Deborah Ellis
The Courage to Hope

The Promise
A Story of Sisterly Devotion

Bookmark!
Celebrating Pride

Reviews of more than 40 titles by Jan Andrews, Lee Edward Födi, Thao Lam, Eric Walters and more
Books Matter.
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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR: Gabrielle Grimard has been drawing since she was young. Her passion for drawing and painting led her to pursue studies in fine arts and arts education at Concordia University. After she had her first child, she began her career as an illustrator. She moved from Montreal to Waterville, Quebec, where she now lives with her two children, several chickens and her husband, who builds wooden boats. They share an old barn as their artists’ studio.

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Festival

Telling Tales
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Westfield Heritage Village, Rockton
Parking at Rockton Fair Grounds

Celebrating Graphic Novels
Saturday, September 21st, 1-3pm
Hamilton Public Library,
Central Library

Nature Tales
Sunday, September 22nd, 11am-4pm
Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington
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As I sit to write this letter from the editor, it’s hard to imagine our readers enjoying this issue out on their decks or balconies as it’s still rather chilly here in Ontario. But I hope that’s where you’ll find yourself as you sit down to read the articles and reviews we’ve included here for you.

We have some interesting pieces in this issue for you to enjoy. Marylynn Miller Oke and I had the opportunity to chat with cousins Margie Wolfe, publisher of Second Story Press, and Pnina Bat Zvi, the host of a top-rated current-affairs program in Israel, about the writing and publishing of *The Promise*, a book about their mothers, Rachel and Toby, and their time spent in a concentration camp during World War II. While the process certainly wasn’t easy, both Margie and Pnina think their mothers would be proud. They hope that by sharing the story with students at schools, synagogues and libraries they will teach them about the consequences of hate.

After hearing Deborah Ellis present at the 2018 IBBY Congress in Athens, Kathy Stinson posted a portion of Deb’s speech on her blog. Someone then suggested she contact me and ask if I’d like to share it in *Canadian Children’s Book News*, which resulted in my asking Kathy if she’d like to expand that piece into a profile about Deb. Kathy was happy to do so, Deb agreed, and the end result is the beautiful piece you’ll read in this issue. Well-known for the number of works she’s had published and the accolades she’s received, Deb is even more of an inspiration for her stance around politics and social movements. I hope you’ll enjoy learning more about Deb as much as I did.

Authors Andrew Katz and Juliana Léveillé-Trudel also agreed to share their story of how they co-wrote *How to Catch a Bear Who Loves to Read/Comment attraper un ours qui aime lire*, creating two original versions of the same story, one in English and one in French. Their process was quite interesting and I hope it will give others food for thought.

We also chatted with S.K. Ali, author of *Saints and Misfits* and *Love from A to Z*, in our “Keep Your Eye On…” column; in honour of PRIDE parades and events, we have a fabulous list of LGBTQ2+ themed books in our “Bookmark!” section; and we reviewed 42 titles from picture books to YA literature that have been published recently.

Here’s to a summer of great reading!

Sandra O’Brien
Sisterly Devotion
Two cousins reveal their mothers’ long-kept story of childhood terror and unbreakable resilience during the Holocaust
BY MARYLYNN MILLER OKE

The moment had come for Pnina Bat Zvi and Margie Wolfe to release an emotional legacy from family memory — into the collective consciences of children around the world.

In a poignant interview, Pnina and Margie explain that The Promise is a loving tribute to their mothers, Rachel and Toby. In a modern time filled with tension and turmoil, they feel this ‘unpretty’ picture book also serves as a still-needed reminder that as human beings we are all equally deserving of love, respect and compassion.

Pnina & Margie | Rachel & Toby
Rachel’s daughter Pnina grew up in Israel. She entered the worlds of radio broadcasting and the military as a teenager. Pnina sent soldiers’ regards over the airwaves before moving on to news reporting and documentaries. After giving birth to twins at age 50, she now hosts a top-rated current affairs program in Israel.

Her cousin Margie, daughter to Toby, grew up in Toronto. She is an award-winning publisher, producing feminist-inspired social justice and human rights books for adults and young readers at Second Story Press, which she co-founded in 1980.

It seems they were ultimately destined to tell unforgettable stories.

Giving voice to whispers of memories
In The Promise, young Rachel and Toby were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp after their parents had been taken, then killed at Treblinka. The girls witnessed daily atrocities and became well aware of the unfathomable consequences if one misbehaved or became too sick to work.

“I started to hear about this story from my mom at a very young age,” recalls Pnina. “But, I had it in bits and pieces. As I grew older, I learned the whole story. I wanted to tell it to young readers. Maybe they will feel what I felt when I wrote it, or when I heard it first.”

Although Pnina repeatedly asked Rachel and Toby about writing their story, the sisters were very reluctant.

However, after both had passed away, Pnina said, “Margie, now the story is in our hands. Let’s write it down.” It took me a year to convince her.”

“I had to really convince myself that we could do something that would honour them,” reveals Margie. “That was the most stressful for us.”

Getting closer to the story
“I missed my mother so much,” stated Pnina. “So, I think this was one way to get closer to her. It became very clear about how to write it, what she felt. That dialogue is there.”

Pnina’s initial draft was followed by many more. It proved difficult to edit down the text.

“It was easy to figure out what I would do because Toby was a very brave and rebellious person,” describes Pnina. “My mother Rachel was calm, caring and a very strong woman.”

Pnina remembers a scene from The Promise where Rachel picks up a secret tin of coins that accidentally fell from Toby’s pocket while building a wall at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The precious tin was given to Toby by their father as her parents were being taken away by Nazi soldiers. At the time, her mother made Toby promise that the sisters would always stay together. No matter what.
“I worked on this for a long time,” said Pnina. “Rachel is afraid she will not be able to keep the promise, that she is not as brave as Toby. I wanted to bring in the doubt. The protagonists are not flat. They have doubts and fears. They encourage each other.”

Pnina feels the girls in the story had to acknowledge the absurd situation they were living in, in order to survive it. Margie also felt it was important that *The Promise* reflect Toby’s relentless audacity and the ability to endure.

“Toby worked when she was being watched and she didn’t work when she wasn’t,” recounts Margie. “She would sometimes get caught and be punished severely for it. Not obeying and not working when she was supposed to be, were important little victories for her.”

Finding a way through the dark

As a professional publisher, Margie wrestled with how to write the challenging story while connecting to young readers in a sensitive way. She remembers how Rachel and Toby shared their stories.

“They told it as fact because sometimes remembering was hard,” said Margie. “They were also telling it to children. They didn’t want to fall apart in front of us. There are many stories that they never told.”

At Second Story Press, Margie has published over 20 children’s books related to the Holocaust, including *The Secret of Gabi’s Dresser* and *Clara’s War* by Kathy Kacer, *Hana’s Suitcase* by Karen Levine and *All About Anne* by Anne Frank House. She feels they demonstrate how to tell difficult stories to children. The goal is to marry important content with great storytelling.

While conducting a recent tour at schools, synagogues and libraries, Pnina and Margie asked young audiences why they should read a 79-year-old story.

“Sometimes the kids just put their hands up and they knew,” said Margie. “So, we learn never to repeat again. We learn that history, so we understand today. That is most important because these stories tell us about the consequences of hate.”

“This whole story goes to hate crime,” states Pnina. “I believe that if we speak about hate crime, you have to teach it from a very young age.”

Margie acknowledges this extreme form of hatred can start with bullying or name calling before escalating into something greater.

“It’s not just about anti-Semitism. It’s about racism, homophobia and all forms of intolerance and oppression in the world today that sadly, sadly, sadly people seem to feel emboldened to voice out loud. The story is not in a time capsule and has extreme relevance today.”

Going forward, Margie says, “We should know better than when we start calling immigrants or refugees aliens or evil. Ours and other Second Story books will hopefully show kids that strangers should be welcomed, not sent away and reviled.”

Finding compassion even if it hurts

Margie and Pnina discovered that children are clear about good and evil. They also want in some way to understand the fear and suffering endured by Rachel, Toby and the other girls in Barrack 25. That’s a good thing.

As a publisher, Margie is comfortable with upsetting young readers — for the right purpose.

“I don’t care if they cry a little bit. The crying will not last long and then they will remember. Hopefully, the compassion will stay with them.”

Making it surprisingly real

“It’s not a pretty little book,” states Margie. “Our illustrator, Isabelle Cardinal, was perfect. Her work was not easy. The match was right, and we are really pleased with the art.”

When considering artwork for the book, the team had to overcome the fact that no pre-wartime photographs of their mothers existed, so they provided Isabelle with youthful photos of Pnina, and Margie’s sister Helen, who most resembled the young Rachel and Toby.

“That was the way we had Isabelle work,” explains Margie. “She combines photography with illustration. It’s a surreal, real look. A story in Auschwitz is real, but to tell it, it feels surreal.”

What happened to Rachel and Toby?

“They actually went on to another camp,” reveals Margie. “They were in Bergen-Belsen where Anne Frank died. They were liberated, but Anne Frank was killed almost immediately when she arrived.”

Freed by English and Canadian soldiers, Rachel and Toby alongside many others had nowhere to go. They stayed at the Displaced Persons Camp (DCP) at Bergen-Belsen, which
happened to be the location of a never-before-seen photo that Margie discovered several years ago.

“I was looking at photographs in the museum. I’m not tall and there was a photograph way above my head. I started jumping up trying to see it better and people, I’m sure, thought I was a lunatic. I recognized immediately that here is my aunt and mother.”

Eventually, the girls married. At Rachel’s insistence, she moved with her husband and Pnina’s older sister home to Israel, where they faced poverty and near starvation. Margie was born in the DPC at Bergen-Belsen before she and her parents moved to Canada.

Over the years, Rachel and Toby would drop everything to visit each other until Toby’s death in 1995. Margie and Pnina feel that if any light came out of their harrowing experience, it may be the unbreakable bond that Rachel and Toby shared throughout their lives.

At a recent presentation of their book, Margie and Pnina were amazed to see frail, elderly visitors pay their respects, including some of the girls from the story. Incredibly, an unfamiliar gentleman shared how Toby had hidden and saved him during the war.

“Their experience was a shared experience most of us will never understand,” said Margie. “But hopefully we can learn from it.”

Toby died in 1995, with Rachel by her side.

Rachel passed away in 2012. Toby’s daughters were with her at the end.

Putting it Out There
Reflective of its unifying message, The Promise is available in many languages and is being distributed in different countries around the world.

“We’re proud of that and we’re sad our mothers are not here to experience it,” laments Pnina.

“There are some countries where they have no idea about the Holocaust,” states Margie. “But, because of what’s going on in the world today, young readers can empathize and connect to familial love and devotion.”

This story ends. The legacy doesn’t.
After receiving their first starred review in Kirkus, Margie felt they had completed their job well and could finally exhale. As for their mothers’ other stories, they will stay securely within the family.

“It’s done,” exclaims Pnina. “It was very difficult for me, writing and crying.”

“The point was to honour the women,” said Margie. “It was a story that could and should be told.”

Margie and Pnina think that their mothers would be very pleased with their efforts and the book itself.

Poetically, just like the photo found at Bergen-Belsen, the cousins “like to think their mothers are smiling down on them.”

Marylynn Miller Oke is a freelance writer. With experience in broadcast and public relations, she writes frequently for the academic and non-profit sectors.
News Roundup

AWARDS, BOOK LAUNCHES, ANNOUNCEMENTS AND THE LATEST NEWS

IN MEMORIAM Allan MacDougall, 1947-2019

It is with deep sadness that we announce the death of Allan MacDougall, co-founder and former CEO of Raincoast Books. Allan entered book publishing in 1972, joining McClelland & Stewart as a sales representative. He left M&S in 1976, having become their sales manager. Moving to Vancouver, Allan joined Mark Stanton in creating Stanton and MacDougall Ltd., a firm of publishers’ representatives. The pair went on to found Raincoast Book Distribution in 1979, and Allan became CEO in 1998, serving until his retirement in 2010.

Under Allan’s guidance, Raincoast became the Canadian publisher of J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter books, a series that went on to sell over 12 million copies in Canada and transform children’s publishing. In 2003, the Canadian edition of Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix was the first edition of a Harry Potter book in the world to be published on 100% Ancient Forest Friendly 100% post-consumer paper.

Allan is survived by his wife Angie MacDougall, board chair for Raincoast; his three children: his son Peter MacDougall, VP Sales for Raincoast; his son Angus; his daughter Daisy and his five grandchildren. Our condolences go out to Allan’s family and friends.

Save the Date!

This November, the CCBC will be hosting two seminars. Get Published: Illustrator’s Edition will take place on Saturday, November 16 and The Business of Writing: Selling Your Books, Selling Yourself will take place on Saturday, November 23. The seminars will be held at 40 Orchard View Blvd., Toronto, Ontario, above Northern District Library in Room 200, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The cost is $100 per session, refreshments will be provided. Space is limited, so be sure to register early.

2020 Hans Christian Andersen Nominees

The Hans Christian Andersen Nominating Committee of IBBY Canada has nominated Isabelle Arsenault as the illustrator and Deborah Ellis as the author for consideration by the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Jury. Arsenault has won the prestigious Governor General’s Literary Award for Children’s Literature — Illustration three times and has twice had picture books named to the New York Times Best Illustrated Books of the Year list, making this a much deserved nomination. Ellis is well-known for the number of works she’s had published and the number of accolades she has received, but it is her stance around politics and social movements that make Ellis such a deserving nominee. Congratulations, Isabelle and Deborah!

