

## Newsletter Number Four, March 2012

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March in the mountains has turned out beautifully. For as many as three days the sun has been shining, the air is fresh and the birds are loving the fine weather.

The year began well, with regular visitors. Next week will be one of our busiest. Firstly a visit from a group of twenty home-school children, then the day after a visit from children at Scots School, Lithgow. I welcome visits from school children and enjoy sharing the magical journey in the development of a picture book with them. They are usually enthralled and a highlight is their completion of the educational activity sheet I've prepared for them.

Saturday 24 March is our one day course on creating children's picture books with celebrated illustrator Dee Huxley. These courses have been running now for five years and have been hugely successful. There is never a shortage of people wanting to learn about picture books. So much so that I've taken double the usual number of bookings for this course!

### COMING UP?

Because I'll be out of action for a while recovering from my total knee replacement, I haven't put a program for the rest of the year in place. However, when I'm up and about again, watch this space!

In the meantime, let's celebrate National Year of Reading. Pinerolo is a partner and I am an Official Blue Mountains Ambassador, so there's lots to be done. A really important event coming up is the MAURICE SAXBY LECTURE - organised by the CBCA NSW branch. It's at the State Library of NSW on 1 May. All welcome. For a booking form and information go to: <http://nsw.cbca.org.au/userfiles/file/NSW/2012/saxby%20flyer.pdf>

Following is a piece I wrote for National Year of Reading. It was posted on 'Walk a Book' the blog from Walker Books. Keep an eye on that blog. There's some fascinating material. This isn't the original as I've revised it a little to include even more favourite books.

It's so encouraging that in the face of the ebook challenge publishers are continuing to publish picture books - and the books they are publishing are beautiful, with innovative design and production, making them a truly tactile experience.

To me, nothing, absolutely nothing, will replace sharing a picture book with a child on your lap. Imagine trying to share a double-page spread, with a beautiful illustration, with a child when all you've got is a screen!

### NATIONAL YEAR OF READING

National Year of Reading is promoting the joy of reading. Its aim is to get Australia reading. That means everyone: men, women, boys and girls, from the youngest children to the oldest senior citizens. I'm a bit of an optimist, so normally don't have any regrets. But one of my regrets is that I didn't grow up with books. So when I began my career as a children's librarian I discovered all these wonders on the book shelves. I'll be eternally grateful to Maurice Saxby, one of my lecturers for librarianship, who hooked me on books. He changed my life. So I've worked with children and their books all my life: as a children's librarian, as a bookseller, then as a publisher, eventually with my own company Margaret Hamilton Books, now as proprietor of Pinerolo, the Children's Book Cottage at Blackheath. Through all those years I have derived great satisfaction from encouraging children to read, and reading books written for them, from the earliest readers to the most complex, has been a constant joy.

Because I'm now working to promote children's picture books and their creators, my list of recommendations for Year of Reading will include lots of picture books. It shouldn't be too difficult to find picture books to fit the theme for every month of Year of Reading. However, having said that, compiling a list of favourites is a tough call, so I'll probably add a few more along the way and because of space limitations, I've had to leave heaps out!

### FEBRUARY: LAUGH

'Laughter is the best medicine' someone once said. One of the funniest Australian picture books, being reissued after twenty-five years, is SISTER MADGE'S BOOK OF NUNS by Doug MacLeod and Craig Smith. BARRY by Colin Thompson made me laugh and so did UNPLUGGED! by Glenda Millard and Dee Huxley. A really 'laugh-out-loud' new picture book is THE QUEEN WITH THE WOBBLY BOTTOM by Phillip Gwynne, illustrated by Bruce Whatley (Little Hare).

### MARCH: THINK

Books make us think. They open new doors and introduce new concepts. They help us to understand human nature - ourselves, other people and the world around us. A really moving story is THE HAPPY PRINCE by Oscar Wilde. WHY I LOVE AUSTRALIA by Bronwyn Bancroft makes us think about our lives here. THE NAMING OF TISHKIN SILK and the other titles in the Kingdom of Silk Series by Glenda

Millard make us think about families. Glenda Millard's FOR ALL CREATURES, illustrated by Rebecca Cool makes us think about things we should be thankful for:

#### APRIL: FEEL

Books can make us feel, emotionally, or they are so tactile we can physically 'feel' them. Double-page spreads carry the story through in words and pictures. I doubt very much that ebooks will ever be able to replicate picture books and the tactile pleasure that they offer. Hold a picture book in your hands, turn it around and over; run your hand over the cover. Is the cover laminated with a gloss finish or a matt finish, or a mixture of both? Has the book got a dust jacket? Turn the pages. Is the paper shiny or matt? Are there pictures on every page? Smell the book and enjoy it from cover to cover. Picture books which make us feel, emotionally, stay with us forever and we can read them over and over again. Some of my favourites are THE VERY BEST OF FRIENDS by Margaret Wild and Julie Vivas or PIGLET AND GRANNY by Margaret Wild and Stephen Michael King or LOOK, A BOOK by Libby Gleeson and Freya Blackwood. A thoughtful new picture book is A BEAR AND A TREE by the incomparable Stephen Michael King (Viking/Penguin).

