the story and wish there was a better conclusion with the uncle.

I definitely recommend this book to everyone! A very good read!

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## Ian says

Until reading Bear Season I had not encountered the story of Wojtek the Bear that went to war, indeed it was only on finishing the book that it occurred to me that the story may not be entirely fictitious and with very little research so it proved.

I won't dwell on the legend of Wojtek as it's easy enough to find the details elsewhere yet it is the unconditional love of the bear for his human colleagues and their's for him which underpins Hafeli's tale. Bear Season is a wonderful piece of storytelling, set initially in post war Detroit where the Polish war veteran and emigre Izzy has made home close to his widowed sister in law and her son Czeslaw.

Struggling for work, and for purpose, and having let the love of his life get away, Uncle Izzy is popular amongst his drinking peers although considered a little eccentric due to his tendency to speak of the legend of Wojtek.

Izzy and Czeslaw are close, and the point arrives when Izzy's itchy feet get the better of him and he sets off with Czeslaw in tow to see if the flame of lost love still burns and more adventurously to be reunited with Wojtek now resident in Edinburgh Zoo.

The book becomes a road trip (and sea trip) with hitched rides and interesting characters encountered and then working for sea passage across the Atlantic.

Although essentially a story about the relationship of one man and a bear, the reality is that there is an even stronger presence in the story whom we can never meet but which binds everything together and that is Czeslaw's father, Izzy's brother, killed in action during the war in Europe.

Beloved by everyone and the undoubted favourite of Wojtek, borne out by photographs which Czeslaw finds in his uncle's cupboard.

Czeslaw observes his Uncle closely, doting on his memories, and finds the lure of meeting Wojtek irresistible, and is good company for the old man.

Hafeli's book is beautifully understated and heartwarming, without ever becoming sentimental, the story simply rolls along as if effortlessly and yet so much emotion, so much experience, so much heartbreak lies within its pages. In the face of considerable adversity the ties that bind the family and that old bear are woven with the rarest of threads, unconditional love.

I was fortunate indeed to win Bear Season in a GoodReads Giveaway with gratitude to the author, and heartily recommend the book to readers of all ages.

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### **Gaele says**

It really isn't that important to your enjoying this story that you realize that Wojtek is a real bear, and really was part of the Polish army in World War II, but his story is an interesting one and full of legend beyond the simple and rather dry recitation of fact provided to those who don't speak or read Polish. What is important is the seamless integration of the search to reconnect with this bear and how it effects and 11 year old boy and his uncle in the years following WWII.

Czeslav is eleven years old, and lost his father during the war. His closest male relative is Uncle Izzy, a man coping with his PTSD from the war and grief over his losses from the bottom of a bottle. Frequently unemployed and prone to bouts of rambling dialog on the wonder that is Wojtek, Izzy has decided to follow his dream of meeting the bear and finding the answer to nagging questions.

Vaguely reminiscent of road stories that are considered classics today: this story provides a tale rich in seeking a dream, finding the importance in family and even coming to terms with grief. Throughout the story, Izzy's kind hearted although misguided and often inappropriate attempts to help Czeslav work through his questions actually helps both characters find some sort of peace in their inner turmoil.

Hafeli has created a story that gently unfolds to reveal the core of humanity: the need for acceptance, love, and connection to others.

I received an eBook copy from the author for purpose of honest review. I was not compensated for this review: all conclusions are my own responsibility.

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### **Annaliese Anderson says**

This book is very well written. Less than 200 pgs, Hafeli manages to draw the reader in quickly and holds their attention until the very end. Highly recommended.

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### **followbooks says**

Bear Season was a very enjoyable read. Touching, interesting, different. followbooks is now featuring Bernie Hafeli, visit <http://followbooks.com/bear-season-by...> to read our full review of this excellent book.

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### **Melki says**

In 1951, eleven-year-old Czeslaw, mostly known as Chester, is picked on for not having a father. He, of

course, DID have a father - *he'd died in the Battle of Monte Cassino during World War II*. Chester lives in Detroit with his mother and Uncle Izzy. Chester's mother is a chemist and manages to keep the family afloat. That's good, because Izzy has trouble getting and keeping a job. Though he possesses no physical scars from the war, he is tormented by memories that only alcohol can chase away.

Chester and Izzy like to escape to the roof of their apartment building where Izzy regales the young boy with tales of a mystical bear called Wojtek. Found as a cub by members of Izzy's unit, the bear grew fond of his soldier companions, (and alcohol!), and served as mascot of the Second Company.

While many people considered Izzy's stories as little more than drunken ramblings, Chester is enthralled by the tales. Besides being highly entertaining, he sees them as a link to his father who also served in Second Company.

It takes some doing, but Chester finally manages to convince his mother to allow him to accompany Izzy on a trip to a magical place called...Cleveland. Once there, their discoveries will lead to even further adventures, including a long voyage to visit an old friend. The duo is determined to see this thing through, even if it means incurring the wrath of MOM.

