



# May We Recommend... Bob Graham

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Article Category:

May We Recommend

Byline:

**Tony Bradman** introduces **Bob Graham**.

a series in which we feature writers and books we think you might like to know better.

For younger readers, **Tony Bradman** introduces **Bob Graham**

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Theo is a small black dog of indeterminate breed. Theo lives with Sarah and her little baby brother, John.

Theo is very playful.

In Bob Graham's **Here Comes Theo**, in fact, this particular canine is so playful and friendly that he knocks Sarah over to give her 'the licking treatment'. Dog owners, especially owners of small, black and over-affectionate mongrel dogs will know exactly what the licking treatment consists of: a warm, rasping, red tongue slopping all over your face at a high rate of knots.

Such seemingly minor details form an essential part of the appeal of Bob Graham's work. It's the sort of closely observed, everyday part of life in a family house which draws young children in - and makes them laugh. In **Here Comes John**, a companion volume to the book which features the licking treatment, baby John crawls along the garden path and meets ... a snail. He's saved from a fate worse than yeuch! by Sarah's well timed intervention, and there will be many older brothers and sisters among the book's readers who will have had the same experience of stopping baby siblings from eating something nasty they've just found. Put this together with the sort of combination of words and pictures that make these books ideal for early reading and you've found a name well worth recommending.

Bob Graham is a softly spoken Australian who once lived in Manchester for a while. 'That was just after I got married. My wife Carolyn comes from London originally, and her parents still live in England.' Their first child, Naomi, was born while the couple were living in Manchester, and although both of them wanted to try and make a go of life in the old country, harsh economic reality forced a return to the Antipodes. 'It just wasn't much fun living in a small flat without enough coins for the meter. But I do love the English countryside, and I'd really like to come and settle here.'

Down under, Bob and Carolyn have moved house 12 times in 14 years, finally settling in a house on top of a hill in the middle of a rain forest near Melbourne. Daughter Naomi is now 16 and her brother Peter 14. All of which may explain why Bob Graham's first large format picture book, **Pearl's Place**, was about moving house. Arthur, the hero of the story, lives in a block of flats with his mum where he's not allowed to keep pets. Then he discovers Pearl, who lives in an old rambling house which contains hundreds of budgerigars.

A budgerigar also features in the book which first brought Bob Graham's work to my attention. **Pete and Roland** was published in hardback here a few years ago by Collins, and is now available as a Picture Lion paperback from Fontana.

This touching little story of how Pete finds and looks after budgerigar Roland until the day Roland flies away comes, says Bob Graham, from an experience in his own family. **Jenny's Baby Brother** issued at the same time by Collins (and now also available in Picture Lions) has the same ring of truth about it. Jenny isn't very keen on her new baby brother until he does something remarkable - like splatting her in the eye with a perfectly aimed shot from his highchair.

Re-settled in Australia Bob Graham put his art school training to use and worked for a while for the government printing office in Sydney where he did what he describes as 'educational artwork'. 'But I had always been interested in children's books, and one day when I was at home from work with an illness I decided to start one. That book eventually became **Pete and Roland**.' From there he went from strength to strength. Several of his books have had foreign editions, most notably in countries such as France, Germany, Norway, Finland and America. In this country he is now published in hardback by Blackie and by Hamish Hamilton, for whom he did the Theo, John and Sarah books. There are now two more of those titles forthcoming: **Where is Sarah?** and **Bath Time for John**. In both of these the irrepressible Theo causes all sorts of havoc with a game of hide and seek, a toy frog who ends up missing a leg and Sarah's face - which gets the licking treatment once again.

Apart from appearing to be a little bemused at the success of his creations, Bob Graham looks like a very happy man indeed. Perhaps that's got something to do with the fact that he's always liked children's books - to the extent that they've come before other things in the Graham household.

'My wife works in a bookshop, and we're lucky to have lots of books stacked up all around the house. Children's books, I think, are most important. Our kids at any rate always had books - they even had books before we had the telly! In fact they've even had books sometimes instead of, or before, other things.'

Family input still plays a large part in Bob's work even though his children are now well past the picture book stage. 'My kids are a captive audience, but they do give me a lot of constructive criticism. I show them my books and get lots of ideas from them. In fact Pete's very good on artwork - he draws very well himself, and I'm a great fan of his work. I try not to push him too much, just encourage him.'

That warm family feeling, and knowledge of the way children are, based on real parental experience, informs his latest picture book for Blackie, **Libby, Oscar and Me**, to be published in February. It's a dressing up story, again based on family experience, this time of daughter Naomi's dressing up games in the past. He's also working on a new picture book called **First There was Frances**, the story of a lady who collects animals - which again is based on someone he knows.

A growing reputation has led to lots of commissions and projects. I've got so much to do that it'll be no telly for me for a while'. he said.

With books like Bob Graham's to share more adults and young children might feel like turning the set off for a while themselves.

## **Bob Graham's books**

### **Pearl's Place**

Blackie, 0 216 91487 6, £4.95; Picture Lions, 0 00 662342 5, £1.25 (in February).

### **Pete and Roland**

Picture Lions, 0 00 661880 4, £1.25

### **Jenny's Baby Brother**

Picture Lions, 0 00 661881 2, £1.25

## **Libby, Oscar and Me**

Blackie, 0 216 91674 7,£5.50

## **Here Comes Theo**

Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11200 1, £3.95

## **Here Comes John**

Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11199 4 £3.95

## **Where is Sarah?**

Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11434 9, £2.95

## **Bath Time for John**

Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11433 0, £2.95

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