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### ***The Fire Trail***

Christine Sunderland

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Reviewed by Carol Hoyer for Reader Views (6/16)

In “The Fire Trail” by Christine Sunderland, we meet Jessica Thierry, a U.C. Berkley grad student who is working on her Ph.D. in History. She has a hard time trusting others and is determined not to be like her sisters with their pregnancies, promiscuous ways, and drug abuse. In fact, she is so determined not to be that way it has taken over her life and she cannot see the good in others around her.

Jessica takes daily walks or jogs through the Fire Trail until she hears a woman’s screams and runs right into the rapist-murderer. After working with the police Detective Gan, she tries to focus on her dissertation knowing the killer is still out there looking for her.

By chance, she meets Anna Aguilar, a docent for Comerford House Museum who offers her a job and is accepting of her, no questions asked. Through Anna, Jessica meets Father Nate the groundskeeper for the museum, and his brother Nicholas, a former college professor impacted by paralysis, who has difficulty speaking and moving about. Jessica also meets Zachary Aguilar, son of Anna, who is also a graduate student working on his dissertation.

It is through these four individuals that Jessica learns to trust others again and to believe in good over bad. As she learns more about the history surrounding the Comerford Museum she begins to see that sometimes the world is not what it seems and that there are many people out there searching for the same things in life. Each of the four individuals she has become friends with has had something tragic happen to them that make them who they are, whether they like it or not.

Given that the rapist-murderer is still out there, everyone is on their guard until Jessica goes missing on the Fire Trail. Little does she know she will encounter this crazy person again and he will bring harm to one of her new friends. Through her determination and keen sense of survival, Jessica is able to change her life and see the world in a different light.

Sunderland’s book is interesting to read and while the story of Jessica and her new friends covers most of the book, there is an underlying story. Yes, there is good and bad in the world, but it’s all how we interpret it and how we see God or don’t see God. We have all chosen a path to live, which makes us feel secure. We all have a mission here on earth, and we try to fulfill our mission with God’s help and those of our friends.

“The Fire Trail” by Christine Sunderland is not a book readers can just breeze through if they are looking at the underlying story. It takes time and thought, and challenges our beliefs. She does an excellent job of developing the characters, and subtly adding in thoughts on the purpose of life in a not so accepting world.