To See the Stars by Jan Andrews

When Jan Andrews approached me about publishing her young adult novel, To See the Stars, I was thrilled and daunted. Running the Goat is a small press, without the resources of large mainland publishers, but the story of Edie Murphy’s journey from her outport home to New York’s Lower East Side, was so beautiful, so important, I knew I wanted to see the book into the world. How much more daunting to lose Jan part way through the publication process? The book had meant so much to Jan, still meant so much to me; letting its publication lapse was never an option. Now, it would be a testament to the strength of Jan’s vision and her remarkable contributions to Canadian children’s literature. We hadn’t quite finished editing the manuscript when Jan died, so her partner Jennifer Cayley stepped in. At a time of deep grief and taut emotions, she worked with grace and patience to make those last tweaks to the text and to create a book that we both hoped would have made Jan pleased and proud. I feel a certain sadness holding the book in my hands, knowing Jan worked for so many years on the story, never to hold the book in her own hands, but there’s a sweet joy in being told, as I was recently by one reader, that Jan’s voice lifts off the page, speaks to her across time, across loss. The book is in many ways about the struggle of one young woman to raise her voice, to be heard. And Jan’s voice is raised, is heard still, in its pages.

Marnie Parsons, Publisher, Running the Goat Books & Broadside

Lakefield Literary Festival

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the Lakefield Literary Festival will be held from July 12 to 14. Canadian children’s author/illustrators Ruth Ohi and Kevin Sylvester will be there. For more information, visit lakefieldliteraryfestival.com.

The Festival of Literary Diversity (FOLD) Children’s Literary Festival, September 27 to 29, 2019

Canada’s first festival for diverse authors and stories announced earlier this year that it would hold the FOLD Kids Book Fest from September 27 to 29, 2019, in Brampton, Ontario. The event will feature three days of activities geared toward children from ages 0 to 12.

In addition to the annual September kid lit festival, new FOLD Kids Twitter and Instagram accounts (@FOLDkids) will highlight diverse Canadian children’s literature throughout the year. Online promotions and content will focus on children’s literature and young adult literature, supporting parents and educators of children from 0 to 18 years of age.

To assist with this new initiative, the FOLD welcomed three new members to the planning team who will guide and shape the kids festival and online content: Elham Ali, Cylyssa Erb and Nadia L. Hohn.
Tell us about your latest book or a project you are working on.

My latest is the upcoming Love from A to Z, a YA novel about two teens, one Canadian (Adam), the other American (Zayneb), who meet on a plane on their way to spend spring break in Doha, a city in the Arabian Gulf. What they don’t know about each other is that they’ve both been keeping ‘Marvels and Oddities’ journals, recording the amazing and not-so-amazing things in the world. When they meet, they’re at low points in their lives, and the story explores whether they’re meant to meet each other or not, whether they’re marvels or oddities in each other’s worlds. Love from A to Z was released on April 30 of this year.

Tell us about your writing process.

I start with an image or images (i.e., scenes) that won’t leave my brain. I then write into the dark, figuring out the story and characters. Once I have something that seems to have flesh and some semblance of bones, I begin doing the hard work of arranging the bones — i.e., outlining, organizing, weaving the threads. If this part of the process makes sense in terms of narrative structure, if it yields something interesting and fresh (so important to me as a writer), then I’ll dedicate myself to showing up at the laptop diligently to get to the end of the story.

How did you first get published?

I went the route of getting a literary agent first. I knew I wanted a career as an author and would need a partner who could do the business side for me, like pitching, submitting to publishers and things like that, so I spent as much time figuring out the ins and outs of the publishing industry as I spent writing my book. I was very deliberate in how I wanted to be published because at the back of my head was the understanding that it would be more challenging for me as a writer writing unapologetic Muslim content. I knew that it would be easy to get thrust into the niche of telling ‘exotic’/otherness stories of sad Muslim girls abroad. It’s difficult to say this, but particularly true in Canada, I was worried this would obviously not allow me to have a career comparable to, say, Judy Blume or Meg Cabot or Canadian Gordon Korman. So I set out with big goals — get a New York literary agent and sell to the big five publishers in the US. And that’s what I did, after 10 long years of working steadily.

What do you like about writing for young people?

I love that young people are open! They aren’t fixed in their ways and are quicker to understand the depths of diversity — in all their myriad variations. Most of them haven’t developed this suspended acceptance that, unfortunately, many adults have. As a member of a marginalized community, it’s wearying trying to prove your very being, as often happens in adult spaces. But when I’m writing for young people, I have this sense of freedom, like I can take a breath and just write. Because they’ll get what I’m trying to say and receive it.

Tell us about writers who inspire you.

E. Lockhart inspires me because she doesn’t settle into one genre or a certain ‘brand.’ To me, that’s one of the most exciting things about being a writer — I want to write EVERYTHING. Growing up, I read and loved everything — from horror, to European classics, to historical romances, to sweeping sagas, to contemporary works set in Africa and South Asia, to Western-canon fantasy — so I’d like to feel free to attempt any genre now as a writer. I often cite Rebecca Stead as an author I look up to; one of the reasons is that she actually genre-bends in a single book, in a literary way, which is one of my dreams as an author. G. Willow Wilson also inspires me endlessly with her seamless integration of unapologetic Muslim identity into her works.
Subjects that are as personal as they are political.

“REQUIRED READING FOR TEENS OF EVERY GENDER.”
—BOOKLIST, STARRED REVIEW

“Excellent grounding in what it means to be a feminist.”
—Quill & Quire

“Conversational and engaging... [A] fast, accessible read.”
—School Library Journal

“A boon for those seeking clear, comprehensive information.”
—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

“Both arresting visually and dynamic in tone...Thoroughly researched and thought provoking.”
—Quill & Quire

UPCOMING TOPICS IN THE ORCA ISSUES SERIES

- Assisted Dying
- Mental Illness
- Disabilities
- Civil Disobedience

SUBJECTS THAT ARE AS PERSONAL AS THEY ARE POLITICAL.
Kathy Stinson was motivated to attend the IBBY Congress in Athens in 2018 for three reasons.

1. It was in Greece.
2. She’d been working on a book for Kids Can Press that features Jella Lepman, IBBY’s founder.
3. Deb Ellis would be delivering a keynote.

Kathy had heard Deb speak once before and suspected she would find her worth hearing again. She was not disappointed. No one in the audience was. Her talk earned a well-deserved standing ovation. When she got home, Kathy wrote a blog post about what she loved about the IBBY Congress.

Sometime later, as she was contemplating her body of work (as she occasionally does when her writerly ego needs a boost), one of the other Canadians who attended the Congress happened to send out an abridged version of Deb’s talk.

The impact of reading it was still with Kathy as 2018 became 2019, and she thought — what better beginning could there be to a new year of blogging than to share something of what Deb had to say about children’s literature and why we write? With Deb’s permission, she did just that. One of her blog readers suggested she send her post to the CCBC.

We decided to further share Deb’s wise and thought-provoking words and asked Kathy to write a feature on Deb for Canadian Children’s Book News.

If you’d like to subscribe to Kathy’s blog, you can do so at https://kathystinson.com/blog/.

From Deb’s talk at the 2018 IBBY Congress

On November 20, 1959, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It states that every child on the planet has the right to live, to play, to be with their parents, and to be educated. Nearly 60 years later, millions of children have been killed in wars, millions more orphaned and injured, millions are hungry, millions are married off while they are still children, and play is a concept unknown to many.

As a writer for children, I look at the world and wonder, “What is the role of children’s literature in all this?” I think I’m beginning to know. We create the world we have through our decisions. Our decisions are shaped by stories — the stories we tell ourselves and the stories we choose to believe that others tell us about ourselves, about our limitations and what we should fear. The best of children’s literature seeks to inspire young readers to create their own story of who they are and how they want their world to be.

Research has shown that children’s attitudes can be shaped and enlightened through exposure to books. They can grow empathy toward animals and toward the suffering of other people. They can learn to see people who seem ‘different’ as just the same, with the same capacity for love, joy and pain as the child herself.

The best of children’s literature can remind us who we are when we are at our best. It can remind us we need not be
afraid of differences and that we have the power to create beauty out of pain.

Good children's literature can provide that alternative piece of information. It can provide a new way of looking at the world. It can be a welcoming, sturdy branch that says to the child, “You have the power to choose bravely.”

Good children's literature is not the sole key to a sustained, livable future for all, but it is certainly one of the keys.

Deborah Ellis: The Courage to Hope

To get to her school in Paris, Ontario, Deb had to cross a rusty corrugated iron footbridge. It was impossible to avoid seeing the mighty Grand River flowing beneath it. The first time she crossed, with her parents, she screamed the whole way. She was not fearless at the age of five, and still isn’t, but, she says now, “Courage is a choice.”

Deb knew that instinctively, it seems, even in kindergarten. Having reached the far end of that scary bridge on her first day of school, she looked back at what she had done. Then, choosing courage, she skipped back to the middle of the bridge and stood there for a while. After that, crossing by herself (because in the 1960s parents didn’t walk with you after the first day), Deb loved hearing the rattle of her footsteps and seeing the river rushing by beneath her.

That opportunity to walk to school alone, “to enjoy moments of freedom, when I could think and act and just be” is just one of many things in Deb’s life she’s grateful for. “You need a private life,” she says, “even as a child. Especially as a child.” She thinks she’d have “gone bananas” if she’d had to be with adults all the time, as many kids are nowadays, “at school, then in the car, then at home, with no time to just be away from adults and breathe.”

If, as a child, she also chose compassion (over judgment or indifference), she believes it’s because it’s a natural tendency in kids to be compassionate, generous and kind. Also, because her parents thought nothing of mowing a lawn for an elderly neighbour or taking soup to someone who seemed lost or alone, she learned from them that “There are things to be done, and there are things we can do. It’s not onerous; it’s just something you fold into your life.”

As a teenager, Deb became involved in the peace movement; she couldn’t stop countries fighting each other, but working with Young World Federalists she could show films that helped educate people about the need for nuclear disarmament. Now, writing stories about people who are disenfranchised by circumstance and other people's choices, and donating royalties to related causes, she continues doing “what [she] can do” about “things that need to be done.”

As a child, Deb was a loner who loved to read and write. She even submitted poems to magazines like Good Housekeeping when she was just 12 years old. “They were garbage,” she says. “So was pretty much everything else I wrote for years.” But she got wonderful encouragement from her hero, Jean Little. (Deb’s voice goes quite mushy when she says Jean’s name.) Jean was a camp director running a writing workshop for kids at Silver Lake United Church Camp near Kincardine. Deb, at the age of 12, gave her several pages from a book she’d been working on. “It was crap, but Jean was kind.” It wasn’t what Jean said that encouraged Deb to keep writing as much as the fact she took the time to say something nice. Also, “Jean was a living, breathing human being and so was I.” That told Deb maybe she could write real books someday, too.

She wrote a number of ‘terrible novels’ during her 20s and 30s that were rightly, Deb says, rejected by publishers. During those years, she also worked as a ‘Kelly Girl’ secretary, then at a shelter for women. From there, she got a job at Margaret Fraser House in Toronto, for women with mental health issues, back when you got hired on the basis of lived experience as opposed to a university degree.

When she entered Looking for X in a Groundwood first middle-grade novel contest, it placed second. “After Shelley Tanaka edited the be-jeebers out of it,” they decided to publish it. It was 1999. Deb was 39 years old. Having that first book published, Deb says, changed how she saw herself. She was now a writer.

The last lines of Looking for X read like a prediction of who Deb herself was to become. This is first-person narrator, Khyber:

“I'm going to turn myself into a walking, talking backpack — full of pockets and secret compartments for tucking away memories of each place I visit. And when I finally take my place in the middle of the Khyber Pass, I'll have bits and pieces inside me from people and places all over the world, and everyone who meets me will go away thinking they've met someone very interesting indeed.”

Deb has had a longstanding relationship with Groundwood Books and with Pajama Press. (Deb followed Gail Winskill there after Fitzhenry & Whiteside published A Company of Fools, which Groundwood had turned down.) Deb has also published with Penguin (the Keeley books in the Our Canadian Girl series); Grass Roots Press, an adult literacy publisher (In from the Cold and The Clearout); James Lorimer (Annaleise Carr: How I Conquered Lake Ontario to Help Kids...
Battling Cancer, by Annaleise, as told to Deb) and Praeger (Women of the Afghan War, for adults).

From the streets of contemporary Toronto to 14th-century plague-ridden Paris, from war-torn Afghanistan to southern Alberta in the early 20th century, Deb does careful research to ensure accuracy in her fiction. “[Writing outside your own culture], it’s important to get it right as much as possible, but it’s always better if you can hear directly from people, without a filter. If there’s a way for me to facilitate that happening, that would be more valuable than anything I could write.”

That’s what Deb has done with Looks Like Daylight: Voices of Indigenous Kids; Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees and others. She interviewed real kids and provided the context for their words.

