



The Cloud Chamber

Joyce Maynard

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The minute the school bus carrying Nate Chance and his little sister, Junie, pulls up in front of his family's farmhouse, Nate can tell something's terribly wrong: Somehow his father has been wounded by a gunshot. Nate sees him stagger across the yard, then watches as the police take him away.

Then, nothing. Nobody in the family will say what happened, or where Nate's dad has gone. At school, his best friend, Larry, won't talk to him, and kids whisper that his dad's a "psycho." Back home, police keep showing up with questions for his mom; and then there's Junie, worried that Mom will sell her beloved pony and counting on her big brother to figure out a way to reach their dad.

But the science fair is coming up, and Nate has a plan. If he can just win first prize with his amazing cloud chamber project, he'll get to go to the state finals, near the hospital where his dad's been locked away. And since it was his dad who taught him to love science--and the stars--it seems like maybe the magic of the cloud chamber can bring the family together again, too.

Too bad he has to work on it with the weirdest, most unpopular girl in school, Naomi, with her goofy hair and nutty idea that the two of them should be best friends. The craziest part is, she just might be right.

The Cloud Chamber Details

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From Reader Review The Cloud Chamber for online ebook

Tim says

This book was pretty fascinating about a young teenage boy and his brother and mother who were all seeking a way around life after their father died.

Stephanie A. says

One of those heavy, bittersweet books that spare no quarter for young readers by giving them happy coincides or the expected triumph, and which I sense I may not have enjoyed as a young reader, but nevertheless found very satisfying as an adult. The rural/farm setting and time period of the 1960s came to life so incredibly well it felt like I was there.

Rosemarie Rung says

As is typical with Joyce Maynard's books, the writing captures the reader immediately and throughout the book, even if the plot tires and characters become more like caricatures. There are great messages here to young adults about finding friends in the loneliness of cafeteria tables and learning that parents can have faults but still be greatly loved.

Amy Snyder says

I really wanted to like this book, and at times it was sad and touching, but in the end there was no resolution and poor Nate's life never improves. His father has tried to kill himself because he is so depressed. He is a terrible farmer with bad luck, and since a storm has destroyed their crop and they will soon be bankrupt, he cannot take it. The father is taken to a mental hospital and the mother is blamed for his shooting, since they cannot find the gun. Nate and his sister Junie are now shunned at school. Nate loses his best friend and Junie invites many children to her birthday party, with the only one showing up a young girl with cerebral palsy. The mother is so depressed that she is no longer emotionally there for the children, and they are not allowed to go see their father. Nate must complete a science project, and the only choice for a partner is Naomi, the strange new girl who is very religious. Eventually, Junie must lose her pony as they need to sell it to pay their debts, and they lose the farm. Nate tried to win the science fair with Naomi so he can go visit their father, but his grandfathers watch, which they need to see the asteroid particles in the cloud chamber, is stolen at the fair before the judges can see it. They know who stole it, a girl who accused Naomi of stealing her bracelet, but there is nothing they can do. The only thing I did not like was the end. Nate drives himself and Junie to see their father, abandoning the car when it runs out of gas. Nate realizes that his father has been blinded from shooting himself, and although he, Naomi, and his again best friend eventually find the gun and clear his mother's name, it is too late. They must move away. Mom has found a new apartment and the farm is sold, and it seems as if their parents will never be together again. There really is no resolution to the story, but I guess in a way it more mirrors real life than if everything were patched up in the end. I realize now that I respect the ending of the book more than I initially thought.

Laurel-Rain says

In a small Montana town called Lonetree, the Chance family struggles against all the adversities that often fall upon farmers, especially those, like Carl Chance, who do not really have the talent for it. Unlike most farmers, Carl Chance is a dreamer. He has taught his son Nate, who is fourteen, what it means to explore the outer limits of the world in which they live for the magic that escapes him in his own small corner of the universe.

But one day, something tragic and unexpected happens. Getting off the school bus, Nate and his seven-year-old sister Junie are confronted by the sight of their father, bloodied, being led to an ambulance. When he disappears with the paramedics, it's almost as if he has completely disappeared from the earth. For weeks and then months, the family is plagued by officers descending and asking interminable questions. They even suspect the mother of firing the shot—for the children learn, finally, what felled their father. Even though he appears to have survived the injury, the mystery of what happens to him next hangs over the family like a shroud.

