Orphan Train by Christina Baker Kline

The book by Christina Baker Kline is based around a dark period in our country’s history when hundreds of thousands of children, orphans, homeless or neglected were shipped by train through the upper Midwest. There they were given away to families who would agree to take them – some to work on the farms, some to work as mother’s helpers, some to thrive, and some to fail.

The book, Orphan Train combines the fictional tales of Niamh (pronounced Neeve) Powers, an Irish immigrant who, shortly after immigrating to America with her family, is left orphaned in a tenement fire and has been put into an overcrowded orphanage in New York City.

The next part of the story is the modern day tale of 17 year old Molly Ayer, a teenager who has been passed from one foster home to another and is in danger of once again being rejected by her foster family. Her background is a Penobscot Native American orphan who, once again, is in trouble with the law.

In 1930 the little orphan girl, Niamh, at only 9 years old, is put on a train with many homeless children to go to the Midwest to work and, hopefully, have a chance at a better life than in the overcrowded cities of the East Coast. In 2011 Molly, the teen in the book who struggles growing up and wants and needs to be accepted meets Niamh, now in her 90’s. The communication tools of today that include the Internet and Ancestry databases brings the two women together in an unforgettable tale of abuse, prejudice, hope, caring, and determination, as well as a deep understanding and admiration for one another.