When she went back to Palestine a second time to do interviews, her hopeless feelings about the situation somehow seeped in and she decided instead to write a novel, The Cat in the Wall, told from the point of view of a North American girl reincarnated as a cat living on the West Bank. I expressed surprise that she sometimes experiences a sense of hopelessness (she always comes across as such an optimist). “Of course,” she said, “everyone does. You just have to smack yourself up the side of the head and work through it.” Elsewhere she has said, “Hope is something that you actively go out and seek.”

Deb says the most challenging part of writing a novel for her is to keep herself out of the story, to not overwrite, not editorialize or pontificate. Also, “not getting so complicated and clever it turns out to be crap.” This apparently is what happened with two novels recently. “If Shelley tells me something is garbage,” she says, “it probably is.” Will she try reworking those novels? She might, or she “might just let them lie. It’s always a hard decision.”

Two of Deb’s YA novels are told from two points of view. Eric Walters came to her with the idea for Bifocal after students in Mississauga were arrested for plotting terror activities at their high school. Each chose a character, wrote chapters, then they swapped chapters to flesh out parts where their character appeared. The process went very smoothly. True Blue features a character quite different from others Deb has written about. Jess’s failure to show courage — when her best friend (or is she?) is arrested for the murder of a young camper in her care — makes some readers uneasy. Perhaps they don’t like Jess because she makes us wonder if we’d have behaved much differently in her situation.

No question, Deb writes about some tough subjects. Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak was pulled from a lot of shelves the year it was on the Silver Birch reading list because some people believed “children that age shouldn’t be reading about such a complex situation, they don’t have the capacity to understand it.”

Deb believes that whenever a book gets challenged like that, it’s a good opportunity to discuss it — both what the book is about and what kids are capable of understanding.

As for protecting kids from the harsh realities for many kids around the globe because it might be too upsetting, “I’m not a parent, if I were I might think differently about my own children, but as a citizen, I believe that anything we do to kids around the world, we should reflect in our literature. If we don’t want kids to read about what we do to other kids, then we shouldn’t be doing it to other kids.” (Deb may not have kids of her own, but she clearly views all the world’s children as ‘ours’ to be concerned and cared for.)

One book Deb wishes had attracted more attention is Jakeman, about a boy whose parents are in prison. “We don’t spend nearly enough time thinking about what happens to the children of the people we put behind bars. I guess what I really wish is that I’d done a better job on that book so it would have gotten more attention. Some problems are really complex, but this one isn’t. We should be able to figure out a way to do this better.” Will she return to this subject, have another go at it? “I don’t know. That’s something I’ll think about.”

Deb’s books have earned many awards, including the Vicky Metcalf for her ‘exceptional body of work’ in 2004. (She has had about 30 books published since and seen translations in more than 20 languages.) Her most far-reaching work remains The Breadwinner, adapted as an animated film directed by Nora Twomey, produced by Angelina Jolie, and nominated for Best Animated Feature at the Oscars. It didn’t win there, but it won in four of six categories at the Canadian Screen Awards.

In writing the first draft of the screenplay, Deb added things she had wished she’d included in the book — about the Afghani people’s resistance to the Taliban at the time, and “the things people did to keep themselves and their communities going, even under this repressive government.” Those things didn’t make it into the movie, and neither did some of the examples from the book of people being kind in extreme circumstances. “They brought in someone who knew how to write for animation and she took it over,” Deb says, “and that was a good thing. The people who put the film together clearly knew what they were doing because the film did really well.” (The film is amazing, especially, in my opinion, the parts that capture the world Deb wrote about so well, but I personally agree with the child who wrote in her review, ‘Read the book. It’s way better!’)

For Deb, the best part of the process was attending a screening in Toronto and hearing many of the Afghan-Canadians who were involved in the film telling their own stories, many similar to what happened in The Breadwinner. She’s really pleased that there are more Afghan writers telling their own stories now. “The more stories like that, the better.”

Young people get to tell their own stories in a number of Deb’s books. The interviews in Kids of Kabul. Living Bravely Through a Neverending War for example, shows how some problems in Afghanistan are ongoing, and, more optimistically, how artists, musicians, journalists, and women in parliament are helping to give the young people hope.

Of all the letters Deb receives from kids, she likes best the ones in which they write to tell her about their experiences. ‘I read this book and it made me think of my family’ or ‘it made me think about the world in a different way.’ “I mean that’s what we want from our books, right?”

Is there a child she’s met and hasn’t heard from again who haunts her still? In answer to this question, Deb describes a girl in a refugee camp in Pakistan. Her family had just sold her into marriage, at the age of 13 or 14, to a man who was going to take her back to Afghanistan. Just before her wedding, she told Deb she didn’t want to get married, she wanted...
The First Mighty Muskrats Mystery!

Four cousins solve the case of a missing archaeologist on the Windy Lake First Nation in the first in a new series by Michael Hutchinson.

“The Muskrats feel like the kind of real kids that have been missing in children’s books for quite some time.”

—QUILL & QUIRE

“[A]n Indigenous version of the Hardy Boys full of rez humor.”

—KIRKUS

www.secondstorypress.ca
to go to school, but that was it, there was no way out for her. “If I could have taken her [home], I would have. I hope she’s all right, has managed to find a good life for herself, that she’s still alive, and okay. I think about her.”

Deb once received a note from the Taliban that said, ‘Stop talking to Afghan women or we will kill you.’ Scary stuff, maybe, but “I had a way out of there, a ticket home, a passport. The bigger danger was for the women staying behind, being threatened because they were trying to empower women, teaching them, writing about them, trying to get them basic rights and services. What I got was nothing compared to what they were dealing with.”

“Having choices is power,” Deb says, and she feels blessed to have had so many choices in her life. “I grew up in a place and time when I could be who I wanted to be and do what I wanted to do.” She expresses gratitude for the publishers and editors she’s worked with, too, and feels “really, really lucky” to be part of the Canadian children’s book community.

When I tell her that we feel really, really lucky that she is, that she’s a beacon of sorts for a lot of us, I get the sense she hardly knows what to make of that. When I ask her how she got to be like she is, so humble, she laughs. “I’ve written a lot of garbage, so there are no worries about that.” Deb refers to two novels she’s written recently as ‘garbage’ and she’s waiting for Shelley’s verdict on her most recent submission. She’s not saying what it’s about in case it’s ‘garbage,’ too.

In the meantime, readers can welcome the publication this fall of The Story Starts Here. The title came from graffiti she saw on a railway tunnel in her town. It’s a book of interviews with kids in Canada’s criminal justice system. She hopes it will “help people see these kids as full human beings, not just as problems.” (If it’s anything like her similarly structured books, it will do so in spades.)

This piece began when I quoted some of Deb’s wise words. I’d like to do that again — these from the Claire Mackay Memorial Lecture at CANSCAIP’s Packaging Your Imagination conference last year.

So, what if we can create books that influence future people in power to NOT call for genocide, or to NOT drop bombs on schools, or to NOT rape, or to NOT make money from weapons, or to NOT add to the environmental destruction of the planet? We have to give our young readers hope that things can be better, that they can be stronger, that they can have a role to play in the shaping of a just world. If we don’t bring that story with us into the books we write for young people, all we are doing is perpetuating what we have now. And that’s not good enough.

There’s no question that Deborah Ellis is, as Khyber said she intended to be, “very interesting indeed.” But Deb is so self-effacing that when I told her I’d been invited to write about her for Canadian Children’s Book News, her reaction was, “I’m honoured, although I’m not sure what you’ll find to write about.”

I managed, somehow.
Andrew Katz and Juliana Léveillé-Trudel published their first picture book, How to Catch a Bear Who Loves to Read/Comment attraper un ours qui aime lire, with CrackBoom! Books in November 2018. Through an unconventional co-writing process, they created two original versions of the same story, one in English and one in French. Their book was released simultaneously in both official languages, and it will be featured in the Montreal Westmount Library’s bilingual Summer StoryWalk®, opening June 21, 2019. This is the story of a unique artistic collaboration between two writers, but also between two languages and two cultures.

Ne pas se montrer le bout du nez is an expression familiar to French Canadians. Roughly translated, it means that someone or something ‘isn’t showing even so much as the end of its nose’, that it isn’t presenting itself, isn’t appearing, at all. For example, on a grey rainy day, a French speaker...
What she doesn’t yet know is that if there is indeed a bear in about how she might attract a ‘bearnormous’ new pal. But then one day, a book she is reading gives her an idea.

The inspiration for How to Catch a Bear Who Loves to Read/Comment attraper un ours qui aime lire came to us one day when Andrew spotted a book lying around that he didn’t recognize. The book looked intriguing, and he made an excited lunge toward it, as if it were a chocolate chip cookie. Juliana joked that to make a trap for Andrew, the thing to put in it would not be food but a book. We laughed at this idea, and also agreed that this unexpected twist might make for a good story. Juliana, who has an overflowing love of animals, had always longed to meet a bear, certain, despite the obvious risks, that the two of them would get along. And so the tale of a young girl and a bear who loves to read began to take shape.

We imagined a young girl full of spunk, daring and imagination, and we named her Julia, after the creator with whom she shares some personality traits. Julia loves playing and reading in the forest by her house. However, she despairs slightly at the fact that she has never spotted hide nor hair of a potential ursine buddy. She has other animal friends — a squirrel named Scotty, a groundhog named Abigail and a skunk named Frieda. (In French they’re known as Léon l’écureuil, Charlotte la marmotte and Georgette la mouffette.) But she is the kind of kid who dreams big and her biggest dream is to befriend a bear — imagine the hugs!

When it came time to put these ideas into words, we decided we’d take turns. One of us would try our hand at a scene first. We would then pass the scene along to the other person, who would play around with it as much as they liked. After that, the other person would write out the next scene. Finally, the other person would pass the story — now longer by one scene — back to us. And the process would continue like this, back and forth.

Because our native languages are different, our process also included an added twist — Juliana would write in French and Andrew would write in English.

Juliana led off, describing our protagonist’s predicament — i.e., no bear in sight. As she reflected on how to phrase this conundrum, a gentle variation on the familiar French expression above occurred to her, in a very natural way: aucun ours ne montre jamais le bout de son museau, which translates to ‘no bear ever shows the end of its snout.’

After finishing a draft of the opening, Juliana emailed it to Andrew, who then re-wrote it in English. As we had agreed on together, he didn’t translate the French version word for word, but instead gave himself the liberty of adding or changing details, re-ordering events, and so on. But although he made changes to the text, he also took inspiration from his writing partner. One line in French struck him as particularly original, and brought a smile to his face: the one about ‘no bear ever showing the end of its snout.’

As an anglophone, he wasn’t sure he ever would have thought to formulate Julia’s problem this way. He could have opted for a phrasing closer to the English expression, such as ‘no bear ever showed its face.’ But the concreteness and comic charm of the French sentence kept tickling his imagination. So he tried to capture these qualities in his own draft, writing, ‘no bear ever showed its snout.’

Once Andrew had translated and reworked the opening, he wrote out a new scene of his own. Then he sent the story — all in English now — back to Juliana. Re-writing it in the same way her colleague had done, she took inspiration from some of the changes he had proposed, as well as from his English phrasings. As she read his new scene, she found herself charmed by this sentence: ‘the bear was lending a helping paw to an old turtle.’ The English expression “lending a helping hand” could be translated as donner un coup de main. But somehow the image of the bear extending his paw was more vivid in English. So Juliana sprinkled the English version with a bit more detail, to make the line more visually appealing: l’ours tend gentiment la patte à une vieille tortue, which translates to ‘the bear kindly extends his paw to an old turtle.’

Continually passing the story to our co-author in this way and having it come back each time in a different language — not so much translated as transformed, infused with the flavour of new expressions, new turns of phrase and new ideas — was definitely one of the most invigorating aspects of our collaboration. The idiosyncrasies of the other person’s native language nourished our own writing and vice versa, and allowed us to create two original versions of the story, one in English, one in French, which neither of us would have been able to write by ourselves.
Most writers to whom we’ve described our co-writing process have expressed astonishment. “I could never write with someone else!” some have said. “I wouldn’t be able to stand it if a sentence wasn’t just the way I thought it should be.” But when your writing partner doesn’t share your mother tongue, sharing the writing process with them turns out to be much less fraught. Juliana leaves the exact phrasing of the English to Andrew, and Andrew keeps his big paws off Juliana’s choice of words in French. (Forgive us; we had to get in at least one bear joke.) And as we discovered, collaboration between two authors who write in different languages can enrich a story in other ways as well.

If the other person’s language brought fresh ingredients to our work, so, too, did their culture. In the stories Andrew grew up reading, for example, forests were a recurring landscape. While these forests could be places where characters got lost and encountered danger, they could also be places where characters were able to experience a new kind of freedom — a freedom to play, discover and grow. There were the Forest of Arden, the Hundred Acre Wood, Terabithia, and many other forests where imagination was free to run wild. This is the kind of forest Andrew pictured for our main character: a safe place for exploration, close enough to home to hear her mother calling her for lunch, and free enough for her dreams of friendship with animals to come to life.

