

Unfortunately the book gives hardly any mention of Jesus' home country, or his life and family there. This book is part of the Matt Christopher series which is popular for the fast-paced sports action it provides. The very best descriptive paragraphs of the book are all about the baseball action not about cultural exchange.

Touch the Dragon **Connelly, Karen**

Turnstone Press 1992
Age Range 15 to 18
206 pages

Based on actual diary entries and letters, *Touch the Dragon* recounts the author's yearlong stay in Chiang Mai, Thailand through the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship when she was 16 years old. When Karen Connelly first sets out on her adventure, she is confident that she will embrace the culture of her new home, but her self-assurance wanes when she comes face to face with the poor living conditions of her host country and the unexpected restrictions placed on her independence.

Soon after her arrival in Thailand, Karen discovers that language and cultural barriers, not to mention homesickness, are much more difficult obstacles to overcome than she had anticipated. Karen tells her story so naturally and with such honesty that the reader is constantly wavering between wanting to comfort the poor girl and giggling at her naiveté. *Touch the Dragon* is completely enjoyable for its youthful idealism, enthusiasm, honesty and sensitivity. The descriptive passages

are full of romantic emotion, written as only a sixteen-year-old could write.



During the course of her stay, the author becomes totally engaged by the tropical landscape and the colourful personalities and she learns to respect and love her new home. Instead of wanting to transplant her Canadian ideals, Karen learns to appreciate the Thai culture and traditions even though they place restrictions on her that she would never endure at home.

If you were not considering a trip before you read this book, or were the type of tourist who never leaves the resort, *Touch the Dragon* will send you running for your atlas and searching out a more authentic travel experience.

The Breadwinner **Ellis, Deborah**

Groundwood Books/ Douglas and
McIntyre 2000
Ages 10 to 14
166 pages

Parvana is a young girl living in Afghanistan under the tyranny of Taliban rule, where women are forced to stay within the confines of their homes, unless they are escorted by a male family member. Even then, they must wear a *burqa*, a tent-like cloth that covers them from head to foot, with heavy netting to conceal their faces. When her father is taken prisoner, Parvana must go out by herself to earn a living for her family. To do this she must disguise herself as a boy and risk being discovered by the Taliban soldiers and tortured for being a female. *The Breadwinner* is an authentic story of what life is like for the Afghan people, especially women who were completely stripped of their rights and freedoms.

Parvana lives with her parents and her sister and baby brother in Kabul, Afghanistan, a city almost completely destroyed by war. Their home is a bombed out ruin with no running water and her father is disabled from injuries. The family's circumstances are already desperate, but when her father is taken prisoner, Parvana's mother becomes depressed and unable to cope or care for the children. The family's survival becomes severely threatened. Parvana puts herself at great risk by dressing as a boy to leave the house so she can earn money for food. In doing so she witnesses the terrible abusiveness of the Taliban during a public execution and she is driven to earn extra money by digging human remains from their graves.



The Breadwinner deals with extremely serious political and humanitarian issues, but the writing style lacks the intensity required to adequately convey the brutal nature of the Taliban regime. The author does include a brief historical background at the back of the book, as well as a glossary of terms. There is also a map at the beginning to give the geographical setting for the story. These elements are helpful but they do not go far enough. The book would perhaps be suitable as an introduction to this terrible situation but despite its value as a testimony to this brutal regime, I feel *The Breadwinner* does not provide sufficient emotion or information to provide a proper context to this complex political situation. It could be used as part of a larger package of literature, perhaps combined with news coverage or personal accounts from women and children in Afghanistan, to reinforce the story with the reality.