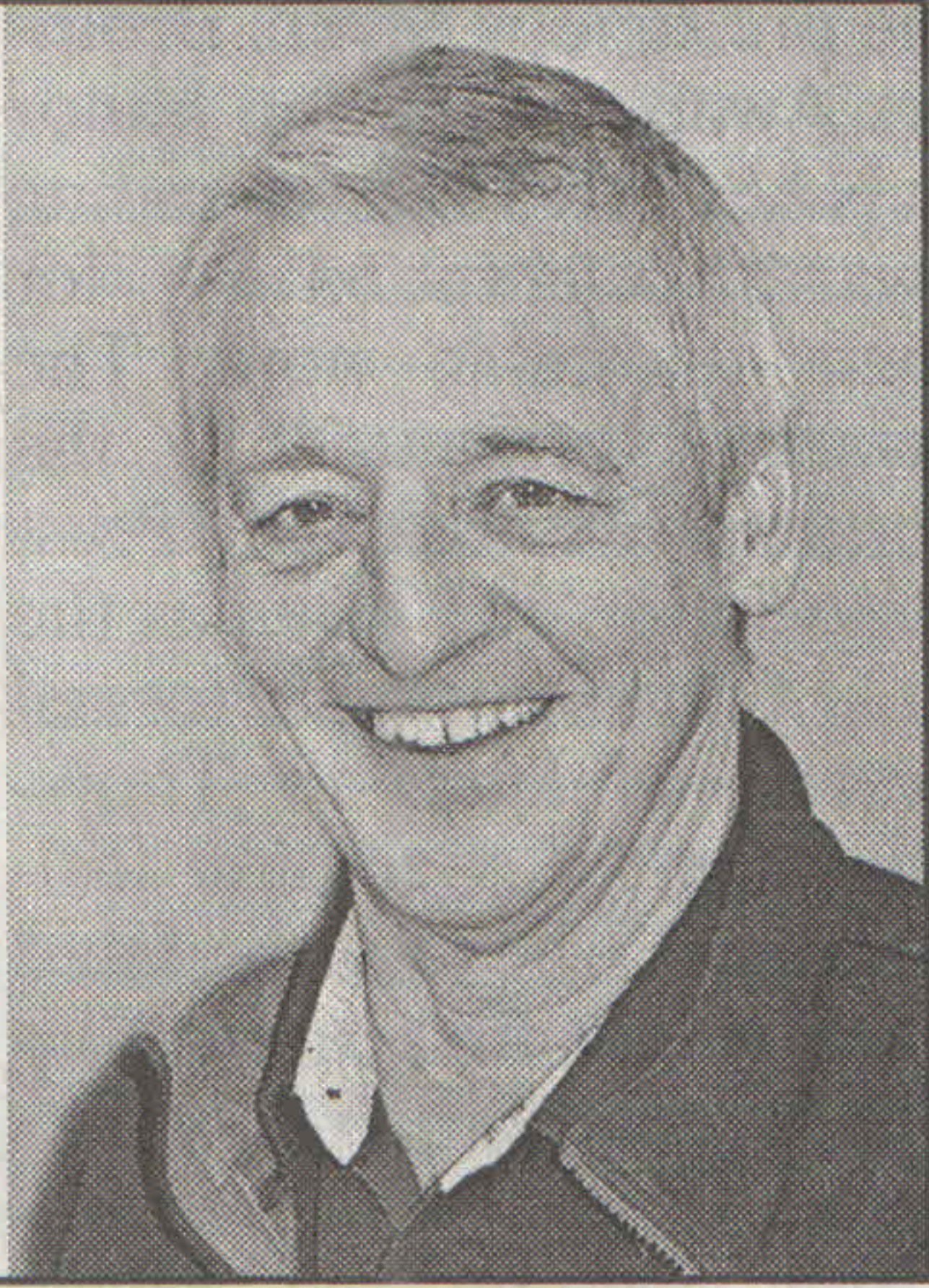
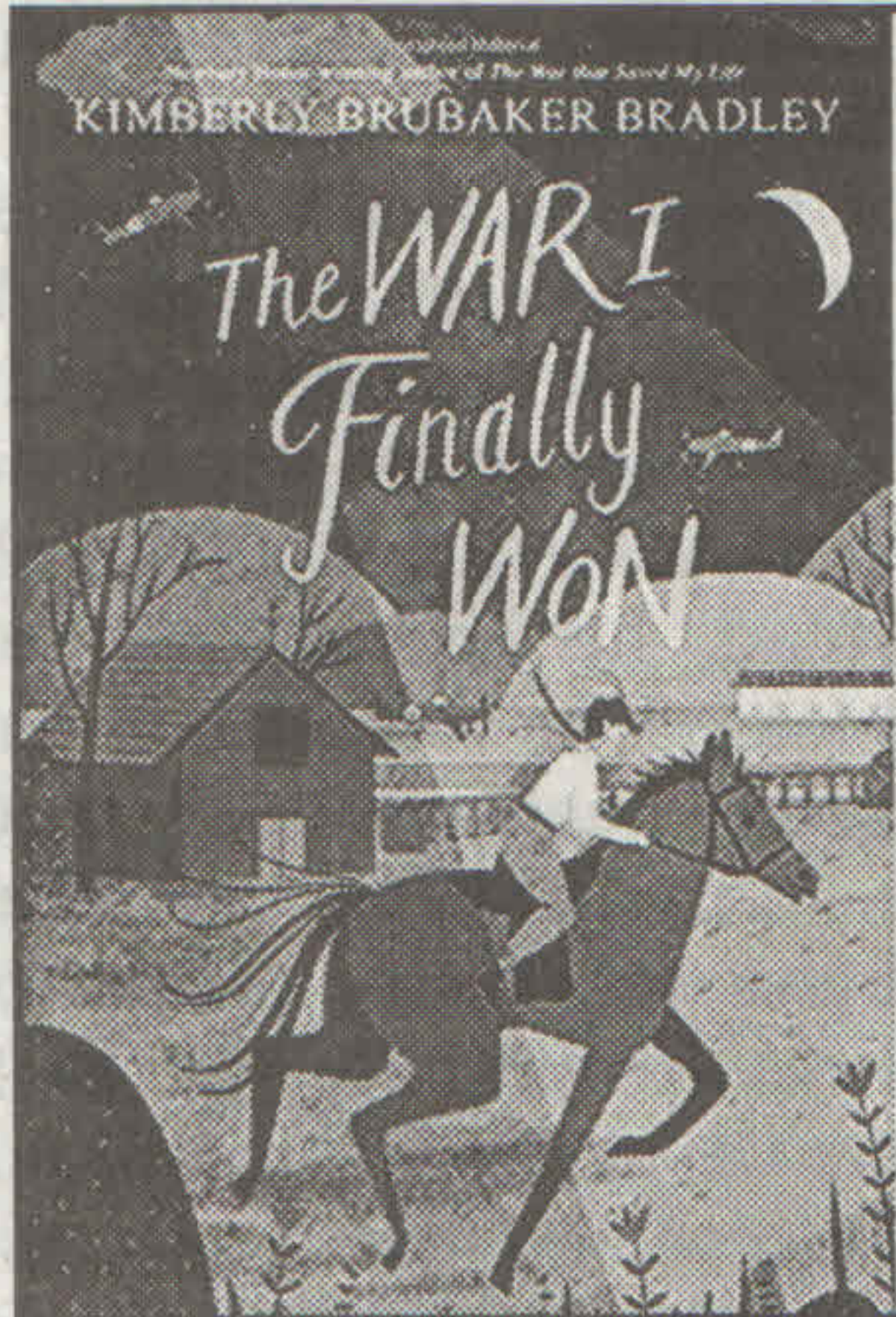