Juliana, for her part, has always loved audacious stories that take delight in breaking taboos, the type of stories that have been growing steadily in popularity in French children’s literature in Quebec. Notably, Quebec author-illustrator Élise Gravel has shown a fondness for subjects that aren’t usually discussed in polite company. Gravel has created a series titled Les petits dégoûtants (Disgusting Critics), which celebrates tiny beasts that generally get a bad rap — cockroaches, worms, rats and slugs, among others — and recently she has also written a picture book titled La tribu qui pue (The Stinky Tribe), about the adventures of a group of children who live wild and naked in the middle of the forest. A hit in Quebec, La tribu qui pue still has not been picked up by any publishers south of the border, who, so far, have judged it too obscene.

It was a bit of Gravel’s influence that inspired Juliana to imagine the concours de pets (farting contest), a little game that Julia and her friend Frieda, the skunk, like to play together. Among francophone audiences, very few, if any, readers took note of this pastime, except to point out its comic nature. On the other hand, to our surprise, a small but vocal number of commenters in English Canada and the United States judged this joke to be inappropriate, a minor controversy we now affectionately refer to as ‘Fartgate.’

As for the kids we read the book to in libraries, bookstores and schools, in both languages, they tend to just briefly giggle and move on with the rest of the story.

Beyond how it shaped our picture book, our bilingual collaboration and friendship has influenced us in other ways, broadening horizons that might have been hidden or inaccessible to us otherwise.

Our book was published with CrackBoom! Books, an imprint of Chouette Publishing, who release all their titles simultaneously in French and in English, targeting at once French Canadian, English Canadian and American markets, as well as French markets in France and elsewhere in Europe. But with our book, for the first time, Chouette published not an original and a translation, but two original versions. This opportunity — to publish both in our own native language and in our second language — was a first for us as well, and it opened doors into new literary worlds. Andrew, for instance, had never participated in, much less attended, the Montreal Salon du livre, a mega-event in Quebec French culture. The Salon had simply never been on his radar; in English Canada, even in English Montreal, that kind of book fair, which includes speakers, workshops and nearly a stadium full of books, doesn’t really exist. But a few weeks after our book was published, Andrew found himself sitting behind an author’s table with Juliana inside the Salon, meeting French kids and their parents and signing the French copies of their books.

Anglophone culture has its own kinds of literary events that you’d be hard-pressed to find in the francophone milieu. One example is the oral storytelling nights hosted by American and Canadian groups like The Moth and Confabulation, in which anyone who never need to be a professional) can get up in front of an audience and tell their own personal story — sans notes, sans costumes, sans props. Juliana, who had never experienced this kind of amateur storytelling, fell completely in love with it, and in collaboration with Confabulation created Enfabulation, a French version of the same event, which just finished its second season, and which continues to draw larger and larger crowds of francophones curious about this form of storytelling.

We have shared with each other our cultural treasures: Juliana, a playwright and novelist as well as a children’s author, now attends the Stratford Festival of Canada each summer. Andrew, who grew up watching Passe-Partout, but somehow had never heard of La Petite Vie, now watches reruns of this iconic Quebec comedy. We have drawn from our differences to help create a richer narrative universe around Julia and her forest friends.

But after over six months now of reading our picture book to kids, in English and in French, we have witnessed, above all, how children are the same, whether they are introduced to Scotty the squirrel, Abigail the groundhog and Frieda the skunk or Léon l’écureuil, Charlotte la marmotte and Georgette la mouffette.

They just want to hear a good story.

This article was written by Andrew Katz and Juliana Léveillé-Trudel, with four hands in two languages. We hope to publish the French version, Encrire à quatre mains et en deux langues, in a French magazine in Quebec in the near future.

Andrew Katz is an author and teacher at Dawson College in Montreal. His areas of specialization include children’s literature, and in 2013, he won his college’s Director General’s Award for Teaching Excellence. How to Catch a Bear Who Loves to Read, co-authored with Juliana Léveillé-Trudel, is his first published work.

Born in Montreal in 1985, Juliana Léveillé-Trudel writes in multiple genres, including as a novelist (Nirliit, 2015), picture book author (How to Catch a Bear Who Loves to Read, 2018, co-written with Andrew Katz), blogger and playwright. She has performed several of her theatrical and literary works on stage, and since 2017, she has been the director of Enfabulation, an oral storytelling show in French. She has organized several cultural mediation projects and is also the founder of the Productions de brousse theatre company.
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BOOKMARK! highlights books for a variety of grade levels around a particular theme. CCBC’s Library Coordinator, Meghan Howe, has compiled a list of books in honour of PRIDE parades and events that are held over the summer.

**LGBTQ2+ STORIES**

**PICTURE BOOKS FOR PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 3**

*A Family Is a Family*

written by Sara O’Leary
illustrated by Qin Leng
(Groundwood Books, 2016)

When a teacher asks her class to think about what makes their families special, the answers are all different in many ways — but the same in the one way that matters most of all. A warm and whimsical look at the great diversity of families and the bonds of love that matter most.

*From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea*

written by Kai Cheng Thom
illustrated by Wai-Yant Li and Kai Yun Ching
(Arsenal Pulp Press, 2017)

Miu Lan can’t decide what to be: a boy or a girl? A bird or a fish? A flower or a shooting star? In this picture book about gender, identity and the acceptance of differences, Miu Lan faces many questions about who they are and who they may be.

*Jack (Not Jackie)*

written by Erica Silverman
illustrated by Holly Hatam
(Little Bee Books, 2018)

Susan can’t wait for her little sister, Jackie, to get older so they can do all sorts of things like play forest fairies together. But as Jackie grows, she would rather play with mud and wear a cape! Jackie also doesn’t like dresses or her long hair, and she would rather be called Jack.

**JUNIOR & INTERMEDIATE FICTION AND NON-FICTION FOR GRADES 3-9**

*Be My Love*

written by Kit Pearson
(Harper Trophy Canada, 2019)

This summer Maisie needs an escape more than ever and her regular visit to Kingfisher Island is her chance for that. Maisie hopes to spend the summer with her cousin Una, but Una’s crush on an older boy and Maisie’s new and unfamiliar feelings for her complicate plans for a perfect summer.

*The Disappearing Boy*

written by Sonia Tilson
(Nimbus Publishing, 2017)

Neil MacLeod, 13, is trying to adjust to life in Ottawa, but he misses his friends in Vancouver. Worse, his mother still refuses to tell him the truth about the father he’s never met. After visiting a grandmother he never knew existed, Neil uncovers a shocking secret.
**The Lotterys Plus One**
written by Emma Donoghue
illustrated by Caroline Hadilaksono

Follow the domestic adventures of a large, rumbustious, multicultural family. The Lotterys, as they call themselves, are headed up by two moms and two dads who joined forces to create a family. When grandfather Grumps comes to stay, their family life becomes even more chaotic.

**My Life as a Diamond**
written by Jenny Manzer
(Orca Book Publishers, 2018)

Ten-year-old Caspar “Caz” loves baseball and has a great arm. When his family moves from Toronto to Seattle, he is thrilled to make the local team, but he worries because he has a big secret — Caz used to live life as a girl named Cassandra.

**Pride: Celebrating Diversity & Community**
written by Robin Stevenson
(Orca Book Publishers, 2016)

For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people around the world, Pride is both protest and celebration. It’s about embracing diversity, honouring the past and fighting for freedom and equality.

**We Are All Made of Molecules**
written by Susin Nielsen
(Tundra Books, 2015)

Stewart is academically brilliant, but socially “ungifted.” Ashley is the “It” girl of Grade 9, but her marks stink. When Stewart and his dad move in with Ashley and her mom, their worlds collide. Stewart is trying to be happy about it, but Ashley is horrified. She’s already hiding the truth behind her parents’ divorce.

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**SENIOR FICTION AND NON-FICTION FOR GRADERS 7 AND UP**

**Branded by the Pink Triangle**
written by Ken Setterington
(Second Story Press, 2013)

This book tells the history of the persecution of gay men by the Nazi regime during the Holocaust. Homosexuals were imprisoned along with Jews in the camps. The pink triangle, sewn onto prison uniforms, became their symbol.

**Fire Song**
written by Adam Garnet Jones
(Annick Press, 2018)

Shane is reeling from his sister’s suicide, but he can’t turn to his friend David for comfort because they must hide their relationship from everyone on the rez. But when another tragedy strikes, Shane and David have to make difficult choices about their future together.

**Keep This to Yourself**
written by Tom Ryan
(Artemis Whitman, 2019)

It’s been a year since the Catalog Killer terrorized Camera Cove. When Mac Bell finds a cryptic message from Connor, the killer’s final victim, he’s drawn back into the search for the murderer. Sensing that someone is following his every move, Mac struggles to come to terms with his true feelings toward Connor while scrambling to uncover the truth.

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**Kings, Queens, and In-Betweens**
written by Tanya Boteju
(Simon Pulse, 2019)

Nima Kumara-Clark is bored with her insular community of Bridgeton, in love with her straight girlfriend and trying to move past her mother’s unexpected departure. After a bewildering encounter at a local festival, Nima finds herself suddenly immersed in the drag scene on the other side of town.

**Moon at Nine**
Written by Deborah Ellis
(Pajama Press, 2014)

Farrin, 15, has many secrets, but the day she meets Sadira her life changes forever. Sadira is wise and outgoing; the two girls become inseparable. But as their friendship deepens into romance, it becomes dangerous.

**Synchro Boy**
written by Shannon McFerran
(Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018)

When Bart discovers he has a natural talent for synchronized swimming, he leaves the swim team to swim the mixed duet with Erika, committing to taking them all the way to the Olympics. But as he falls for Erika, he develops a crush on a boy in the diving club. Can Bart keep his Olympic dream and live a “different kind of maleness?”

**What Makes You Beautiful**
(Real Love)
written by Bridget Liang
(Lorimer, 2019)

Logan knows that he likes boys and is attracted to Kyle, but Kyle is straight. Logan begins to question their gender identity and begins using ‘they’ pronouns. Eventually Logan realizes they are not a gay boy but a transgender girl and asks for people to call them Veronica. As a girl, does Veronica stand a chance with Kyle?
In this issue we have combined our Red Leaf Literature and We Recommend columns. Red Leaf Literature titles have been indicated with a red maple leaf next to the title.

**We Recommend**

NEW AND NOTED BOOKS FOR TODDLERS TO TEENS

**Albert’s Quiet Quest** *(A Mile End Kids Story, Book 2)*
written and illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault
Tundra Books, 2019
978-1-101-91762-6 (hc) $22.99
978-1-101-91764-0 (eBook) $10.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Reading | Conflict | Tranquility | Community | Empathy*

Poor Albert! All he wants is a quiet place where he can read a book. Because his house is so noisy, he retreats outside, finding the perfect spot in a nearby alley. Luckily, no one else is there. Sitting opposite a discarded painting of a beach scene encourages him to imagine that he is perusing his book on a sandy shore while on holiday. Alas, Albert is not alone for long. The peaceful atmosphere is interrupted again and again by his friends who appear on the scene, inviting him to join their increasingly boisterous activities. Finally, in frustration, Albert yells, “That’s it! QUIET!! For Pete’s sake, can’t someone just read a book around here or what?!” The surprising reaction to his outburst brings about a welcome resolution.

Rendered in pencil, watercolour and ink with digital colouration in Photoshop, Arsenault’s animated illustrations are arranged in the style of a graphic novel, with hand-lettered text placed within speech bubbles. Soft muted colours dominate, interrupted only by vibrant splashes of orange and blue reflecting the painting’s restful beach scene where Albert imagines himself relaxing. The environment becomes increasingly frantic with each friend’s intrusion until the final page, when all appears to be tranquil again.

**Albert’s Quiet Quest** is the second book featuring children from Montreal’s Mile End neighbourhood, where Arsenault lives with her family. It is reassuring to renew acquaintances with the characters and the back lane featured in *Colette’s Lost Pet*, the first Mile End Kids Story in a series that subtly underlines a genuine sense of empathy and community.

*Senta Ross is a former elementary teacher and teacher-librarian in Kitchener, Ontario.*

**Alis the Aviator**
written by Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail
illustrated by Kalpna Patel
Tundra Books, 2019
978-1-101-91905-7 (hc) $21.99
978-1-101-91906-4 (eBook) $10.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Aviation | Female Pilots | Alphabet | Air Travel*

What could be more fascinating than taking an alphabetical tour of 26 flying machines ranging from the Avro Arrow to a Zeppelin? Conducted by an intrepid tour guide named after Dr. Alis Kennedy (acknowledged to be the first Canadian Indigenous female commercial pilot), young Alis introduces readers to planes, helicopters, hot air balloons, parachutes and more.

A former president of the Canadian Aviation Historical Society, author Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail knows her subject well. Each aircraft is accompanied by a brief rhyme-like description, with additional details included in a helpful glossary. A section devoted to Dr. Alis Kennedy celebrates a courageous woman committed to aiding people and animals all around the world. Rendered in cut paper, Patel’s vibrant illustrations are captivating. Her unique skill and artistry in representing complex airborne machines and their environments in such a creative manner will leave readers asking, “How did she do that?”

For those who are interested in aviation, and even for those who are not, *Alis the Aviator* will prove to be an engaging book that may well cause your imagination to soar!

