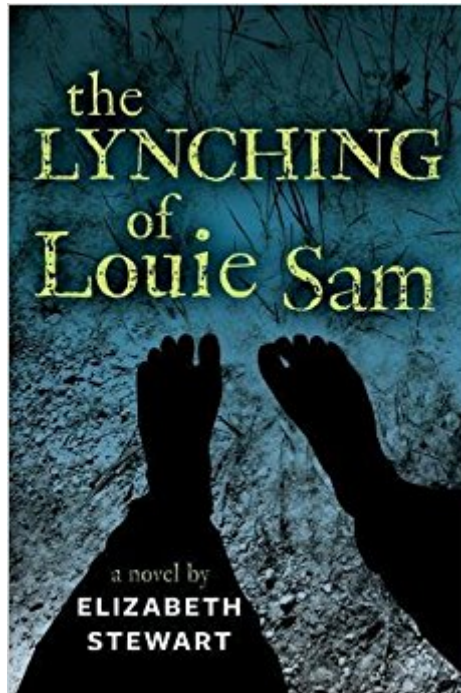




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# The Lynching Of Louie Sam



## Synopsis

Murder, racism, and injustice wreak havoc in a frontier town. The year is 1884, and 15-year-old George Gillies lives in the Washington Territory, near the border with British Columbia. In this newly settled land, white immigrants have an uneasy relationship with the Native Indians. When George and his siblings discover the murdered body of a local white man, suspicion immediately falls on a young Indian named Louie Sam. George and his best friend, Pete, follow a lynch mob north into Canada, where the terrified boy is seized and hung. But even before the deed is done, George begins to have doubts. Louie Sam was a boy, only 14; could he really be a vicious murderer? Were the mob leaders motivated by justice, or were they hiding their own guilt? As George uncovers the truth, tensions in the town begin to rise, and he must face his own part in the tragedy. Inspired by the true story of the lynching, recently acknowledged as a historical injustice by Washington State, this powerful novel offers a stark depiction of historical racism and the harshness of settler life.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 14 years

Grade Level: 6 - 10

## Customer Reviews

Gr 6-9-George Gillies, 15, witnesses a lynching the night he follows a mob of settlers to the International Border between the Washington Territory and Canada. Intent on justice for the murder of a white man, the mob seizes an Indian boy who is in the custody of Canadian officials and

suspected of the crime. It is February 27, 1884, and the relationship between the Native tribes and settlers is tense. George, moved by the anger and excitement of the mob, ignores observations that support Louie Sam's innocence, choosing to believe that justice has been served. After the lynching, he encounters rumors and pieces of evidence that leave him confused. Has the mob murdered an innocent 14-year-old? Almost everyone in his town seems determined to bury the truth: Who actually murdered Mr. Bell, who led the mob, and what actually happened the night of the lynching? Eventually George cannot continue to conceal what he knows, and the consequences for him and his family are severe. Stewart takes on the daunting task of reflecting the period's social history through a single incident, and sometimes her characters must represent large and disparate groups of people. This can lead to didactic moments, especially when the Native American characters speak, but it also serves as context for a little-known and disturbing true story. The plot moves quickly and should interest many readers, even those not usually drawn to historical fiction. The violence and tragedy are balanced by a bit of romance, which will make this title a good recommendation for middle school and early high school readers. -Caroline Hanson, Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter High School, Washington, DC

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Told from a teen's fictionalized viewpoint, this historical novel is based on a shocking true event. In 1884, two young boys from the Washington Territory followed a lynch mob, including their fathers, that hung an Indian boy, Louis Sam, 15, who was wrongfully accused of murdering a white settler, James Bill, and setting his cabin on fire. Teenage George's immediate, present-tense narrative reveals the secrets and lies, the settlers' daily struggles, and their fierce racism about the "wild heathens" who speak "gibberish" and could rise up to steal back the land. The personal profiles of the small frontier town's inhabitants are sometimes hard to keep straight, but they do show the various settlers' viewpoints, including the savage self-righteousness in the name of "civilized justice." Readers will also be held by the mystery right up until the end: who did murder James Bill? Why? A final note fills in historical facts. Grades 7-12. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The book reminded me of To Kill a Mocking Bird. The two stories are not similar but I experienced similar feelings. The Lynching of Louie Sam has a nice pace and development that makes it a great book for high school.

