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Remington, R. & Zickefoose, S. (2009). Runaway Devil: How Forbidden Love Drove a 12-Year-Old to Murder Her Family. New York: McClelland & Stewart Ltd.

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Robert Remington and Sherri Zickefoose's book, "Runaway Devil," is a bone chilling piece of literature that uses a journalistic approach to identify the odious truth behind a young girl and her older boyfriend's motives for murdering her family in a "quiet suburban street in Medicine Hat, Alberta" (p. xi). Using interviews, court hearings, blog posts, social media sites, and internet instant messages, the authors tell the story of a teenage rebel who experiences the troubling world of being an adolescent. While she grows up in a supportive and loving environment, she turns towards heavy-metal music and goth culture as a way to express her true emotions. Remington and Zickefoose look to analyze and break down the reasons as to how a 12-year-old girl was able to manipulate a 23-year-old man into committing a heinous crime against her parents and brother. The book focuses on the detailed and organized timeline, starting from when the murders were committed to the final verdict hand given to the murderous couple.

Remington and Zickefoose go into depth to explore how J.R.'s family life may have influenced her to participate in this inexplicable crime. Neighbours describe Marc and Debra's family as "always [treating] each other with respect, they treated their children with the same respect and love" (p. 16). When the family moved to the quiet town of Medicine Hat, J.R. was perceived by her peers as a kind, gentle, and understanding individual who still had her preteen innocence. But when J.R. reached the beginning of her early adolescence she went through a drastic change. She became involved with the local goth crowd that got together at the Medicine

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Hat mall and began to drift apart from her circle of school friends. Not long after, her preteen innocence was nowhere to be found. Her parents began to notice an extreme change in her appearance and behaviour, and tension had significantly raised within the household because of “her association with older guys and with her growing responsibility” (p. 59). J.R. now had a lack of freedom due to her parents enforcing more rules within the household, which led to more rebellious acts against her parents’ wishes. She met 23-year-old Jeremy Steinke through the goth crowd and both were intrigued by the other; they were unaware of the significant 7-year age gap between them. Jeremy was seen by the others as “a really hyper kid, everybody liked him but there were days he was miserable” (p. 68). Jeremy had a rough upbringing by a mother who was a heavy drinker and a father who was abusive. Over time, Jeremy began to abuse substances himself and dropped out of school “three months into Grade 10” (p. 37). Remington and Zickefoose provide insight that J.R.’s parents taking away privileges for her to use the internet to communicate with Jeremy, as well as a lack of freedom and trust, may have been some of the driving forces that ultimately resulted in the murder of her family.

Evidently, Remington and Zickefoose use internet instant messages exchanged between J.R. and Jeremy as a means of exploring the lovers’ relationship in further depth. Police officers assigned to the case were able to pinpoint sufficient evidence between J.R. and Jeremy using records of messages they exchanged early in their relationship, which showed for the most part how happy they were to have each other in their lives. But over time, as J.R.’s parents began enforcing more rules and restrictions in the household, the topics discussed between J.R. and Jeremy took a turn for the worst. One of J.R.’s emails to Jeremy stated: “So I have this plan. [sic] it begins with me killing them and ends with me living with you” (p. 81). The couple began to plot a massacre of their own in an attempt to recreate their own version of their favorite

movie, “Natural Born Killers.”

Remington and Zickefoose’s use of interviews between the detectives and the two suspects in the case allows them to piece together how the couple conspired to kill J.R.’s family. Sergeants Sheehan and Cole’s jobs were to “catch their untruths and challenge them at every turn” (p. 141) throughout the interviews. Because J.R. was an underage individual when she committed the crime, detectives had to follow Canada’s “Youth Criminal Justice Act,” which “provides enhanced rights and protection for children” (p. 142). On April 25, detective Sheehan, a handsome 35-year-old man, manages to gain J.R.’s trust through their mutual interest in music. J.R. revealed that Jeremy first stabbed her mom as she was coming down the stairs. J.R.’s dad, who had a screwdriver in hand, proceeded to fight Jeremy off, but Jeremy stabbed him as well before moving upstairs to stab J.R.’s brother in the throat and chest. J.R. also confessed to stabbing her brother once because he would not sit still. Detective Sheehan then let her write an apology letter to her parents and allowed her to exchange personal letters back and forth with her lover. On April 26, Jeremy was interviewed by Sheehan but was not able to get much out of him other than a similar story of what J.R. had told him the previous day. He learned that, during the murders, Jeremy was high on drugs and alcohol and that it was J.R. who murdered her brother by slitting this throat. On May 4, an undercover cop named Cory Both was in the same transport van as Jeremy. Without any hesitancy, Jeremy revealed, “I might get off on one of those charges, she killed her brother” (p. 191). To conclude the interview, Both secured a confession from Jeremy, who admitted to the killings and described in detail how he had stabbed Mark and Debra.

A year passed before court proceedings began. With the help of crime scene police investigators and forensic analysis, there was a sufficient amount of evidence against the couple who committed the horrific crime to plead guilty to all charges presented before them.

Stephanie Cleary's relentless cross examination of J.R. provided the jury with information about the internet messages between her and Jeremy, the drawing found in her locker of her family being burned alive and running towards Jeremy's truck, and the jailhouse love letters sent between the two stating that they were legends for committing such crimes. On November 8 2008, "the jurors found J.R. guilty of three counts of first-degree murder" (p. 222). She was sentenced to the maximum of six years in prison as a young offender and another four years of conditional supervision in the community. J.R. was also considered for the Intensive Rehabilitative Custody and Supervision Program. As for Jeremy's verdict, on November 14, he was found guilty of first degree murder on all counts and was given the mandatory sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole for 25 years. Remington and Zickefoose conclude by recognizing that "the most disturbing outcome of the trial is that neither J.R. nor Jeremy Steinke ever took responsibility for the death of Jacob" (p. 251). J.R.'s lawyer gives a brief update a couple years later on J.R.'s progress, stating that she is doing very well both from an academic and therapeutic perspective. The lawyer believes it is time to start reintegrating her into society so that she can get on with her life.

It is Remington and Zickefoose's intention to provide in-depth insight to the chilling crime committed by a 12-year-old girl and her 23-year-old lover, and to provide evidence to the public about what really happened in this sensational case. Some limitations to the story include, the fact that, because so many youths were involved, many of the individuals' real names could not be released for confidentiality reasons. Not being able to read the actual dialogue and conversations was another limitation. One area that could have been expanded on was going more into depth and pressing the suspects to determine which individual caused the death of J.R.'s brother, Jacob, and pressing the accused for more information because to this day these

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details are still being called into question.

Remington and Zickefoose's intended audience is individuals who study criminology or who work in forensic settings. The book provides insight about gathering supportive evidence that will help convict those involved in criminal activity. It may also serve as an excellent teaching resource in sociology and social work departments. Remington and Zickefoose look at the significant influence that family interactions and their dynamics can have on an individual's choice of peers, relationship partners, and behaviours.

Remington and Zickefoose provide an in-depth analysis through the use of interviews, court hearings, blog posts, social media sites and internet instant messages that look to identify the factors that contributed to the occurrence of shocking crime committed by a young couple. "Runaway Devil" was a captivating read, a chilling true crime story that was difficult to put down. This book would be recommended to anyone who is interested in anything related to crime such as criminal justice, true crime stories, or forensic science.