*Senta Ross*
Always With You is a touching story that follows Emily as she grows up. In the beginning of the book we learn that Emily has lost her grandfather, who “was always kind and funny and silly…” but he has left gifts and letters for her to be opened on those special moments in her life — her first day of high school, her graduation ceremony, her wedding day and the day her first child is born. It is a story that will help children deal with grief and loss and show them that even when our loved ones pass away, we still remember them at those pivotal moments in our lives.

Eric Walters dedicated this book to his niece, Emily, who lost her father, and wrote it to remind us that we will always carry those who have passed on in our hearts. Halifax-based artist Carloe Liu’s illustrations are painted in gentle watercolours and add to the tenderness of the story. The fold-out letters, akin to The Jolly Postman, contain grandfatherly advice that Emily cherishes and that children will enjoy discovering. Be sure to keep a tissue nearby as you read this moving story.

Sandra O’Brien is the editor of Canadian Children’s Book News.

Awâsis is tasked with delivering Kôhkum’s (Grandmother’s) world-famous bannock to her relative, but as she walks, she loses it. Fortunately, she has many animal friends in the forest who help her along the way. Because of their help, Kôhkum and Awâsis can then make more bannock to share with their new friends. Dallas Hunt seamlessly weaves in everyday Cree words throughout the story. Included at the back of the book is a recipe for Kôhkum’s world-famous bannock, as well as a glossary of the Cree words used within the story and a pronunciation guide.

Appealing and warm, Amanda Strong’s illustrations bring the story to life in an engaging way. Not only a charming and whimsical story, Awâsis and the World-Famous Bannock is also a celebration of nêhiyawêwin (Cree) language, as well as the Cree teachings of sharing and kindness. Highly recommended to have at home and in school and public libraries.

Colette Poitras is a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, holds a Masters degree in Library and Information Science and is the Manager of the Indigenous Public Outreach for Public Library Services Branch, Alberta.
With an illustration style that reminds me of reading the comics, one page in the newspaper, the bright, playful images in this story are a perfect fit for the text. The narrator’s willingness to engage with and be guided by the child protagonist makes this story a wonderful read-aloud. When I shared the story with my daughter, we couldn’t stop laughing. Our cat, however, did not seem as thrilled.

Jen McConnel is a teacher and graduate student with an MA in Children’s Literature.

Ho’onani doesn’t see herself as exactly a wahine, a girl, or a kane, a boy. Instead, she’s just Ho’onani. Ho’onani’s parents and brothers support who she is, but her sister Kana wishes that Ho’onani didn’t stand out so much. When her teacher, Kumu Hina, announces that the high-school kane will perform a traditional hula chant, Ho’onani tries out, even though she’s the youngest and the only girl. Once she passes the audition, Ho’onani will have to be sure, strong and steady to become a leader of the boys and a true hula warrior. She also might even prove to her sister that being in the middle is the right place for Ho’onani.

Hawaiian culture and gender diversity are celebrated in this picture book. The story is based on the true story of the real Ho’onani, who had her story told in the documentary A Place in the Middle, which can be found at aplaceminthemiddle.org. The story is about being true to oneself and focuses on a culture that isn’t often reflected in Canadian children’s books, with watercolour illustrations that are reminiscent of Qin Leng. A story of inclusion and acceptance, this is an inspiring story about Ho’onani’s fearlessness and her quest to be both. Emma Hunter is the CBC’s Marketing and Website Coordinator.

How to Give Your Cat a Bath: In Five Easy Steps
written by Nicola Winstanley
illustrated by John Martz
Tundra Books, 2019
978-0-7352-6354-3 (hc) $21.99
978-0-7352-6355-0 (eBook) $10.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

How to Give Your Cat a Bath is as delightful as the title implies it will be. Kids (and parents) who are growing up with cats will recognize the futility of the narrator’s calm, step-by-step instructions, and even those without a cat at home will find lots of amusement in this laugh-out-loud tale. Told in the spirit of Numeroff’s If You Give a Mouse a Cookie series, where the chain of events quickly spirals out of the control of the narrator and the young character struggling to complete the ‘simple’ directions, this story has a hearty dose of minor disasters, like the tub overflowing in the middle of the process and the cat disappearing. Rather than being discouraged, however, the young character who is attempting to bathe the cat does not give up, but takes breaks for cookies when things get bad and dutifully cleans up the mess that comes from attempting to bathe the cat.

With an illustration style that reminds me of reading the comics page in the newspaper, the bright, playful images in this story are a

I Didn’t Stand Up
written by Lucy Falcone
Clockwise Press, 2019
978-1-988347-06-6 (hc) $19.95
for Grades 1 to 4

I Didn’t Stand Up was inspired by the iconic poem First They Came made popular by a Protestant Pastor named Martin Niemöller in opposition to the oppressive Nazi regime. It looks at the common circumstances of bullying or oppression that children encounter through the eyes of a bystander.

The book begins, “First they went after Jamal/But I’m not black — so I didn’t stand up for him.” It then continues to reveal the various children that are being bullied — the geek, the child who wears hand-me-downs, the girl who was not born in this country, the boy who is gay, the Muslim child, the boy with a disability, the transgender child, the boy who is overweight and finally, the child who has stood by and watched it all happen. Afraid to stand alone, she is helped by those who were bullied before her and choose to stand with her.

Jacqueline Hudon’s mixed-media illustrations pair beautifully with Lucy Falcone’s sparse text. Children will have no difficulty recognizing the emotions being felt by both the bullies and the bullied. Falcone wrote this book in the hope that those “who read this book will take some action to stem the tide of bullying in our schools.” This powerful and moving book is a MUST-HAVE selection for every classroom, school and home library. I hope it will inspire not only the children, but those who teach and raise them, to speak up when someone else is being put down!

Sandra O’Brien

The Invisible Garden
written by Valérie Picard
translated by Sophie B. Watson
Orca Book Publishers, 2019
978-1-4598-2213-9 (eBook) $4.99
for Preschool to Grade 1

Arianne and her family have travelled from the city into the countryside to celebrate her grandmother’s birthday. As the sole child at the event, her initial enthusiasm is soon reduced to boredom. A suggestion to go outdoors to play in the garden is welcome, but eventually she grows listless here, too, until she finds a little stone. Then, everything changes. Suddenly, magically
Every summer morning, Ellie loves spending time at the beach with Nonna. Even though there are other children at the beach, she is too shy to approach them. One morning, she stumbles upon Piper, an older girl who invites Ellie onto her magic boat, an old boat partially buried in the sand. Piper has a great imagination and “But where did they go?” guide readers without drawing their attention away from the sweeping dream-like panoramas that mark the power of the imagination amid the allure of the natural world.

Senta Ross

Reduced in size, Arianne finds herself experiencing nature from a startlingly different viewpoint. Surrounded by colossal plants, she follows gigantic grasshoppers and dragonflies high into the air while floating on a dandelion puff. She then descends into the depths of an ocean to pursue fish that transform into dinosaurs on land. When she captures a star with a butterfly net, then hears her name being called, her reverie comes to an abrupt end. Has this just been a dream, or...?

A world of fantasy has been created by Ferrer through her subtle, yet powerful artwork rendered in watercolours and gouache, and digitally touched-up in Photoshop. Readers accompanying Arianne on her odyssey will find themselves entranced by a world that seems somewhat familiar, with the addition of exotic twists. Picard’s minimal text provides some context during the young girl’s adventure. Phrases such as “Ooooh!”, “Hey, wait for me!” and “But where did they go?” guide readers without drawing their attention away from the sweeping dream-like panoramas that mark the power of the imagination amid the allure of the natural world.

Karen Krossing is a Toronto author and an MFA student.

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Karen Krossing is a Toronto author and an MFA student.
My Mommy, My Mama, My Brother, & Me
written by Natalie Meisner
illustrated by Mathilde Cinq-Mars
Nimbus Publishing, 2019
978-1-77108-741-4 (hc) $22.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | LGBTQ+ | Family | Community | Acceptance

In a foggy seaside town, two boys and their mothers spend the day at the sea. As they pass the day finding objects in the sand, before they head home they can only pick one to take home with them. A lobster claw, a moon snail, a mermaid’s purse, a shell and fused glass all find their way into their pails. As the day goes on, they meet neighbours along the beach that help them identify what they’ve found. When the day comes to an end, all of the items they have found go back to the beach, while the friends they met throughout the day come home to join them for dinner.

Community and family are celebrated in this simple story about the seashore and one family’s day there. This book is inspired by the author’s family, who also live in Nova Scotia by the sea. In the author’s note, she explains that “Our family model… was likely unfamiliar to most and yet the arms of the town opened to us and have remained open as our sons grow up.” The normalization of diverse families in this tender story is strengthened by the adorable illustrations by Mathilde Cinq-Mars that perfectly capture the little family on this day filled with wonder, family and friends.

Emma Hunter

The Not-So Great Outdoors
written and illustrated by Madeline Kloepper
Tundra Books, 2019
978-0-7352-6417-5 (hc) $21.99
978-0-7352-6418-2 (eBook) $10.99
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

Picture Book | Environment | Nature Appreciation | Exploration | Family

“I have no idea why we have to ‘venture into the great outdoors’ this summer,” grumbles a young girl as her parents pack the car and leave the city. “It’s not like there’s anything out here,” she continues when they reach their wilderness destination and pitch their tent. As she complains about there being no urban attractions such as electricity, fountains or city lights, the scenery behind her depicts a campfire, a waterfall and the northern lights. Her awareness and appreciation for the natural surroundings begin to grow as she explores forests, lakes and mountains, encountering a myriad of creatures and enriching experiences along the way. The outdoors turns out to be great after all!

Disconnecting a young urban child from the trappings of technology and the hustle and bustle of city life and linking her to the beauty and stillness of nature is no small task. Kloepper has written a charming story that demonstrates that the outdoors can be just as stimulating as a metropolis. Her detailed artwork, rendered in mixed media and finished digitally, depicts a variety of natural vistas that contribute to the protagonist’s conversion from a begrudging frown to an excited smile.

Senta Ross

The Pencil
written by Susan Avingaq and Maren Vsetula
illustrated by Charlene Chua
Inhabit Media, 2019
978-1-77227-216-1 (hc) $16.95
for Preschool to Grade 2

Picture Book | Resourcefulness | Drawing | Inuit | Igloolik, Nunavut

Anaana (mother) leaves Susan, her brother and sister in the care of Ataata (father) for the day while she goes to help deliver a baby. As they do not own much, the children have always been told to take good care of their belongings and use them wisely. After playing some games, the children have fun with their father, taking turns drawing with one of their most prized possessions — a pencil.

There is a glossary at the back of the book with the Inuktitut words used within the story.

This is a wonderful story that explains to young children the value of using things wisely and being resourceful, as well as showing the love this family shares. Avingaq and Vsetula also provide an engaging way to introduce a new language into a child’s life. Charlene Chua brings the story to life with bright and appealing illustrations, even showing us the drawings the children created within the story.

I would highly recommend this title for use in school and public libraries and at home.

Colette Poitras
A Plan for Pops
written by Heather Smith
illustrated by Brooke Kerrigan
Orca Book Publishers, 2019
978-1-4598-1614-5 (hc) $19.95
978-1-4598-1616-9 (eBook) $4.99
for Preschool to Grade 1

Picture Book | STEM | Grandparents | Intergenerational Relationships | Aging | Community | LGBTQ+ | Inventions

Lou visits Grandad and Pops every Saturday. Lou listens to Pops’ personal stories from his youth, then sketches and builds a machine with Grandad; at first, their machine doesn’t work, then, Grandad makes a little adjustment and smiles. When Pops has a fall and needs to use a wheelchair, he shuts himself in his room for weeks. Lou and Grandad don’t know what to do. Even the machine Lou and Grandad made no longer works — until Lou makes a little adjustment and then cries. At this point, a plan for Pops begins to take shape in Lou’s mind, and soon Lou, Grandad and the neighbours work together to make that plan a reality.

Smith’s characters are real and honest. There is also lovely use of language, such as in “the eggs are buttery soft, and the spaghetti tastes like fireworks” (because Pops likes to add hot sauce to his spaghetti and waffles). Kerrigan’s digital artwork, combined with scanned textures, watercolour washes and paper collage, is both engaging and touching. One particularly poignant spread has Lou, Grandad and the dog staring quietly at Pops’ empty chair in the kitchen, a full glass of juice complete with crazy straw and paper umbrella also in silent attendance. Lou’s gender identity is never specified, allowing the young reader to see Lou for who Lou is. This title is also available in French as Une idée pour Papi.

Ken Kilback

See to Learn: Forest
(See to Learn, Book 1)
written by Kate Moss Gamblin
illustrated by Karen Patkau
Groundwood Books, 2019
978-1-55498-879-2 (hc) $16.95
978-1-77306-324-9 (eBook) $14.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

Non-fiction Picture Book | Natural World | Exploration | Environment | Seasons | Animal Homes

At first glance, See to Learn: Forest is a simple text, depicting an adult and child on a walk through a forest. However, on closer examination, the picture book — the first in See to Learn, a non-fiction series for young children — uses gentle guiding questions that foster an appreciation and stewardship of the natural world.