This was a wonderful story that has an autobiographical feel to it. I hate to use the word "heartwarming," but it was, it was. Funny, sweet, touching...yeah, I was blubbering by the end.

Highly recommended.

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### **Tanya Harrison says**

I highly recommend reading this book! It is one of the best books I've read on Goodreads. Hafeli's story reminded me of a John Steinbeck or Ernest Hemingway story. It is not just a coming of age story, centered around a little boy and his uncle. It is a story about addiction, a story about the after effects of war, a story about family and survival too. It's many stories within a story. It's also a story about a young cub bringing life, hope and compassion to a troupe of soldiers on the verge of despair from the horrors of betrayal from an alliance in war, the Bolshies.

This is a story that would appeal to children and adults, alike. I could see this story being a bedtime story for all to enjoy. It's funny. I actually laughed outloud a few times. It's sad. I did shed a few tears. It's also very historical.

There is a lot of adventure throughout the story. A lot of life lessons throughout the story. I recognized a lot of symbolism in the story. I also recognized a lot of foreshadowing in the story.

If you are an animal lover, you are sure to enjoy this story. The story did make me think of Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*. It doesn't have that dreadful ending for the animal, but it is a bittersweet story centered around the relationships between animals and humans.

I'm so glad that I read this story. I will certainly be reading more of Hafeli's stories. I hope he writes more soon for all of us to enjoy!

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## **Melissa Reddish says**

An engaging and clever bildungsroman (and hero's journey) featuring well-developed characters, a compelling plot, and the kind of narrative momentum that makes the book difficult to put down.

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## **Melissa says**

I loved this book, I received it as a first reads copy. The part of this book I enjoyed the most was watching the relationship develop between the narrator and his uncle. The innocence of the little boy's character really makes the story stand out for me. And I especially liked the part where the zoo keeper lets them spend time with the bear; to come all that way and take the risk only to be turned away would have been heart breaking. I feel like the end where the uncle went missing is a bit of a let down though, I think it could have gone better. It just goes to show that some people never really change though.

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## **Marsha says**

This is a great story of an 11 year old boy and his uncle who drinks too much setting out on quite an adventure. The descriptive quality paints quite a picture and you really can imagine yourself right there seeing everything they see. I finished this book in one evening and it was one of those books you hate to see end. Bernie Hafeli did a wonderful job on this one. Uncle Izzy really tries to help Chester figure things out in his own misguided way. I really do think this book will appeal to a wide variety of readers.

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## **Meghan Humphreys says**

Interesting idea and great characters -- a boy's coming of age story with a strange and compelling focal point. I think someone who grew up in Detroit (I did not) would find a lot more nostalgia and realism in it than I could.

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## **Richard Block says**

Bernie Hafeli is an old friend, so that's out of the way. I knew he had a novel in him 30 years ago, and presto! Here it is. The story is tender, elegantly written and great fun. It is about a boy going on an adventure with his uncle, a wayward Polish immigrant called Izzy, who beguiles everyone with his tales of a bear that became an army mascot during the war. The boy and his uncle venture from booming Detroit to Cleveland and then on a journey to Scotland to meet up with the bear.

In Bernie's fable, the real and fanciful is sublimely mixed, and this allows him to confront the consequences of the war on this family with a human, knowing intelligence that involves the reader completely. It shows so much promise, it almost gets the full five stars. It is ideally paced and plotted and never outstays its welcome.

Welcome a new American writer of great skill and merit.

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### **Judy says**

My Review: This story is a heartwarming tale of a young man coming of age. In post war Detroit in 1951 as a son of Polish immigrants Chester(Czeslaw) finds himself torn between the love of an uncle that fills the void of a father killed in the war and the embarrassment of the same uncle. Uncle Izzy is coping with post war stress the best he can by drinking and telling what most everyone, including sometimes Chester, thinks are unbelievable stories of a soldier bear that lived and traveled with their company during the war. Seizing upon a chance to travel with his uncle to Scotland to reconnect with the bear Chester starts on an adventure that will see him truly grow up. This is a great read for anyone and is well written. I give this book 5 stars.

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### **Nina Schuyler says**

Bernie does a wonderful job transporting the reader to the 1950s and the subculture of Polish Americans. His book is lush with period details and complex characterization. He portrays a heartfelt, honest relationship between 11-year-old Czeslaw Wierzbick and his uncle and their search for the elusive bear, a "soldier" with the Polish Army.

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### **Jim McGowan says**

Mr. Hafeli is a superb writer. From the first sentence to the last, Bear Season is an easy joy. I found I cared for each character small or large. The main character Uncle Izzy remains with me. Like Salinger, like Leonard, Hafeli's characters resonate and stay within.

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