School children snub and even bully Nate and Junie, who soon become outcasts. But Nate is determined to complete his science fair project, which he believes will somehow save his family. The Cloud Chamber he plans to build was inspired by things his father taught him. It will be his father's redemption, wherever he may be.

Naomi, another outcast, becomes Nate's partner in the project, and as they work together, a bond grows between them.

Nate's journey toward his goal is persistent, with its overtones of hope for the future. We see him single-mindedly planning how this particular project will open up the world for his family and restore what has been lost.

One of the greatest clouds that cloaks the family during this dark time is the secrecy that puts a distance between the family members and allows the pain and torment to continue unabated.

In many ways, the Cloud Chamber symbolizes the despair and grief that encompass Nate and his family. I like this quote near the end of the book: "He (Nate) imagined how it would be if grief were something visible, like cosmic rays. He imagined what the airspace around their kitchen table would have looked like, these last months, if there had been a light to shine on it or some chemical compound to pour onto the linoleum that made it so they could see all the things they had been feeling."

"The Cloud Chamber" is a wonderful story of the ties that bind and then come undone due to tragedy and loss. Categorized as YA fiction, this story is one that young and old can enjoy and relate to, especially the portions that reveal the chasm that yawns between family members when silence rules the day.

Definitely five stars and highly recommended.

Ilsa Bick says

I've read this four times now, and the more I do, the better I like it. Principally, what Maynard does beautifully is that she creates a completely believable conclusion that isn't at all happily-ever-after. Yet Nate really grows here, and in that sense, this is a true coming-of-age novel where reality trumps wish-fulfillment but fails to crush hope. Highly recommended.

Skyler Blackwell says

The Cloud Chamber by Joyce Maynard is a sad yet hopeful book. The hopeful main character, Nate, feels alone in a house where no one seems to care anymore. His sister, Junie, is also a hopeful character who is trying to appear nonchalant but is secretly wishing for a normal life. Their father is very sick and Nate thinks his only way to get his father to come home is to build the cloud chamber. Although the Chance Farm has little of hope of pulling through, Nate succeeds in his endeavors and finally sees a faint flash of light in the project he has labored so hard on; a faint glimmer of hope. All in all, this was a good story about overcoming tragedy.

Crissy says

Great book.

Jean Leong says

The Cloud Chamber is one of those books that slowly and secretly sneaks into your soul and pulls you towards it. I wasn't particularly interested at the start, but somehow, something just clicked within me and suddenly I was just...completely addicted to it. Joyce Maynard really worked her magic with this book, throwing some serious issues in our face with lighthearted ways, yet letting us deeply understand the cruelty of society.

This book is just sad. Beautifully and tragically sad. It's not the grief of the death of a person, or a loved one with cancer, those books are different. This sadness is the accumulation of the impact of all the family members, realizing that while Dad had tried to kill himself, he too killed his family members.

I cried my way through the book, but couldn't tear my eyes away from the pages. It was so emotional and so inspiring. I was angry, then sad, then inspired. Mix of emotions really.

I thought it was one of those "Meh. Let's get this over and done with." books, but in fact, you won't be able to put the book down mentally even if you have done so physically. That's what happened to me. The whirl of questions and unspoken thoughts just keep tumbling inside my head even after writing all these. I don't know. The impact after reading this book and digesting it will be everlasting.

Jan says

14 year old Nate comes home from school to police cars everywhere. Apparently, his father attempted suicide, but failure to find the rifle that caused his head wound has the local law enforcement-and the neighbors-wondering if Nate's mother fired the shot. Their Montana dairy farm was already in big trouble and now they may have to sell everything. Nate deals with the cold shoulders he gets at school by deciding he will win build a science project that would make his father proud: a cloud chamber in which the radiation of cosmic particles is made visible in vapor. His partner is the girl no one likes: Naomi dresses funny, and her father is a fire-and-brimstone preacher. As he works on the cloud chamber, Nate dreams of finding his father and proving that his family is not just a bunch of "crazies."

Ringzabell says

The book, *The Cloud Chamber*, by Joyce Maynard is named that because the main character, a boy named , makes a cloud chamber for the school science fair.

The kid lives with his mom and his dad is locked up somewhere do to his suicide attempt. The kid's mom won't let him talk to his dad, and she doesn't talk to him about what happened so he is alone. The mom is in her own world because the police thinks she shot her husband . No one can find the gun he used to shoot himself, so they blame her. No one is town will talk to them because of the incident.