Ushering readers through seasons in a forest, See to Learn: Forest asks close-ended lyrical questions on every spread: “Do you see the animals that call this place home — the ants and worms, the spiders and all the very tiny creatures within the soil?” Vocabulary, including multi-syllabic words like ‘invitation’ and unfamiliar words like ‘sapling’ might prove to be difficult for emerging readers; however, the book’s pointed questions and delightful illustrations offer ample opportunities for co-engagement between young and
adult readers. On each subsequent read, children and their parents will notice something new in Karen Patkau’s detailed artwork.

Grounded in research from Gamblin’s doctorate in sustainability learning, See to Learn: Forest aims to bring empathy and awareness to children, prompting them to see the natural world around them differently. Questions, including this one about pine needles, challenge readers to contemplate their own relationship with and impact on the environment: “Do you see them gently falling all around, making the soft carpet you now tread?”

See to Learn: Forest is sure to encourage readers to use their imagination and prior knowledge to picture other life that lurks in and around the forest floor. See to Learn: Lake, the next book in this series, will be released in the fall of 2020.

Jessica Rose is a writer, reviewer and editor in Hamilton, Ontario.

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**Sprout, Seed, Sprout!**
written by Annika Dunklee
illustrated by Carey Sookocheff
Owlkids Books, 2019
978-1-77147-308-8 (hc) $19.95
for Preschool to Kindergarten

*Picture Book | Resilience | Care | Garden*

Sprout, Seed, Sprout! is a delightfully sweet book. With rhythmic repetition and simple, resonant phrasing, it was written to be read aloud. The text can serve as a simple counting book, the seed of an idea to try at home or an introduction to resilience. The story centres on the long process of encouraging an avocado pit to first take root in a glass of water and then begin to sprout in a container. With time, lots of care and a child who does not give up (despite feeling frustrated with the process), the story yields not only a sprout, but also a lovely green avocado tree, the perfect height for the small narrator to read beneath.

The gentle illustrations rely on pale blue, sunshine yellow and new-leaf green. This book now tops my list as a newborn gift, but the message of the simple text is one that can be enjoyed with older readers as well — the story leaves plenty of room for curiosity and dialogue. This is a book that can grow with a reader.

The next time I make a smoothie, I want to save the avocado pit and see what happens if my daughter and I try to help it sprout.

Jen McConnel

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**Unicorns 101**
written and illustrated by Cale Atkinson
Tundra Books, 2019
978-0-735-26543-1 (hc) $21.99
978-0-735-26544-8 (eBook) $10.99
for Preschool to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Humour | Unicorns*

Sure, everyone loves unicorns, but what do we really know about them? Cale Atkinson, PhD in hornology, aims to demystify in this fun, bright picture book all about everyone’s favourite mythological creature. With the top unicorn scientists — Dr. Glitter Pants, Grand Unistorian; Dr. Sprinkle Steed, Doctor of Magic; Dr. Star Hoof, Rainbowmetrics Specialist; Dr. Sugar Beard, Certified Hornologist and their assistant Pete, we learn everything there is to know about unicorns, scientific name Betterthan horsicus. From what they eat (24-carat cake), to how they settle disagreements (the ancient ritual of the dance-off), this clever book is filled with rainbows, sparkles and cuteness overload.

Kids of all ages will love this humorous, original and all around one-of-a-kind book about everyone’s favourite horned friend — the unicorn.

Emma Hunter

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**When I Found Grandma**
written by Saumiya Balasubramaniam
illustrated by Qin Leng
Groundwood Books, 2019
978-1-77306-018-7 (hc) $17.95
978-1-77306-314-0 (eBook) $14.95
for Kindergarten to Grade 2

*Picture Book | Grandparents | Newcomer Experience | Intergenerational Relationships | Family*

Maya knows her grandmother, who lives thousands of miles away, mostly through postcards. She’s excited when Grandma makes a surprise visit; however, their relationship doesn’t come naturally. Grandma dresses in a crimson sari and her bangles jingle loudly. She calls Maya Mayalakshmi, and cooks unfamiliar meals that Maya doesn’t like. By the time readers are halfway through this captivating debut picture book by Saumiya Balasubramaniam, Maya wishes her grandmother had never visited at all.

When I Found Grandma is a charming and poignant picture book about the evolving cross-cultural relationship between a granddaughter and her grandmother, subtly exploring the compromises each needs to make to better understand the other. Illustrated in the muted and evocative style of Toronto’s Qin Leng, the book’s plot takes an abrupt turn when Maya is separated in a crowd during a carnival, leading to a moment of understanding between grandmother and granddaughter. Though deeply rooted in personal relationships, When I Found Grandma also has a quickly paced plot that young readers will find entertaining.
Written in the voice of Maya, Balasubramaniam’s first-person narrative makes the book feel intimate, especially with the guidance of relatable, natural dialogue. While *When I Found Grandma* will especially resonate with first- or second-generation Canadians, it is a worthy addition to any child’s bookshelf, exploring the idea that not all familial relationships come easily, and that’s okay.

Jessica Rose

**Penguin Days**
written by Sara Leach
illustrated by Rebecca Bender
Pajama Press, 2018
978-1-77278-053-6 (hc) $17.95
for Grades 2 to 4

*Fiction | Family | Autism Spectrum Disorder | Weddings | Emotions*

In this follow-up book to *Slug Days*, Sara Leach continues her exploration of life through the eyes of Lauren, an eight-year-old girl on the autism spectrum. Lauren and her family are off to Aunt Joss’s farm to take part in a wedding, but events do not unfold as Lauren expects. Just the thought of playing with her cousins sends her anxiety levels soaring, and she is disappointed to find that her flower-girl outfit is a scratchy purple dress instead of the soft onesie she had mistakenly imagined. As Lauren navigates her own anxieties and misunderstandings, she eventually finds comfort and acceptance in her extended family.

Sara Leach pays keen attention to the details that matter to Lauren — noise and touch, cow poop and insects. Coping skills such as ‘square breathing’ are introduced to the reader as helpful tools Lauren uses to make it through difficult situations. Readers will notice that Lauren’s interpretations of statements, jokes and instructions are quite literal; when her mind makes a leap, it is often in an unexpected yet understandable direction. As readers get to know Lauren, they will empathize with her disappointments and smile at her honesty — a trait that seems to go hand-in-hand with her literal nature. Rebecca Bender’s black-and-white illustrations complement the storyline by conveying the emotional ups and downs of Lauren’s experience.

Overall, this book would make a great springboard for a discussion about feelings and emotions. It presents a wonderful opportunity for children to empathize with the perspectives of others.

Ildiko Sumegi is a reviewer from Ottawa and the mother of two young readers.
Central characters make for a realistic, believable plot. The pragmatic, sombre, but touches on growth and forgiveness. The actions of the ministers and as Governor General, never forgot his love for his family and Acadian roots. This attractive book provides a heartwarming account of the life of Roméo Leblanc, who in his rise from an impoverished farming background to Governor General, never forgot his love for his family and Acadian roots. The writing is direct, and the robust illustrations represent the strength of those portrayed. Given the intended age group, the inclusion of maps and sidebars would have been an enhancement. The book’s readability and inviting layout invite attention, as do the enriching segues into topics influencing Leblanc’s life, each highlighted by a contrasting background. These include sections on Acadian history and culture, a favourite recipe, Joe Dimaggio’s biography, the role of Governor General and more. Information is complemented by maps, photographs and skillful black-and-white drawings. The book includes a comprehensive index and resource list for English and French readers and a timeline of Leblanc’s life within the context of events in Canada. Endorsements from Leblanc’s son Dominic and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien are included.

With emphasis on the childhood that made the man, this biography provides a positive message about overcoming obstacles, providing ample opportunity for discussion. Also available in French as Un gamin acadien : l’odyssée de Roméo Leblanc vers Rideau Hall.

Aileen Wortley is a retired children’s librarian.

The Big Dig
written by Lisa Harrington
Nimbus Publishing, 2019
978-1-77108-754-4 (pb) $16.95
for Grades 6 to 8

Fiction | Loss | Family | Adoption | Coming of Age
Set in the 1970s, The Big Dig is a story of 14-year-old Lucy who has recently lost her mother. Shortly after her mother’s passing, Lucy’s father decides to send her to visit her mother’s estranged family — her eccentric aunt, Josie, and sister Ellen, for the summer. Lucy is angered by the decision; however, once there, Lucy slowly begins to develop a relationship with key characters. There is Colin, who is digging a massive hole in the field next door as his own form of protest against being moved to the small town, and her peculiar cousin, Kit. As Lucy confides in her new friends, secrets about Lucy’s mother’s youth begin surfacing. Together, they begin unearthing answers to some tough questions that culminate in a shocking truth.

The Big Dig is a coming-of-age story that deals with the hardships of losing a parent and uncovering family secrets, as well as the issue of adoption. Readers will enjoy the gripping mystery that deepens as the protagonist follows the clues to a path of change and forgiveness. The time period is well captured through pop-culture references of the era, giving the novel a unique setting.

Though The Big Dig deals with death and loss, the tone is not sombre, but touches on growth and forgiveness. The actions of the central characters make for a realistic, believable plot. The pragmatic protagonist is likeable, as are the secondary characters. Often through simple, realistic dialogue, profound insights are shared — insights that can be appreciated by many readers.

Melissa Connolly is a literacy consultant in Brantford, Ontario.

The Big Dig
illustrated by Maurice Cormier
Bouton d’or Acadie, 2019
978-2-89750-133-4 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 4 to 8

Non-fiction | Biography | Romeo Leblanc | Acadia | Governors General
This attractive book provides a heartwarming account of the life of Roméo Leblanc, who in his rise from an impoverished farming background to Governor General, never forgot his love for his family and Acadian roots. Glimpses of the hardship of rural life in 1930s New Brunswick are revealed as Roméo, youngest of seven siblings, assists with farm chores and attends a one-room school complete with 57 students and one teacher. Always surrounded by a loving family, his first tragedy strikes when he’s seven, when his beloved mother dies. Later, when his scholarly potential is recognized, his sister sacrifices her meagre wages to pay for his higher education. His career transitions from teacher to journalist to politician, and he makes major contributions in ministerial positions under three different prime ministers and as Governor General.

A Boy from Acadie: Roméo Leblanc’s Journey to Rideau Hall
written by Beryl Young
illustrated by Maurice Cormier
Bouton d’or Acadie, 2019
978-2-89750-125-9 (hc) $19.95
978-2-89750-133-4 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 4 to 8

Non-fiction | Biography | Romeo Leblanc | Acadia | Governors General

Fierce: Women Who Shaped Canada
written by Lisa Dalrymple
illustrated by Willow Dawson
Scholastic Canada, 2019
978-1-4431-7510-4 (hc) $16.99
for Grades 4 to 8

Non-fiction | Canadian Women | Endurance Feats | Women’s Studies
Fierce consists of 10 well-researched biographies of unknown Canadian women. They emerge from different centuries and backgrounds, each living a life of courage and accomplishing unimaginable and selfless feats for a larger good. It features women like Marguerite de la Roque, abandoned on an island teeming with ferocious animals; Joan Bamford Fletcher, who rescued 2000 prisoners from a Sumatran camp; Alice Freeman, living a double life as teacher by day and reporter by night to address social injustices; and Tha’analtther, who, at 17, negotiated peace between the Dene and Nehiyawak.

The volume is slender in size but large in its inspiration and content. Two-and-a-half years in the making, its creation is obviously a labour of love and respect by author and publisher. A two-page spread after each account verifies the authenticity of the information provided and identifies missing aspects of their lives. A scholarly introduction explains how subjects were selected and why their lives have been overlooked. Sometimes similar stories are paired as ‘sister’ stories.

The writing is direct, and the robust illustrations represent the strength of those portrayed. Given the intended age group, the inclusion of maps and sidebars would have been an enhancement.

The book inspires on several levels, bringing attention to feats of endurance impossible to imagine and simultaneously questioning why women’s achievements have so often been discounted. This is a worthwhile addition to the history of Canada and an inspirational tribute to the courage and tenacity of the human spirit. A must-read!

Aileen Wortley
Strengthened by memories of her mother, who taught her to be strong, Nia resolves to hold on to her dreams and be the author of her own story. And, while Nia’s story is one of hardship and impoverishment, it is also a story of resilience, kindness and courage. The text is interspersed with Nia’s own stories about Dewi Kadita, the Princess of the Southern Sea in Javanese folklore. She derives strength from this mythical heroine, and writing her stories proves to be Nia’s salvation.

In this moving, ultimately hopeful tale, Michelle Kadarusman presents young readers with a window into a very different world. Jakarta’s slums, rife with crushing poverty, can be a dangerous place for girls, offering few opportunities for escape; but there is also strength, loyalty, community and kinship. Nia’s refusal to give up and her determination to write a better future for herself will stay with readers long after the book is finished.

Tracey Schindler is a book reviewer and former teacher living in Bethany, Ontario.

**How to Become an Accidental Genius**
written by Elizabeth MacLeod and Frieda Wishinsky
illustrated by Jenn Playford
Orca Book Publishers, 2019
978-1-4598-1675-3 (hc) $24.95
978-1-4598-1676-0 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 4 to 8

What do Kevlar, smart dust, popsicles and plastics have in common? They were all invented by accident — invented by people who saw accidents as opportunities and understood that failures often lead to success. In this fascinating book, Elizabeth MacLeod and Frieda Wishinsky showcase a diverse cast of innovators (over half of which are women) and their inventions. Young readers meet Sarah E. Goode, who developed the first folding bed in 1885, and was the first African-American woman to receive a patent for an invention; and Narinder Singh Kapany, who, as a high school student in India, had a ‘light-bending’ idea that resulted in his invention of fibre optics in 1954.

