



Editor's Page - September 1988

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News and comment from the Editor.

Another summer almost gone *and* no break this year for the **BfK** team - there's been too much going on. For a start there have been the merger negotiations.. .

Welcome BBN Children's Books

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I am delighted to announce that, as from this issue (Sept 88), British Book News Children's Books, the magazine published by The British Council, *has* merged with Books for Keeps. We had much in common, not least readers (around half of BBN Children's Books subscribers are **BfK** readers too) and, although the style, tone, content and philosophies were slightly different, we were close enough for it to be a fairly painless (and in the event pleasurable) process to come together. You may ask, *so* where's the difference? - this issue of **BfK** looks and feels like the previous 51. Well, that's the first thing to say. **BfK** will remain unchanged philosophically and, as ever, utterly and unashamedly independent. The changes a long time 'abrewing but given a marvellous impetus by the merger talks, will *take* many issues to unfold and are to do with more pages given over to wider reviewing, improved design, more colour and more book world information. A bigger, better magazine *in* other words. One thing we shall incorporate from BBN Children's Books is their advance publishing listing to start from BfK's March 1989 issue (publishers, please note: we shall be looking for fulsome and unstinting support on this, okay?). All in all, it's very good news, we think, for children's books. And credit (plus thanks) where credit's due - to the Children's Book Foundation who helped set the ball rolling in the first place. Finally, and not least, our thanks to the team at The British Council who were so helpful, imaginative and far-sighted throughout.

If you are/were a **BBN Children's Book** subscriber, I welcome you to BfK. We shall be in touch with each of you explaining how we shall be extending your BfK subscription during this coming Autumn. Good to have you on board.

Then there was

Pogress?

That's our computer file name for tracking where we're at on - can you guess?-Poetry: 0-16. By the time you are reading this issue of BfK, our poetry guide will have been delivered by our printers and we will have begun packing all the advance orders, ready for despatch on publication date of 29th September. And oh, you lovely readers! Haven't you done us proud? Within a few days of sending out our first **Poetry: 0-16** leaflet, bang come back hundreds of orders! If that's not a vote of confidence I don't know what is.

And on to

This issue of BfK and the next .

Slight qualms back in July at taking up the editorial reins without an inkling of how much I would actually enjoy it. However, editing **BfK** is like being on the best children's literature course in the world. You get to talk to and work with children's book people from every quarter and at every level.

Like Jeff Hynds, the first person I ever heard juxtapose the linguistic technicalities of learning to read and the role of children's books in the same lecture. He did it, and still *does* on his 'Roadshows' now booked through to 1990, with great clarity and much entertainment (in private he's one of the funniest people I know) - a combination in presentation that ensures the message sticks. Here he lays out some of the current issues within the Great Debate about Reading (page 4) which has been on the agenda almost since the onset of modern education and shows no sign of coming to an end. It's a debate that goes to the very heart of what we consider to be learning itself. It's technical, ideological and evokes both intellectual and emotional responses - two human faculties that can confuse as much as they can complement each other. Hence the fervour that flavours the discussion and divides the participants on occasions. **BfK's** role is to reflect and give space to as many aspects and points of view as possible and with as much objectivity as we can muster.

Not just to the theorists either. In 'Books to Make Readers' (page 24) that dedicated and pioneering practitioner, Jill Bennett, who was working with real books long before most of the experts started theorising, recommends some recent publishing that aptly complements Jeff's piece. At the end of the day, it's the practitioners par excellence who mould the real landscape and who ultimately are the more convincing and influential whichever way they do it. None more than Jill.

Or, the Ahlbergs, on the cover and on page 20 with their new offering, **Starting School**, and a unique interview with the illustrating half of this award-winning duo, Janet. Allan himself thought it was an excellent idea - 'I always do the interviews' - and both were delighted that it was Judith Elkin, who has known the Ahlbergs from their earliest days (before fame struck) doing the interview and who brings sensitive and perceptive insights to an equally sensitive and perceptive artist. And **Starting School?** What I particularly liked is the way the book engaged me as an adult reader and as a parent. It's not just that I *know* that that's exactly how it is or that it makes me smile ('Kate *thinks* about climbing') but that they manage to make the sharing of this book with small listeners such an easy pleasure. Another winner, is my bet.

And, not forgetting Sid Fleischman (page 14) who flew in from his Californian home during the summer. 'Would you like to interview him?' - asked one of the best children's publicity people in the business. *Would* we? Drop everything, arrange for Stephanie Nettell to do the words, and go with Richard Mewton (he's probably photographed more children's book people than anyone else in the world by now!) to get the pics. It turns out to be one of those occasions when you *know* you adore what you're doing. Sid is urbane, charming, funny but also has a rare touch of wisdom and kindness that beguiles and which is so evident in **The Whipping Boy** (Methuen, 0 416 12512 3, £5.95) first published in 1986 and winner of the 1987 Newbery Medal in America. The pity is that Sid has only four titles in print here in the UK (there are six or seven times that number available to publishers). He deserves more.

So that was our summer, With just a little sense of relief I hand over to Chris Powling for the November issue of **BfK**.

Richard

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