The main character works on his building his cloud chamber science experiment with another girl who is also isolated. She has religious extremist parents who don't let her socialize with anyone. The parents let her visit with him because they are trying to save him from his father's sin of trying to take his own life. As they work on their science experiment together, they form a friendship as a way to move beyond their isolation.

In the end, they are both alone again, because they religious parents stop letting her leave the house. The boy decides to hitchhike to the mental hospital to talk to his dad. He discovers that his dad is blind because of the gunshot. to his face.

It is funny that such an sad and dark story ends in an kind of uplifting way of enduring and continuing on. The kid learns that you have to keep on and move yourself to a better place.

Fatima Mauricio says

The Cloud Chamber is a story that takes place in Montana. The Story is narrated by a young boy named Nate. Nate's entire life was standard there was never something to worry about. Nate, and his younger sister Junie, would have never imagined, that their dad would try to suicide himself.

Nate and Junie's life changed after their dad was taken to a recovery center for lunatics. With so much going on Nate forgot to brainstorm ideas for the science fair. Nate was later forced by the teacher to team-up with Naomi. Naomi part in the story ass the weird church girl who turns out to be Nate's best friend .Nate chooses that him and Naomi were going to build a Cloud Chamber for the science fair project and that they are going to win for that he can show it to his dad. This book will fallow Nate's life as he struggles to work on his science project, and when he tries to find evidence that his mom did not try to kill his dad because of money struggles.

This book was probably one of my favorite book that I have read so far. This book has a sense of reality attached to it that is kind of reassuring. After finishing this book I was hoping that there was a second book but there was none?.

MadisonT says

This book was about a ten year old boy named Nate Chance who builds/makes a cloud chamber to save his dad. When Nate arrives home from school, he sees two police cars in his yard and an ambulance. Before his mother can get him and his seven year old little sister Junie inside the house, Junie witness their father, blood pouring down his face, being led by two police officers into the ambulance. Their father was trying to kill himself. As soon as that incident happened, their home quickly starts to change into a different place. Junie is always curled up in front of the TV, Nate's mom retreats inside herself, and the rumor of mental illness makes Nate a social pariah-(outcast, undesirable, unperson/nonperson. The promise of winning the science fair holds any hope of happiness for Nate. He's building a cloud chamber, which is the project that he and his father had dreamed of working on together. If Nate can build it, he can give his father something that will help him feel better, and his dad will finally be able to come home.

I liked this book because it was really mysterious and I thought that I would never read a book like this, but when I did it became one of my favorite books! The Cloud Chamber was sad and very wild too. I also liked it because I am int books that are sad, true or not true, mysterious,and scary at some point. Anyway, this book was really, really good.

AGastolek says

This is the story of Nate Chance, a fourteen year old boy who lives on a farm in Montana. His family goes through very difficult times. The failing crops and the financial debt lead to this family disaster. Nate's father attempts a suicide and is taken to a mental hospital. Having no options, the mother decides to sell the farm. In the middle of turmoil, Nate is searching for answers about family values and choices in life. He tries to be a normal teenager and a good role model to his little sister Junie. Both children miss their father terribly. To keep himself occupied, Nate concentrates on building a cloud chamber for his science fair project. This was his father's dream to explore cosmic radiation and the memories ignite Nate's motivation. With the help of a new friend, Nate rediscovers his abilities as a young scientist and a starting pitcher on his baseball team. There is one thing left, if he could only see and talk to his father.

I listened to this book on CDs and found Nate's story captivating. The author, Joyce Maynard does a marvelous job describing the emotions and situations. The voice of the narrator, Joel Johnstone, and his delivery complemented the story. The Cloud Chamber is well written and accurately portrays the life of teenagers facing difficult times in life. I enjoyed listening to this book and believe that middle school readers can find it also interesting.

Apzmarshl says

Fast read. Good for tweens on up. It was a good solid story, I just didn't fall in love with it.

Times were tough in 1966 on the Chance farm. A freak storm ruins their crops and Nate's free spirited, dreamer father can't take any more. One day Nate returns from school to find the police dragging his bloody father from the fields.

Nate's dad tried to kill himself. The police think Nate's mother may have been the one to really pull the trigger because the gun is still missing. Nate and his little sister are ostracized at school. The farm must be auctioned.

Nate is paired up with Naomi, another misfit at school. They decide to make a cloud chamber for their science fair project. This is something that Nate's dad had always wanted to do. (It was a great project!! I want to make one!)

The story is a solid telling of how when your world ends, you can still find a way to go on.