The authors assert that all innovators share some very important traits — curiosity, persistence, flexibility, patience and passion. Each chapter highlights three remarkable innovators and the third chapter, titled ‘Pay Attention,’ features inventors who responded to needs they saw around them. Mary Anderson developed the first functioning windshield wiper in 1903, after watching a streetcar driver stick his head out his window to see in a rainstorm, while George Washington Carver saw the impoverishment of black farmers in Alabama and encouraged them to start growing peanuts instead of cotton, then invented uses for all those peanuts!

Engaging and thought provoking, this book is a treasure trove of inspirational people and ideas. There is a plethora of terrific black-and-white photographs, lively illustrations, motivating quotes and sidebars packed with additional information. We all have the potential to become ‘accidental geniuses,’ exhort MacLeod and Wishinsky, and I suspect that after reading this book, many young people will be eager to start inventing!

Tracey Schindler

**The Mystery of Black Hollow Lane**
(Black Hollow Lane, Book 1)
written by Julia Nobel
Sourcebooks Jabberwockey, 2019
978-1-4926-6464-2 (hc) $23.99
978-1-4926-6465-9 (eBook) $22.68
for Grades 4 to 6

When Emmy’s mom announces that she’s sending her to Wellsworth, a boarding school in England, Emmy’s positive that she won’t fit in. But then she finds a box of medallions in the attic that belonged to her absent father, who she learns also attended Wellsworth. When she arrives at the school, she discovers that the strange symbols from the medallions are etched on the walls and books, leading Emmy and her friends to the secret society — The Order of the Black Hollow.

Central to the story is the mystery pertaining to Emmy’s father. He disappeared when she was three and has been presumed dead, but what does the society have to do with his disappearance and who is sending her the mysterious letters? Julia Nobel does an excellent job of creating a sense of danger and suspense and of exploring themes of family, taking chances and fighting for what you want.

The first novel in this middle-grade mystery series has all the components that kids love — adventure, mysterious codes and messages and a creepy atmospheric setting. The English boarding school is full of history and secrets for Emmy and her friends to discover. Emmy is a likeable and relatable character, and readers will empathize with her feelings of insecurity and abandonment as she enters the school. At school, Emmy faces the normal challenges of fitting in, keeping up with the increased academic pressure and dealing with a roommate who clearly does not want her there.

This read offers a fresh approach to the middle-grade mystery.

Rachel Seigel
The Secret of Zoone
written by Lee Edward Födi
HarperCollins Publishers, 2019
978-0-06-284526-9 (hc) $21.00
978-0-06-284529-0 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 4 to 8
Fiction | Fantasy | Adventure | Vocabulary Development

Ozzie Sparks dreams of going on adventures around the world with his parents. Instead, he is stuck at home with his Aunt Temperance, living a very mundane life. That is until one day Ozzie comes home from school and sees a giant skyger, named Tug, lying on the couch. In search of a new adventure, Ozzie and Tug go through a secret door in the basement that leads them to Zoone, a bustling station at the centre of the multiverse that contains doors to hundreds of other worlds. However, as soon as Ozzie and Tug walk through, the door to Ozzie’s world explodes behind them. It is up to Ozzie, and the peculiar friends that he meets along the way, to convince the Council of Wizardry to repair the door to his world, while also saving the entire multiverse in the process.

Lee Edward Födi uses colourful words to describe the characters in ways that help us imagine how they might actually look, act and sound. Ozzie constantly uses words taught to him by his Aunt Temperance, while also defining them, which allows readers to expand their vocabulary while enjoying the story.

The Secret of Zoone is a true page-turner full of adventure and magic. Harry Potter fans would absolutely love reading this novel. Written for upper-elementary and junior-high students, this would be a great book to use to teach about bravery, taking risks, loyalty and friendship. It would make a great read-aloud at any time of the year, specifically when teaching about character traits and expanding vocabulary.

Michelle Snowden is a teacher and learning coach at St. Catherine Catholic Elementary/Junior High School in Edmonton.

Stand on the Sky
written by Erin Bow
Scholastic Canada, 2019
978-1-4431-6379-8 (hc) $21.99
978-1-4431-6380-4 (eBook) $21.99
for Grades 4 to 8
Fiction | Mongolia | Nomadic Lifestyle | Eagles | Family | Home | Hope

“If you tell, I’ll lose everything,” said Serik. “And I’ll never forgive you, Aish. I’ll hate you forever.” With these words echoing in her heart, Aisulu makes the devastating decision to tell her father about the limp that her brother has been hiding. For a young man who is poised to one day take over as the leader of their nomadic family, a lame leg could mean the end of all his dreams. Once Aisulu reveals Serik’s secret, her parents rush him to the city where they learn that he has cancer and his leg must be amputated. The further treatment he needs is costly and far away. But meanwhile, Aisulu has rescued an orphaned eagle, and has discovered that she “has the heart for an eagle.” Now her uncle believes that she is meant to be a burkitshi, an eagle hunter, and that she and Toktar, her eagle, will win the annual eagle festival with a cash prize that will save her family.

In elegantly crafted prose, Erin Bow vividly depicts the Mongolian desert setting and creates a powerful story of family and finding one’s place in the world. Her portrayal of Aisulu and her various relationships is thoughtful and nuanced, as Aisulu confronts the challenges she faces with courage and openness to the important life lessons that she learns along the way. These include the importance of home and family as well as the need to be true to oneself, even when that means being the first girl to compete in a male-dominated festival. While Bow is writing about a culture that is not her own, she nonetheless gives readers a thought-provoking glimpse into a different place and lifestyle while dealing with themes with universal appeal, resonance and relatability.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager of Woozles in Halifax.

In this newest addition to the Dylan Maples adventure series, 15-year-old Dylan has recently lost his friend Bomber in a car crash. Dylan is withdrawn, and occasionally he sees and even talks to his deceased friend. In an effort to reconnect with their son, Dylan’s parents take him on a trip to New Brunswick to stay with well-to-do friends Bill and Bonnie. There, he meets a local girl named Antonine, and together they witness a remarkable sight — the burning ghost ship of Chaleur Bay. Dylan and Antonine decide to investigate, using the resources at their disposal — the library, Antonine’s boat-jacking skills and, most critically, a clue left behind by Antonine’s recently deceased father.

Readers will follow Dylan, not only on his travels, but in his mind as well. Young adults will identify with the running commentary in Dylan’s head — his love for his parents that pulls against his need to be free of their watchful eyes, his initial awkward encounters with the mysterious Antonine and his critical assessments of his hosts Bill and Bonnie.

As Dylan and Antonine pursue their investigation, local politics, social class and the history of immigration to the area are all subjects that must be considered. In this way, Shane Peacock has taken a ghost story about pirates and transformed it into one that is relevant to experiences in contemporary Canadian society. This is a story about how the past is connected to the present in a very real way and how its ghosts are always within reach.

In elegantly crafted prose, Erin Bow vividly depicts the Mongolian desert setting and creates a powerful story of family and finding one’s place in the world. Her portrayal of Aisulu and her various relationships is thoughtful and nuanced, as Aisulu confronts the challenges she faces with courage and openness to the important life lessons that she learns along the way. These include the importance of home and family as well as the need to be true to oneself, even when that means being the first girl to compete in a male-dominated festival. While Bow is writing about a culture that is not her own, she nonetheless gives readers a thought-provoking glimpse into a different place and lifestyle while dealing with themes with universal appeal, resonance and relatability.

Lisa Doucet is Co-Manager of Woozles in Halifax.
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Olive Senior’s books have won many awards, including the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature and the Commonwealth Book Prize.

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After participating in a crusade to find the elusive godsgem and vanquish the Old God, apprentice knight Kalanthe Ironheart is poised to become a full-fledged knight of the realm. She is also reluctantly awaiting her inevitable marriage to a nobleman to pay off the debt she incurred for her training. Olsa Rhetsdaughter is a thief who found herself on the same quest and is now struggling to re-establish herself in the world of pickpockets and petty criminals. Too proud to accept charity from her cohorts, she is not sure where she belongs anymore. While both young women face uncertain futures, they long to find a way to be together. Then Kalanthe receives an offer of marriage, and Olsa finds herself accompanying Mage Ladros on an urgent errand relating to the godsgem. This is the story of the quest that brought them together, the aftermath of these events and the surprising ways in which both of their futures unfold.

Alternating between the time before and after this mythic quest, Johnston creates a compelling fantasy world featuring mainly female knights and a refreshingly diverse cast of highly skilled and intriguing characters. While Kalanthe and Olsa are the main focus, the other members of the crusade are equally compelling. Due to the non-linear structure of the novel, the ‘After’ storyline emerges more clearly than the quest itself, and the shifting timeline sometimes proves distracting. The language is lyrical and the glimpses that we get of this world are captivating, but the relationship between Kalanthe and Olsa is the strongest, most fully realized aspect of this tale. Fraught with tension and filled with vividly depicted scenes of love and yearning, theirs is an epic romance and readers may wish that we could have witnessed the actual development of their feelings for one another over time.

Lisa Doucet

The Afterward
written by E.K. Johnston
Dutton Books, 2019
978-0-7352-3189-4 (hc) $23.99
978-0-7352-3190-0 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 9 and up

After just one chapter of *Comics Will Break Your Heart*, plenty of momentous action has occurred: a fight, a stolen car, a mysterious new boy in the small town of Sandford, Nova Scotia. Miriam Kendrick is drawn to this cute boy who has good taste in comic books and art, until she learns his name, Weldon Warrick. Of the same Warrick family that became fabulously wealthy from the TomorrowMen comics franchise, while her grandfather, who created the comic-book art, sold his share for a pittance. Hicks deftly establishes the characters and themes in this compelling opening, and creates substantial suspense for what is to come.

Miriam is a smart, motivated, knowledgeable 16-year-old with eccentric and loving parents. Weldon is a rich kid who is well aware that the bad behaviour that has exiled him to his dad’s hometown is a cry for parental attention. Sparks fly between the protagonists immediately, and even though the romance does not kick off until almost halfway through the book, the connection between Weldon and Mir is undeniable. With the family animosity amping up, Mir makes brave decisions about her future and lets herself fall for the attentive Weldon in a sweet and chaste romance.

At the centre of the story is the troubled history between the two families, and a contentious lawsuit that reverberates even two generations later. This thoughtful exploration of how kids get caught up in family history is also a lesson about how to make peace with the past. In this case, reconciliation comes via an adventure to Comic-Con! Substantial questions about artistic freedom and self-discovery are embedded within a highly enjoyable novel with vibrant, appealing characters.

Kris Rothstein is a children’s book agent, editor and cultural critic in Vancouver, BC.

**Comics Will Break Your Heart**
written by Faith Erin Hicks
Roaring Book Press, 2019
978-1-62672-364-1 (hc) $24.99
978-1-62672-365-8 (eBook) $10.99
for Grades 8 and up

**The Field Guide to the North American Teenager**
written by Ben Philippe
Balzer & Bray, 2019
978-0-06-282413-4 (eBook) $11.99
for Grades 9 to 12

The Field Guide to the North American Teenager is a sharp, witty debut by author Ben Philippe. Norris’s sarcastic tone and observations flesh out a character who may have a chip on his shoulder and a skeptical viewpoint, but also has heart. Philippe captures an authentic voice of a teen who is a little too smart for his own good and knows it, providing lots of opportunity for Norris to get himself into trouble.

Besides being an incisive look at the categories of high-school students, Philippe’s writing takes a look at Canadian-American relations and the ideas we hold about each other. Norris’s Haitian background also plays a role, as his mother warns him against prejudice in the States and Norris dismisses her to his own detriment.

Suitable as a recreational read for its lighthearted plot about taking a girl to prom, Norris’s story also contains depth, insight and a memorable cast of characters.

Amy Mathers hosts a podcast for the CCBC and avidly promotes Canadian teen fiction.
Funny, You Don't Look Autistic: A Comedian's Guide to Life on the Spectrum
written by Michael McCreary
Annick Press, 2019
978-1-77321-257-9 (pb) $14.95
for Grades 7 and up
Non-fiction | Memoir | Performing Arts | Autism Spectrum Disorder | Stand-up Comedy | Humour | Diversity | Self-acceptance

Funny, You Don't Look Autistic: A Comedian's Guide to Life on the Spectrum by 20-something stand-up comic Michael McCreary is a candid, upbeat #OwnVoices memoir that shatters stereotypes and tackles misconceptions about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and diverse voices in a refreshingly memorable way.

Diagnosed with ASD at age five, McCreary describes it as a “life-changing moment” that helped him to navigate “life, school, friendship, love and amateur theatre as a person who just happens to have ASD.” In junior high, McCreary took to journalling, an empowering refuge for his social traumas and innate humour. By age 14, he was doing local stand-up gigs and by his early 20s, he’d had the honour of performing at the annual pre-eminent Geneva Centre for Autism Symposium and for Colonel Chris Hadfield’s Generator show at Toronto’s Massey Hall.

