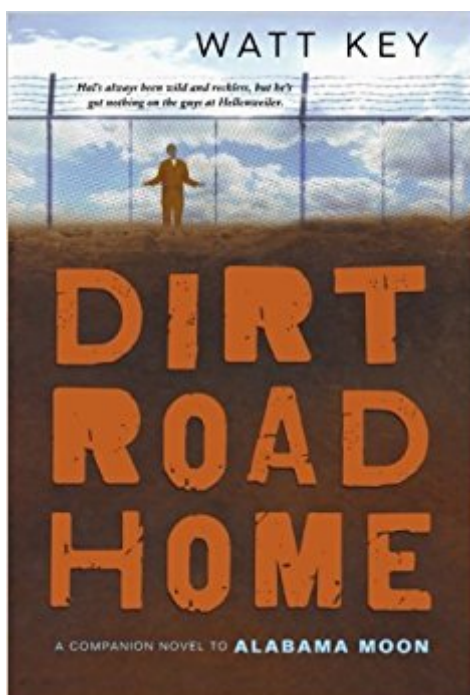


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Dirt Road Home: A Novel (Alabama Moon)



Synopsis

The story of the orphan boy Moon, begun in Watt Key's award-winning *Alabama Moon*, continues with *Dirt Road Home*. After his recapture, gutsy 14-year-old Hal Mitchell is sentenced to live at Hellenweiler, an institution that is more like a jail than the boys' home it's supposed to be. Hal could walk out in just a few months if he keeps out of trouble. But in a place like Hellenweiler, the more he tries to avoid the gangs and their violence, the stronger Hal's fellow inmates try to make him fail. This title has Common Core connections. "Key does a fabulous job of keeping his readers involved in the story and vested in the characters. Even reluctant readers will most likely find this one hard to put down." -- VOYA

Book Information

Series: *Alabama Moon* (Book 2)

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Square Fish (December 6, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 031267435X

ISBN-13: 978-0312674359

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 16.6 x 195.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 32 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #150,568 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #37 in [Books > Teens >](#)

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Customer Reviews

Gr 5-8—A companion to the award-winning *Alabama Moon* (Farrar, 2006), this novel stands on its own. The book opens with lots of action, as 14-year-old Hal is led in chains to the Hellenweiler Boys' Home, a lockdown facility in Tuscaloosa where he is to serve out his sentence. He and his father have an agreement: Daddy is going to stop drinking and Hal is going to keep a clean slate while incarcerated. However, the teen soon discovers that this is almost impossible; he is immediately pressured to "claim" for one of two gangs, with both choices guaranteed to bring him trouble. Hal chooses the unthinkable to join neither. The tension, positioning, threats, and shifting alliances among the boys are believable and will hook readers. The teen's focus on his relationship with his father, as well as a new girlfriend, add moments of hope.

The corruption of the supervising adults is also credible, and Hal's idea to reveal it creates a page-turning experience. Unfortunately, the staff's downfall is a little too easily accomplished and rings false, especially after all the gritty realism that comes before it. A happy ending with Daddy, Hal, and Caboose (another loner from the facility) neatly wraps up the story, putting this book squarely in the camp for younger readers with a tougher edge. --Amy Cheney, Alameda County Library, Oakland, CA (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Key's second novel follows Hal Mitchell, reform-school buddy of the hero of *Alabama Moon* (2006). Hal is in the Hellenweiler Boys' Home, where the state sends the hard cases to live until they turn 18. If he can stay out of trouble, and his dad can stop drinking, the two can be reunited, but it's immediately clear that Hal's end of the bargain is going to be tough to keep. The kids in Hellenweiler are evenly divided between two gridlocked gangs that altercate violently and often. Neither side is willing to let Hal keep his nose clean, which only distracts him from seeing the true villains in the mix. It's a standard setup for a lockup tale, and Hal's efforts to contain his rage and navigate brawls keep the atmosphere tense and pacing fleet. Most interesting is the unusual triangle he forms with a silent, massive loner and a philosophical Mexican gang leader. The ending is a little too neat for credibility, but for comeuppance it doesn't get much more satisfying. Grades 7-10. --Ian Chipman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Whenever my 10 year old son gets really excited about reading a book, he makes me read it also. His class started reading the first book, *Alabama Moon* a couple of months ago. He begged me to buy him *Alabama Moon* before they even finished and once he got it he finished it before the class did. When he finished it, all he talked about was the next book. He was soooo excited to receive it for Christmas. He hasn't read it yet because he was already reading another book called *A Dog's Life: Autobiography of a Stray* by Ann Martin, but I have read it. Even though this book is geared towards a younger audience, I really enjoyed Hal's story. I'm hoping another book will follow with Hal and Moon back together again in another adventure. Will update after my son reads it.

Few followup books can be compared with this sequel. Very realistic, very touching. If you have read *Alabama Moon*, you will want to get this! The message is powerful; following a teenager with a shady past as he tries to stay clean in a juvenile jail, and discovers that though the price is high, it IS

possible to save lives and change lives by caring. His trials and heartbreaking discoveries complete the character building and positive transformation that was begun in the first book. It will leave you encouraged and inspired. The book is especially relevant for boys and teens. I highly recommend that parents read the book to children, as there is swearing that will need to be skipped, and one reference to nudity and invasive inspection in the beginning that is potentially inappropriate and bothersome. There is also a good deal of disturbing violence. But despite these challenges, they are worth your time and effort to work through.

I like a book that grips my attention to the last word, a book that brings the characters so alive that the memory of them lingers in my mind for a long time. I loved the author's style and look forward to more stories.

Excellent book my granddaughter had to read for school, followed after *Alabama Moon*, much more violence, but it tends to be realistic under the circumstances.

Dirt Road Home is a fine sequel to *Alabama Moon*, the well-written coming-of-age story which has received much praise. The author, Watt Key, has just the right touch for this kind of book and one is naturally reminded of the Tom Sawyer/Huck Finn of forever fame. In *Alabama Moon*, we learned a great deal about survival in the woods. *Dirt Road* deals more with decisions and accepting the very unfair and tough breaks in life. While it is aimed primarily at young male adults, any one will find pleasure in reading this story and be uplifted by the determination and courage of the young man whose story this is.

In the sequel to *Alabama Moon*, we get a very vivid picture of what it was like to be incarcerated. This is a great story, its imagery will take you there and sometimes you won't want to be there because it's pretty tough for Hal. Mr. Key and contributors do a great job of relaying the horror of what happens in "reform school" while telling a good story.

I am a detention teacher and try to pre-read any books I allow my students to read. This one is a keeper. It is one that they will identify with and possibly learn a lesson from. I highly recommend that teenagers read this book about making decisions, thinking out the consequences before committing crimes and using self control in their lives. It really grabs your attention. Can't wait for him to write another one.

This was a really good book. It really summed up Hal's life after Alabama Moon. If you've read Alabama Moon you will like this book.

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