

# Stillpoint

By Patricia Campbell Kowal

Reviewed by D. Andrew McChesney

As readers we often prefer a certain author, a certain genre, or a particular theme in our reading. Many of us are loathe to step outside of our preconceived and often narrow range of reading opportunities. As bookstore customers and library browsers, we make many of our decisions based on the cover illustration and title. It is a shame that we do, for often that story that does not appeal to us at first glance can turn out to be an inspiring and uplifting read.

Such is the case with *Stillpoint* by Patricia Campbell Kowal. Because of the title and the cover, my first assumption was that it was probably a little too feminine and a little too self-analytical for my reading tastes. But, having won a copy of it at my second ever SASP meeting, and having had it graciously autographed by the author, I determined that I would read it, and that I would try to keep an open mind as I did so.

Was I ever wrong regarding my first impressions of the story! I found it to be a touching and emotionally moving story, nearly a lifelong “biography” of a very likable, believable, and yet fictional character. The writing itself is clear, concise, and inspiring; qualities that allow the reader to progress steadily through the story without the need to reread or try to guess at the author’s meaning and intent. As with all exceptionally well written stories, I found that I lost track of my surroundings and was physically present, perhaps as a silent observer, in the events unfolding on the page.

*Stillpoint* encompasses Sam Barsby’s life, from his childhood in Vermont, through a cross country hobo-like train trip during the Great Depression, his military service in the Pacific during the Second World War, and his migration to Australia. It covers his times of great loss and sadness, as well as his moments of extreme joy and happiness. The story pivots on that instant in Sam’s life when, with help of a Native Australian, he gently drives away the despair and agony of his suffering and begins to look forward to a continued existence. This is his *Stillpoint*, that moment when directions change but there is no movement at all. It is a rebirth, a renewal, and following this, Sam eventually returns to his boyhood home for one last visit.

*Stillpoint* is a very well written, uplifting, and inspirational story. I most strongly urge everyone to read it and to pass it along to others so that they might read it as well.

*Stillpoint* was published in 2005 through Vantage Press, Inc. and at that time had a cover price of \$12.95. It carries an ISBN of 0-533-14782-4.

Reviewed by James Bartlett Parry

Ms. Kowal skillfully weaves past with present in this intriguing romantic, tragic epic. Through chapters that alternate time periods, we witness wars and other calamities between brief respites of love and happiness. All of this happens through the eyes of several generations of the Barsby family.

This style of writing is difficult to pull-off and, in many books, confuses the reader, but Kowal relates her tale in a skillful and seemingly effortless manner that truly makes the story flow. She masterfully details the ambience of each location and era.

The first page will draw you into Sam's dreams of flying geese - that eventually take him on an odyssey around the world. Brace yourself for a plethora of tragedies (but there is, ultimately and thankfully, a happy ending).