The Village School's Children's Book of the Month



Book reviewed by **George Bennett**
(Village School fourth-to-sixth-grade teacher)

'The War I Finally Won'

By Kimberley Brubaker Bradley

Picking up a sequel can be a little unsettling, because there's always the chance that it won't live up to the first book, but fans of the outstanding "The War That Saved My Life" need have no worries. "In The War I Finally Won," author Kimberley Brubaker Bradley has produced a sequel just as good, and in some ways even more satisfying than the book which first introduced its intrepid heroine, Ada Smith.

In the first book, Ada and her little brother Jamie were evacuated from the slums of London's east end at the start of the Second World War, as part of the government's policy of removing children from potential bombing. Their abusive mother had always resented Ada for being born with a club foot, which she refused to have treated, so that Ada grew up thinking of herself as a cripple. By the end of the book, however, she had mostly adjusted to her new life in the country, and the foster mother who took the children in.

"The War I Finally Won" begins only days after the end of the first book, which left Ada and her foster mother homeless, after a bomb had flattened their house. The book moves rapidly through a series of re-adjustments, in which the family are given a cottage on the estate of Lady Thorton, the local lady of the manor, whose snooty exterior hides her own deep insecurities about the war.

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It's no spoiler to say that Ada's foot is repaired in the first few pages, so that she is able to walk unaided, and even run. The Village School fourth to sixth graders — who'd heard the first book as a read-aloud, and were desperate to hear the sequel — cheered out loud when Ada took her first steps.

The war plays a bigger part in this sequel, and no family is left untouched. The book deals sensitively but briskly with a realistic string of tragedies that affect Ada's friends and family, and through all of them, Ada herself has to deal with her own insecurities, and disturbing memories of her heartless mother. What she doesn't see is that her growing courage and resilience is an inspiration to everyone around her, including Lady Thorton, who is terrified of losing her pilot son in battle.

A whole extra dimension is opened up when Ruth, a refugee German-Jewish teenager, is billeted on the family. They — and the local villagers — at first treat her with great suspicion as an enemy national who is probably a spy, but gradually come to understand that she has far more reason to hate Hitler than they do. Ada discovers that Ruth shares her love of horses, and is a competent and experienced rider. Although Lady Thorton has forbidden the "German" to touch her horses, the two girls ride regularly together in secret, with Ada lending Ruth her beloved pony, Butter, a gift from her foster mother.

By the end of the book, a whole range of narrative strands are brought together and resolved in a way that doesn't diminish the losses that various characters have sustained, but sees everyone learn from them and rise above them. Ada herself manages to bring about reconciliation between a number of estranged characters in a way which is believable and very emotionally satisfying.

"The War I Finally Won," and the book that preceded it, are exceptionally fine books that have proved hugely popular read-alouds with the fourth-to-sixth-grade class at the Village School, where reading aloud is a valued part of the daily curriculum. As individual reading books, they are quite accessible to sixth-grade readers and above. But, as with all good children's books, adults will want to read them too.