"According to the Tuskegee Institute of Alabama, between 1882 and 1968, there were 4,742 lynchings in the United States. In Canada during the same period, there was one - the lynching of Louie Sam." The Lynching of Louis Sam, although fiction, is based on a true story. Most of the facts in this book are taken from the records and from the documentary of the same name. They are as follows: In 1884, near Nooksack, in the Washington Territory, a storekeeper named James Bell was murdered and his homestead set on fire. A witness claimed to have seen Louis Sam, a young Sto:lo boy of approximately 14 years near the scene and 'there was murder in his eyes'. Sam lived in British Columbia which was only a few kilometers away. The Canadian authorities were notified and Sam was taken into custody. However, they insisted that, before they would extradite Sam, he would be tried in Canada. Instead, a group of men from Nooksack disguised themselves, some in women's clothes, crossed the border and took Sam from where he was being held. Just a few metres from the border but on the Canadian side, Sam was lynched. The Sto:lo tribe threatened revenge and the Canadian government, fearing a border war, demanded the arrest of the mob leaders and even sent agents undercover to try to find the guilty parties. Eventually, though, the investigation was dropped by both governments and no one was ever charged with the lynching. Although the truth of Bell's murder has never been fully discovered, there is a great deal of evidence that Louie Sam was innocent but, due to the racism of the time and the fact that his father was in prison for killing cattle and was suspected of the murder of a settler, he made an easy scapegoat. Author, Elizabeth Stewart stays very close to the facts. Although she makes it clear she believes Sam was innocent, she deliberately avoids trying to recreate Sam's thoughts or those of the Sto:lo tribe. Instead, the narrator of the story is George Gillies, the 14-year-old son of Scottish immigrants, and one of the children who first spotted the fire at the Bell house. When the lynch mob is being formed, George wants to go but his father, a member of the 'vigilance committee' tells him to stay home. Instead, George and a friend follow the mob and he is present at the lynching. He is surprised by the fact that Sam is just a boy. He also notices other things which make him think Sam is innocent. He tries to convince others of this and, although his father agrees with him, it becomes very clear that no one else does or, at least, is willing to do anything. Many, in fact, have their own suspicions of who murdered Bell and why but see no purpose served by saying anything. After all, Sam was just an Indian and, anyway, the citizens of Nooksack are seeking statehood and revealing their role in the lynching could jeopardize this. Although a work of fiction, by staying close to the facts, Stewart has written a compelling tale of the dark side of both Canadian and American history. Too often, fictional accounts of the 'old west' show it as a period of unbridled freedom, a sort

of surreal Star Warsesque time where men were men and the white hats always won. The Lynching of Louie Sam is aimed at a YA audience but, for anyone interested in the truth about frontier life, especially the idea of 'frontier justice', this novel gives an unflinching account of Lynch's Law.

What a dynamic book this was. The story was engrossing and fascinating on many fronts. First, the author sucked me in with the historical perspective of the story. I had never heard of this incredibly sad story of the murder of a 13 year old boy due to mob action and that is where the sadness simply begins. Ms. Stewart slowly, methodically and masterfully unwrapped the storyline to show something much more sinister that was going on in this small town being careful to keep the gut wrenching and spine tingling emotion present. To boot, Ms. Stewart follows the story with the historical facts behind her book which were as fascinating as her story. Normally, I would skip sections like this but found myself as enthralled with that part of the book as I was the main story. At 180 some odd pages, this JUVENILE piece of literature showed its' intelligence that quality books targeted towards our youth do not need to have vampires, wolves or popular "mean girls" to be engrossing! On a side note, there is the instance of the usage of one expletive that, personally, I found offensive, particularly in a book targeted towards young adults. I took the time to check this out with a middle school librarian, a children's librarian and a library director. All assured me that due to the context in which the word was used that it was appropriate.

The book is based upon a true story, which makes it more intriguing, and sad too. While I found Louie Sam an interesting character, and I enjoyed getting to know his world and customs, I wasn't too impressed with the writing. Could've been better. The ending was disappointing and provided little closure. I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

In 1884, a mob of settlers in the Washington Territory cross into Canada, take a fourteen-year-old Native boy named Louie Sam from the Canadian police, and lynch him the day before he was due to testify about a murder. 15 year old Georgie disobeyed his father's orders to stay home. He and his best friend follow the mob. He found the body of the man Louie supposedly killed, he wants to be there to see justice done. Almost immediately George begins wondering if this was justice. What the mob finds is a scared Native boy, younger than George. A boy who accuses the leaders of the mob before he dies. George begins asking questions, poking around, discovering things no one wants revealed. Even people who know the truth refuse to act on their knowledge. He gradually

realizes the prejudice and fear in the people surrounding him, realizes that nothing is simple. George finds the real killer, and that puts his life and the lives of his family, at risk. And nothing will bring Louie back, not even the truth. It's an amazing coming-of-age story about a real incident involving real people from America's past. As sad as the ending is, I am glad the author did not trivialize this incident by pasting on a phony happy ending. This leaves George, and Louie Sam, feeling real.

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