Divided into three parts — “Portrait of the Aspie as a Young Man,” “Everyone Has an Anime Phase” and “Stim City” — McCreary weaves his compelling life story with insightful anecdotes; amusing sidebars, charts and diagrams; easy-to-understand definitions; colour photos and a useful autism resource section, making this guide a must-have for anyone with ASD or those looking to widen their understanding of it. Some samples of his jokes would have been welcome, but maybe that’s a clever marketing tactic — you’ll just have to get tickets to his next performance.

In his introduction, the author says, “Whether you’re on the spectrum or not, I hope that you’ll be able to relate to my struggles and triumphs, and that we can laugh together at the quirks and awkward moments that come with being human.” Mission accomplished, McCreary!

Jennifer D. Foster is a freelance editor, writer and mentor. She’s chair of Editors Toronto, administrative director of Rowers Reading Series and vice-president of the Toronto branch of Canadian Authors Association.

In The Key of Nira Ghani
written by Natasha Deen
Running Press Teens, 2019
978-0-7624-6548-4 (eBook) $12.99
for Grades 7 to 9
Fiction | Family | Fitting In | Music | Passion | First Love

Guyanese-Canadian teen Nira Ghani is caught between her parents’ expectations and her desire to be a musician. Told to focus on her grades, Nira struggles to convince her parents to let her audition for jazz band. The one person who believes in her is her grandmother, offering consoling cups of tea as Nira navigates the challenges of teen life — a rift in a friendship, first love and complicated family dynamics. Finding comfort in her trumpet music, Nira just might survive growing up after all.

Natasha Deen, author of the Guardian series, steps away from her usual high-paced fare to bring readers Nira Ghani, an earnest teen with a passion for Georgia, her b-flat pocket trumpet. As immigrants from Guyana, Nira’s parents want her to have a better life with a stable, respected profession and see her music as an unnecessary distraction.

Trying to fit in at high school, while still respecting her parents’ values, is a challenge. Nira deals with misconceptions about her heritage on a daily basis and as a result has trouble letting people in. Add to that the constant comparisons between her uncle, who is rich and thriving, and her father, who is not, Nira is at odds with her cousin Farah, who always seems to do better.

Deen expertly writes an affecting story about a character who is fallible and experiencing the pains of becoming an adult. Nira’s love for her family and her love of music may conflict at times, but with her grandmother’s help, Nira discovers inner strength she never knew she had.

Amy Mathers

Killer Style: The History of How Fashion Has Injured, Maimed, & Murdered Through History
written by Serah-Marie McMahon and Alison Matthews David
illustrated by Gillian Wilson
Owlkids Books, 2019
978-1-77147-253-1 (hc) $18.95
for Grades 6 to 9
Non-fiction | Fashion | Style | Health | Clothing | Politics | Anthropology

Who knew that in 2000, Japanese police banned people from wearing platform shoes while driving? Or that the culprit in England’s biggest department store blaze was celluloid hair accessories? Don your comfiest loungewear and get cozy for an eye-opening account of some of history’s most fatal fashion fads and horrifically harmful haute couture with Killer Style: The History of How Fashion Has Injured, Maimed, & Murdered Through History.

Recounting far more than just deadly fashion faux pas, Serah-Marie McMahon and Alison Matthews David chronicle the often macabre consequences style and vanity have put upon both its producers and consumers through the ages. They divided Killer Style into 16 short chapters housed within three distinctly memorable parts: ‘Horrified Heads,’ ‘Miserable Middles’ and ‘Unlucky Legs.’ Each one features lethal hazards, ranging from strangling scarves and factory collapses to flammable flannelette, treacherous tulle and distressed denim.

Catchy alliterative wordplay and a snappy, just-the-facts narrative keep the text from being overly dark and ghastly. And the colourful vignettes by illustrator/printmaker Gillian Wilson, coupled with archival photos, lend depth and credibility.

The insightful conclusion succinctly sums up the book’s crimes of fashion, stating that, among other discoveries and advances, medical standards and government regulations have helped to declare certain fashion risks unacceptable and protect the most vulnerable. Complete with sidebars, historical anecdotes, a table of
The Sound of Drowning
written by Katherine Fleet
Page Street Publishing, 2019
978-1-62414-711-1 (pb) $16.95
for Grades 7 and up

Fiction | Family | Relationships | Secrets | Coming of Age | Tragedy | Death

Meredith Hall is a young woman who has crashed into waves of tragedy, romance, secrets and love. Each night, she takes the ferry to meet with Ben, the boy she grew up with. He makes her feel complete and secure. She visits him to reassure herself that the secret that almost destroyed them is kept in the past. His love and forgiveness are necessary for Meredith to move on from this terrible event.

But then Wyatt arrives and awakens Meredith to new possibilities. Having just moved from Texas, Wyatt makes Meredith feel alive as he allows her to be carefree and have fun, something that she has denied herself for so long. As their friendship grows, thoughts of Ben force Meredith to make a decision.

Readers will feel they are also caught in this love triangle and will eventually discover the secret that has destroyed so many lives, and just how deep the repercussions go. As they dive into the story of what happened to Meredith and Ben, the importance of the water and the need to see Ben each night become both tragic and beautiful.

Katherine Fleet writes a beautiful love story that takes the reader through many twists and turns. The struggles that Meredith faces are raw with emotion and demonstrate how one’s choices can have a ripple effect. Meredith’s story shows us how difficult it is to heal when you can only hear the sounds of your heart drowning.

Christine O’Sullivan is a secondary teacher-librarian in Bramford, Ontario.

To See the Stars
written by Jan Andrews
illustrated by Tara Bryan
Running the Goat Books & Broadsides, 2019
978-1-927917-17-6 (pb) $16.95
for Grades 7 and up

Historical Fiction | Girls | Resilience | Workers’ Rights | Newfoundland | New York

In the final novel from Order of Canada-recipient Jan Andrews, this first-person narrative follows 14-year-old Edie as she imagines more for herself than a life of poverty in her early 20th century Newfoundland fishing village. Edie takes up service in a fancy house in St. John’s, where she endures gruelling chores, baffling routines and an uncaring mistress. She then moves to a tenement in New York City and accepts a job at the Global Shirtwaist Company. There, Edie finds a community as caring as her own family and she participates in the 1909 garment workers’ strike for better working conditions and witnesses the horrific Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911.

Edie captures the grit and determination of the Newfoundland spirit, marching forward to follow her dreams and find her place in the world. Although her journey is rife with challenges, she’s a powerful and hopeful character who brings history to life. Together,
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Greta feels like she’s standing in a maze, turning round and round, waiting for something to become clear. Living under the constant abuse of her stepmother, with only her twin brother, Ash, in her corner, Greta watches her family’s downward spiral. She believed her last year of high school would be her only escape, especially after meeting Rachel and her popular group of friends. But after a fateful night up at her so-called friends’ cabin, school becomes a corner, Greta watches her family’s downward spiral. She believed her last year of high school would be her only escape, especially after meeting Rachel and her popular group of friends. But after a fateful night up at her so-called friends’ cabin, school becomes a maze, turning round and round, waiting for something to become clear. Living under the constant abuse of her stepmother, with only her twin brother, Ash, in her corner, Greta watches her family’s downward spiral. She believed her last year of high school would be her only escape, especially after meeting Rachel and her popular group of friends. But after a fateful night up at her so-called friends’ cabin, school becomes a minefield of fear and shame. Then her stepmother convinces her father to abandon the kids. Alone and haunted by memories, Greta finds support in unlikely places and realizes that there is still hope.

Lawrence’s work is realistic and in-depth, showing her main character’s inner turmoil, caused by the harsh realities she faces. Even within the perspective of third-person limited, Lawrence successfully manages to depict separate characters’ views and reactions toward the same chain of events.

This incredibly written story deals with several tough aspects of our modern life, while still managing to maintain and give hope to its readers. Anyone who has ever struggled with self-blame or guilt, questioned the stability of their future, or wanted to trust someone even after they’ve been wronged by them, can relate to Greta and her story. Written for high-school students, this book is an excellent reminder that when difficult times come your way, you should never give up hope.

Sara Rigotti is a student of St. Stephen Secondary School in Bowmanville, Ontario, and the youngest member of the Writers’ Community of Durham Region.

Karen Krossing

**We Contain Multitudes**
written by Sarah Henstra
Penguin Teen Canada, 2019
978-0-7352-6421-2 (hc) $22.99
for Grades 9 and up
Fiction | LGBTQ+ | Forgiveness | Relationships | Family | Letter Writing

Flamboyantly gay, frequently bullied Jonathan Hopkirk and notorious bad boy Adam Kurlansky are an unlikely pairing. Nevertheless, an English assignment requires the two boys to write regular letters to one another. While their exchanges are sometimes formal, sometimes angry, occasionally critical, often philosophical, they are always honest. As they get to know one another, they get to explore many intensely personal topics in the relative safety of these letters, discovering things about each other and about themselves. And they fall desperately in love. But despite their best efforts to protect one another and their fragile relationship, life and love and families are complicated, and people hurt each other in so many different ways. How do you ever really know all that is in someone else’s head and heart? Because, after all, we contain multitudes.

Presented in an epistolary format, the writing in this book is exquisite and poetic. Each letter creates an eloquent portrait of its writer, enabling the reader to get to know both boys more intimately, in spite of the things that Kurl initially keeps hidden. Jonathan is quirky and offbeat with his fanboy obsession with Walt Whitman, his love of vintage clothing and his wildly beautiful voice as he sings bluegrass tunes and plays his mandolin. Kurl is a former football star and hot-tempered and unpredictable. He is also a gifted writer and he loves his mother and worries about his brother who served in Afghanistan. Their respective stories, as well as their combined story, are complex and beautiful. This is a character-driven book that explores family and relationships in a realistic way. While a lot happens in the final quarter of the book (too much to be fully resolved), this is a poignant love story and a profound meditation on the complex nature of families and forgiveness.

Lisa Doucet

**Trail of Crumbs**
written by Lisa J. Lawrence
Orca Book Publishers, 2019
978-1-4598-2123-1 (eBook) $9.99
for Grades 9 and up
Fiction | Dysfunctional Families | Poverty | Abandonment | Sexual Assault | Hope

The fateful night up at her so-called friends’ cabin, school becomes a minefield of fear and shame. Then her stepmother convinces her father to abandon the kids. Alone and haunted by memories, Greta finds support in unlikely places and realizes that there is still hope.

Lawrence’s work is realistic and in-depth, showing her main character’s inner turmoil, caused by the harsh realities she faces. Even within the perspective of third-person limited, Lawrence successfully manages to depict separate characters’ views and reactions toward the same chain of events.

Liv and Jory Brewer have grown up hating each other. Liv is a former pageant queen and a child star, while Jory, born with a partial facial paralysis, faded into the background. The only thing that unites them is contempt for their parents. Now, Liv is suing their parents for emancipation, but on the day of the hearing, their parents mysteriously vanish and the siblings must join forces to find them. What begins as a simple overnight trip turns surreal and terrifying.

Telling the story from the alternating viewpoints of Liv and Jory, and lacing it with flashbacks from their childhood, Boorman has deftly created a psychological thriller. Liv and Jory’s memories...
differ — Jory remembers feeling invisible and always being pushed aside for his famous sister, while Liv remembers Jory being spoiled and selfish and ruining her fun.

When their parents disappear, Liv convinces Jory to join her on a road trip to find them, but it quickly turns into something out of a Stephen King novel. The siblings eventually find themselves lost on a deserted back road in the desert without gas, supplies or cellphone service. Adding to the eeriness of the trip is the way that time and events keep changing and repeating. Liv is certain they must face their past and find a way to reconcile to end the loop they’re stuck in.

Filled with false clues, unreliable characters and settings, and told at a breakneck pace, this novel’s ending will come as a big surprise to most readers!

Rachel Seigel

You Owe Me a Murder
written by Eileen Cook
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019
978-1-328-51902-3 (hc) $25.50
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for Grades 9 and up
Fiction | Mystery | Murder | Blackmail

Seventeen-year-old Kim never thought she’d be plotting a murder, but that’s exactly what happens when she meets Nicki — a stranger on the plane to London who jokingly proposes swapping murders — she’ll kill Kim’s ex-boyfriend, Connor, and Kim will kill her alcoholic mother.

Kim was devastated when Connor suddenly dumped her right before the school trip that she agreed to go on with him. When Nicki proves an eager audience for her venting, she gets caught up in listing all of the things she hated about him and mentions she’d be much better off without him. Kim thinks it’s all in fun until Connor mysteriously dies and she’s being blackmailed to fulfill her end of the bargain.

With Connor’s death, the clock starts ticking. Kim must either do what Nicki wants or take the fall for Connor’s murder. The first isn’t an option. Despite her venting, she didn’t really want Connor to die and she can’t commit murder. Unfortunately, now Kim’s sanity is in question, and readers learn that there is more to her story with Connor than what she initially admitted.

In her new thriller, Eileen Cook challenges readers to consider how far they’ll go when their back is up against a wall and they seem to be out of choices. The story is action-packed and full of surprising twists and turns. Cook successfully keeps the reader wondering what Nicki’s next move will be, how Kim can resolve her dilemma and whether or not Nicki is even real.

This is a riveting thriller that readers won’t be able to put down.

Rachel Seigel

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