

Tillie the Terrible Swede: How One Woman, A Sewing Needle, and a Bicycle Changed History.

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Tillie the Terrible Swede: How One Woman, A Sewing Needle, and a Bicycle Changed History (review)

Elizabeth Bush

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Stauffacher, Sue. *Tillie the Terrible Swede: How One Woman, A Sewing Needle, and a*

Only two years after her arrival in America, Swedish immigrant Tillie Anderson began her record-setting bicycle racing career. First there was the hundred-mile race near Chicago in 1896, then time and distance records in the velodrome, followed by a world championship title and a host of wins until her retirement in 1902. Stauffacher relegates many of these particulars to thumbnail notations on the endpapers, choosing instead to focus her text on how Tillie scandalized polite [End Page 298] matrons with her skintight racing garb, ticked off fellow competitors with her upstart achievements, and confounded the medical community with her sturdy muscles. Fine print “acknowledgments” offer no specific sources for quotations—some of which sound authentic, and others reconstructed—and many listeners will be forgiven for asking whether Tillie really did marry her manager Phillip Shoberg while wearing the white bicycle-racing outfit and veil pictured herein. McMenemy’s gouache compositions, which incorporate very little background detail, often feel more like vignettes than descriptive illustration, and the paucity of defining black line gives the paintings a half-finished aspect against the stark white background. While this title is not as satisfying a slice of cycling history as Lesa Cline-Ransome’s *Major Taylor* (BCCB 4/04), kids who enjoy old-timey tales of spunky gals busting through gender barriers will gravitate to Tillie. [End Page 299]

persuasion; soon she finds herself believing both in Errol and more importantly in the love, both romantic and otherwise, that surrounds her on a daily basis. A host of oddball characters and a sweet hint of romance make this mostly a light, effervescent read, but when the story takes its turn at more serious moments, the result is often disappointingly generic. The troubled relationship between Alice and her mother and its parallel in her anorexic neighbor's relationship with her father is somewhat belabored, making for a programmatic element that disrupts the playful tone. Furthermore, although Errol keeps promising that his love story is "the greatest love story ever told," we actually get to hear very little of it, and from what we do, it's pretty standard fare. Alice is nonetheless a likable heroine, and readers may find the gentle humor and happy ending a fitting accompaniment to their Valentine's Day sweets. KQG

SHANG, WENDY WAN-LONG *The Great Wall of Lucy Wu*. Scholastic, 2011 [320p]
ISBN 978-0-545-16215-9 \$17.99
Reviewed from galley R Gr. 4-6

Sixth grade is going to be the best year of eleven-year-old Lucy Wu's life. Or at least so it seems, until her parents inform her that Yi Po, her grandmother's sister from China, will be staying with Lucy's family until Christmas. Now Lucy has to give up half of her bedroom to an old lady who smells like Vicks VapoRub and gets up at the crack of dawn—and who is not and never will be Po Po, Lucy's beloved, recently deceased grandmother. To make matters worse, Lucy's parents are making Lucy attend Chinese school in an effort to get their American-born daughter to better respect her heritage, and they are threatening to forbid her from playing her beloved basketball if her attitude does not improve. Most readers will know where this is going, but the book's predictability is not necessarily a fault here, rather just another comfortable element of a cozily hopeful exploration of family dynamics and cultural history. Yi Po's gentle sense of humor and serious cooking skills inevitably win her grandniece over, and Lucy realizes that a connection to Yi Po is an honor, not a rebuke, to her grandmother's memory. Though the relationship between Lucy and Yi Po is front and center in the story, Shang also capably portrays the family as a whole, presenting a fully realized unit that has both smooth and rough times. Bits of Chinese history and culture as well as allusions to incidents of prejudice and racism are effectively integrated without melodrama, leaving the focus entirely on Lucy's preteen and familial experience. Her struggle to determine what and who is important to her will most certainly resonate with young readers. KQG

STAUFFACHER, SUE *Tillie the Terrible Swede: How One Woman, A Sewing Needle, and a Bicycle Changed History*; illus. by Sarah McMenemy. Knopf, 2011 36p
Library ed. ISBN 978-0-375-94442-0 \$20.99
Trade ed. ISBN 978-0-375-84442-3 \$17.99 Ad 5-8 yrs

Only two years after her arrival in America, Swedish immigrant Tillie Anderson began her record-setting bicycle racing career. First there was the hundred-mile race near Chicago in 1896, then time and distance records in the velodrome, followed by a world championship title and a host of wins until her retirement in 1902. Stauffacher relegates many of these particulars to thumbnail notations on the endpapers, choosing instead to focus her text on how Tillie scandalized polite



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