

Early Review of Steplings by TexasBookLover blogger Michelle Lancaster, posted on her blog, on *Library Thing*, and on Barnes & Noble.

You know when some horrible accident occurs and you can't look away? Something that commands your reluctant horrified attention? Like a train wreck, plane crash, volcanic eruption? Meet Jason Sanborn. He is that train.

But it's not as if he doesn't have his reasons: his mother died of cancer; his father fell off the wagon after 15 sober years and married a woman he met in AA; he now has an eleven-year-old stepsister; he has a court appearance coming up on an assault charge; he dropped out of high school and his beloved Lisa is going off to college in Austin.

Critical mass is achieved when Jason gets a Dear John letter from Lisa. He throws a few things in his pack grabs his guitar and takes off to hitch to Austin. As he is walking out the door his know-it-all stepsister Emily shows up with her own pack. She is painfully unhappy with her mother for moving her to Mesquite and away from the father she adores in Austin. Jason and Emily begin their adventures together hitching their way across Texas. Meanwhile all hell breaks loose at home involving Amber Alerts and TV news vans parked across the street as Jason's stepmother accuses him of kidnapping. So now the police are looking for them.

This novel takes off during the second half. The characters take on vivid personality and the relationships deepen in a delightfully believable way. We follow Jason as he desperately tries to contact Lisa and Emily discovers that her father is not the saint she had believed. The two make page-turning strides toward responsibility and maturity as they learn what an awesome task it is to take responsibility for each other.