#### MAY: ESCAPE

For some of us our daily lives are rather humdrum and uninteresting. Our lives can be enriched by escaping into other people's worlds or putting ourselves in their shoes. Losing yourself in a picture book is quite one of the best things to do. Jeannie Baker's wonderful book MIRROR highlights life in Sydney against the life of a similar family in Morocco. Jeannie spent time in Morocco steeping herself in the local culture. Her collage illustrations are incredible.

#### JUNE: DREAM

We dream about lots of things: world peace, finding a soul mate, having a baby, becoming a rock star, or just having a gourmet meal. Many books can make us dream, but one of this year's best books about dreams is LIGHTNING JACK by Glenda Millard, illustrated by Patricia Mullins.

#### JULY: DISCOVER

Discovering wonderful books in your favourite bookshop or local library can be loads of fun. Libraries are free and hold treasures that may no longer be available in bookshops. It's very satisfying to visit a library and go home with a stack of books. But having your own 'home library' is having old friends that you can turn to again and again. You're never stuck for a companion. Grow up with books of your own. Start with GRUG by Ted Prior; then read TEN LITTLE FINGERS AND TEN LITTLE TOES by Mem Fox and Helen Oxenbury and move on to **any** book by Bob Graham.

#### AUGUST: QUESTION

If people stopped asking questions centuries ago we wouldn't have progressed to where we are today. Enquiring minds have been responsible for the great inventions that make our daily lives so comfortable. Children's Book Week is in August with the theme 'Champions Read'. Try reading some of the books that were shortlisted for the awards this year:

#### SEPTEMBER: GROW

Everything we do in life helps us grow as human beings – emotionally, mentally and spiritually. When we're young we can't wait to be grown up, but when we're older we remember our youth with nostalgia. Growing up means birthdays, so read WHERE DOES THURSDAY GO? by Janeen Brian, illustrated by Stephen Michael King or THE PERFECT PRESENT by Fiona Robertson.

#### OCTOBER: EXPLORE

Get out there and explore life, with all its complexities. Understand it more by reading widely and joining in other people's experiences. Exploring is not just finding new places, but a book can take us to fantastic destinations. Visit ONCE THERE WAS A BOY by Dub Leffler and MR CHICKEN GOES TO PARIS by Leigh Hobbs. Or to really explore dangerous places try ALIVE IN THE DEATH ZONE by Lincoln Hall.

#### NOVEMBER: CRY

People cry for all sorts of different reasons – grief, pain, or sheer joy. One of my favourite books of all time makes me cry every time I look at it. SADAKO AND THE THOUSAND PAPER CRANES by Eleanor Coerr; was arguably one of the most important books of the twentieth century. It inspired and continues to inspire millions of readers. The subsequent picture book SADAKO, magnificently illustrated by Ed Young, is equally moving.

#### DECEMBER: LOVE2READ

Hopefully you'll add books to your Christmas list. A book is a gift that will outlast all the cheap plastic toys, which break, or the chocolates which are eaten and quickly forgotten. Classics make great gifts. They are books which have stood the test of time and been enjoyed by several generations. Wonderful new editions are always available. Try these: THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS by Kenneth Grahame, illustrated by Robert Ingpen (or any of the other classics illustrated by Robert Ingpen), and Australian classics like SNUGGLEPOT AND CUDDLEPIE by May Gibbs, THE MAGIC PUDDING by Norman Lindsay. Or even a beautifully illustrated edition of THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

Once you have spent a year reading you will be hooked on books for life. Keep it up! There are far more books available than one person can manage to read in their whole lifetime – but it's fun to try to read as many as you can!

My thanks to publishers for sending review copies of their new picture books. It's a constant joy to be able to share these with visitors, both children and course participants - and a great opportunity to promote Australia picture book publishing, which is alive and well.

I'll try very hard to publish a newsletter more often. I welcome feedback though, so would be interested in your views. It's important to keep in touch. Happy Reading!

Margaret Hamilton AM