



# Eggplant Alley

*D. Cataneo*

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## **Eggplant Alley** D. Cataneo

The hero of Cataneo's intensely moving novel is thirteen-year-old Nicky Martini who lives in an apartment complex, known as Eggplant Alley, in the Bronx in 1970 and struggles to cope with a changing family, a changing neighborhood, and a changing world. Long-haired hippies, racial tension, and the divisive Viet Nam war leave Nicky longing for the good old days. Nicky's complaints and remembrances revolve around the five things that ruined his childhood: the nosebleed he received from President Kennedy; the Great Northeast Blackout (which he thought he caused); the end of neighborhood stickball games; the departure to Viet Nam of his beloved big brother, Roy; and Roy's hippie girlfriend, Margalo. With Roy overseas for a year, Nicky is left behind with two distracted, worried parents. And for him, enough is enough. He decides to do something about the endless downward spiral of events. He decides to lead a crusade to revive neighborhood stickball, which he is sure will spark a return to all that was innocent and beautiful about the good old days. In the course of his year-long quest, Nicky confronts an ancient fortune-teller from the second floor; Willie Mays; his father's deep, dark secret from World War II; neighborhood bullies; and a huge romantic crush on Margalo. Most important is his encounter with Lester Allnuts, a new kid in the building who gives Nicky a fresh outlook on Eggplant Alley, and eventually on life in general. Lester is a country boy with a deep secret, and that secret makes him as eager as Nicky to revive stickball and rejuvenate Eggplant Alley. Working together toward the same goal - for entirely different reasons --- the boys develop a strong friendship. Before the year without Roy is over, Nicky learns Lester's secret --- and realizes the destructiveness of prejudice and fear, and the value of empathy and forgiveness. And he ultimately learns there is something far richer than the good old days: real hope for a better future. D.M.Cataneo is a native New Yorker and a magna cum laude graduate of Boston University's School of Public Communication who worked for 22 years for the Boston Globe and Boston Herald as a reporter, columnist, and editor. He is the author of six non-fiction books. He is currently teaching at the University of New Hampshire and lives in Durham, NH, with his family.

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