



Editor's Page ? May 1986

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News and comment from the Editor.

By the time this May issue of **Book for Keeps** reaches you it will be June; like the summer we are rather late in arriving. We know the magazine has been missed because of the number of (in the main) friendly calls we've had asking what had happened. The second multi-cultural guide is what has happened; we've finally got it in our hands (and by now we hope into yours too) and that feat - along with one or too other things - has stretched our slim resources to the point where the May issue slipped back and we couldn't recover. We do apologise for keeping you all waiting; we have now caught up with the schedule and the July issue is on target.

Late though it is, we make no apologies for what is in this special Picture Book Issue of **BfK** - it's full of the voices of people who have things to say about picture books and we defy you not to be interested and stimulated by what you find as you turn the pages. For a start there's Elaine Moss looking back at twenty-five years of picture books - an area of children's publishing about which she is an experienced commentator, who has played no small part in helping us to understand what these books have to offer to children and how we might more frequently bring them together. I hope Elaine approves that description; she steadfastly resists labels like 'expert' and 'critic' (although she is both in the best and most positive sense of those words). Her particular contribution is to share her enthusiasm and knowledge in a way that makes us confident that we can get there too, to invite us into the charmed circle of 'expertness' where there is room for everyone to contribute. This quality is captured exactly in the selections from her writing and lectures over the past twenty-five years that make up **Part of the Pattern** (Bodley Head, 0 370 30860 3, £8.95). The articles and interviews - arising from what Elaine characteristically calls her 'fieldwork in children's books' - are strung together by an autobiographical thread of comment and recollection. For those who have read the pieces as they appeared, their collection between two covers sparks off new ideas and insights; for those meeting them for the first time here is instruction and delight, an entry pass into a friendly world from one of its distinguished citizens.

Looking back and seeing through

One of Elaine's particular qualities is her capacity to be still excited and fascinated by the world in which she works. When we asked her to look back to the early sixties - a real watershed in British picture books - and give us some perspective on the mass of full colour books, whose regular appearance we now take for granted, it was as if we had offered her a treat. With typical thoroughness she explored her first interested reactions, went off to research, check, talk to people - the results you can read for yourself (see page 4). And when you've finished that turn over again and be further enlightened - as I was - by what Shirley Hughes has to say about the design of picture books. Shirley is that rare thing - a superb practitioner who is absorbed by her art but can communicate its complexities to 'outsiders'. As with Elaine, I always come away from meeting or reading Shirley with something new to add to my own sum of experience. We know that the way books are designed is one of Shirley's particular interests; it's a hidden aspect of books which affects us although we may be unconscious of it. She writes about it in a way that makes us see more clearly, makes the invisible reveal itself to be examined. The illustrations for **Grand Designs** we must add, were chosen by us not by Shirley. She made lots of suggestions but we decided that the best way to illustrate an article on designing pages was to

show you a double page spread from an artist who does it supremely well. **Chips and Jessie** has been so carefully and thoughtfully designed that the reader, is not aware of what is happening. Look carefully at the way the text is positioned, how the pictures extend and explain the text, how the speech bubbles are placed, how the frame at the edge of the pages is broken, how the eye takes in the page, and then consider the effect of all this on readers sharpening their expertise on longer stories. Magic.

More voices, more views

And there's more. Colin McNaughton - another practitioner who knows a thing or two about design - speaks out on behalf of the Mother Goose jury about a disappointing year for newcomers to children's book illustration. Susan Varley, winner of last year's Mother Goose Award for **Badger's Parting Gift**, was enticed to London from Blackpool to meet and talk to Harold Jones, a contemporary of Ardizzone, who has achieved the status of a classic illustrator in his own lifetime. Klaus Flugge, Susan Varley's editor at Andersen was sceptical about whether we'd get Susan to do it. She's a quiet person with a tendency to shyness, but she's an artist and, as we'd hoped, the opportunity to meet someone, whose work is very much in the tradition of illustration, she favours herself, couldn't be resisted. We had a delightful time in Harold Jones' studio - the room and its contents would have made an article on their own - and it was a pleasure to see the link forged between the generations and to find how much they had in common. Susan's account of that meeting captures its flavour exactly (see page 24). I interviewed Lynley Dodd, in Durham at the Federation of Children's Book Groups eighteenth birthday party - she was disguised as a Scottish terrier (Hairy Maclary) at the time, having just won the fancy dress competition for book characters; she made the costume in Hong Kong on her way over from New Zealand. Another book person who really gets involved! And there is Graham Oakley ? what better time to catch him for our Authorgraph than with a new book as exciting as **Henry's Quest** (0 333 40841 1, £4.95) which we are delighted to have on our cover (with a little help from Macmillan). The book is a real treat. Enjoy it yourself and make it available to those older children you know will appreciate its theme and enjoy the jokes.

I haven't mentioned the second multi-cultural guide. We are holding our breath waiting for the reaction. We hope you like it.

Pat

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