

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
1972 JUDGES' REPORT

CLASS A
BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

Longtime Passing, by Hesba Brinsmead. Published by Angus & Robertson. *Longtime Passing* is a warm-hearted novel for teenage girls. It is notable for its evocation of people and place and for its expression of the author's joy in living.

Mrs Brinsmead's story was inspired by her family's reminiscences and her personal recollections of life in the Candlebark Country in the Blue Mountains. It is presented as fiction but it has the ring of authenticity and the author has invested her characters with a sharply defined reality. There is a strong sympathy for these people, as pioneers and as members of a close family unit, and their everyday life is shown with compassion and quiet humour.

In a variety of anecdotes, some serious, others amusing, Teddy, the youngest child, tells of the Truelance family's life at Longtime. Teddy gives an account of her father's and mother's early life and their decision to come to Longtime. She describes the clearing of the land, the building of a house and the gradual changes in the family and the settlement over the years.

Although there is no strong plot, the episodic structure is loosely brought together by the interweaving of legend and symbolism with descriptions of events and scenes. Longtime is both home and place of refuge for the Truelances and its mystique pervades the story and gives it unity.

The portrayal of the family and its relationships reveals not only the author's mature insight into people but also her ability to show the interaction of personalities. This is noticeable for example in the scenes between Mark and his father: "There was always a strange jealousy and misunderstanding between the boy and his father. Yet, in his heart, Father must have known that the knights of his story must once have looked very like Mark. Such a fair little boy, so well set-up, and unafraid".

The descriptions of the Candlebark Country are vivid and convey the unique atmosphere of the setting but occasionally there is some over-writing:—

"Colonnade after colonnade stood the classic correlation of the candlebark trees."

In the main, the story is told with a directness and exuberance which capture the variety of feelings, thoughts and personalities of a family group and there is a sense of loss when modern improvements shatter old ways and change the landscape.

The scene depicted on the dust-jacket (by Victor G. Amburns) is appealing but not convincingly Australian. The production is good, apart from the muddle in type-setting on p. 94.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

The Windmill at Maggie Creek, by Christobel Mattingley. Illustrated by Gavin Rowe. Published by Brockhampton Press.

The limitations imposed on an author writing stories for the young reader from 7-9 years are considerable. Mrs Mattingley has confined herself to a simple, brief style while retaining a fresh and imaginative expression.

The daily life on an Australian farm is shown with clarity and attention to those details which doubtless will appeal to most young children, but boys in particular will respond to the descriptions of catching yabbies and other outdoor activities.

The plot is exciting and there are many changes of scene. It revolves around Tim whose twin fears of magpies and of climbing the windmill provide the conflict and tension. Tim's character is clearly delineated. In many ways he is an average boy, warm, sensible and conscientious, and his courage and ingenuity in overcoming his fears are realistically and credibly described. This character study in miniature compounds humour of situation with a keen understanding of a child's mind and emotions.

In recent years the great majority of commended books have been written for older children. In view of this it is particularly gratifying to be able to commend an admirably written, original story for a younger age-group.

The illustrations by Gavin Rowe successfully convey the story's settings, although there is a glaring discrepancy on p. 9 between the text and illustration.

COMMENDED

Hughie, by David Martin. Illustrated by Ron Brookes. Published by Nelson.

Hughie is an interesting study on the question of colour discrimination.

Mr Martin presents his theme naturally and without sentimentality. The differences in the background of the aboriginal and the white Australian produce differences in outlook and values. There are racial prejudices on both sides but, through common interests and trust, two children from these divergent cultures can break barriers and become friends.

The main characters are well drawn while minor characters are individually recognisable. However, it is mainly through the action rather than through the characters' introspection that the theme emerges.

The plot is timely, has suspense and continually moves forward from one interesting episode to the next. The final unresolved situation is very credible but there are a few incidents which seem somewhat contrived, such as Hughie's meeting with the bus conductor who just happened to know his cousin Greg. The language generally succeeds in being colloquial and the descriptions of the Australian country town are excellent.

The book's values are currently popular, yet timeless.

The general production is good and the dust-jacket appropriate, but on the whole the illustrations add little to the story. The illustration on p. 153 is at variance with the incident it describes.

Josh. Reviewed by Gilbert Elliott, 12 years.

After reading previous books by Ivan Southall I have always felt that he is very cruel to the characters concerned, but after reading his latest novel, *Josh* I have been able to relax satisfied with the turn of events.

Josh is a member of the Plowman family, a pioneering family held in high esteem in the small town it founded, Ryan's Creek. The only Plowman remaining there is Josh's Great Aunt Clara, a rich elderly spinster owning half the town and the old Plowman Homestead there where she lives. She is the supreme authority in the family and it is customary for young Plowmans to stay with her in the "ancestral" home and gain her approval. Josh finally persuades his mother to let him stay there one summer holidays. When confronted at Ryan's Creek railway station by a stern old lady who addresses him as "Joshua" Josh takes a violent dislike to his great aunt. Things become worse for Josh when he comes into conflict with local elements and the plot culminates in a nightmarish climax.

Ivan Southall gives a very sensitive portrayal of the characters involved and shows Josh as a sensitive and confused person in conflict with the pretensions of built up family tradition only to see that he, not the others, is a true Plowman, or at least the reader sees, and perhaps the lesson Josh learned is for us all. I feel that this book is to be ranked, along with other books by Ivan Southall, as one of the best children's books written.

SECOND:—

The Shape of Three. Reviewed by Jeanette Miffin, 11 years.

In this book, Liith Norman uses for her plot a very unusual situation—a case of swapped twins. The main characters involved vary greatly; one Roman Catholic family living in Bankstown in a very noisy, happy, bustling, crowded house, is a contrast to the other home, formal and overtly in the prosperous Sydney area of Rose Bay.

The three boys involved, Greg and Shane Herbert and Bruce are very realistic, convincing the reader so fully that one really cares about the outcome of this extraordinary occurrence. They speak what they think frankly, and the authoress describes their feelings so compassionately and sensitively that one is really involved, feeling as though they knew the characters personally.

Liith Norman's style is clear, sensitive, descriptive and enthralling. She uses all the possibilities fully, extending each description to suit the situation. One very praiseworthy point is her assurance concerning legal positions of this event; each remark on this side of the story seems factual. Setting the story in a place so close to home also attracted me.

Although there are no illustrations I feel these were not necessary, as the dust jacket design by Gavin Rowe is enough to create a vivid picture of Greg and Bruce.

I really enjoyed this book because I was so deeply involved when I read it and the topic was so rare an occurrence. Also, the background setting was realistic and everything about the book was convincing.

THIRD:—

Josh. Reviewed by Ruth Morrison, 12 years.

The reason I think this book stands out in people's minds is mainly because it is so different to other books. This book tells of the inside emotions of a central figure whereas most other books tell only of outside conduct.

Although we only meet Josh for a few days we feel as though we know his entire and sensitive nature.

Ivan Southall has the ability to change his books according to the subject, e.g. *Ash Road* tells of many people's experiences in a terrible bushfire, whereas in *Josh* he centralises his writing on one main person.

Josh's character is, I think, overdrawn, but if he was not so deep thinking this book would not have been nearly so successful.

This is not a book for all children as some need faster and more adventurous stories. A few readers from sixth class on who enjoy a sensitive story would find this book absorbing.

THIRD:—

Minnie. Reviewed by Elizabeth Bain, 11 years.

Minnie, I found was a delightful book because of the illustrations and story. The illustrations, also done by the authoress, are thoroughly enjoyable and add to the attraction of the story. The ones in colour are very different from the ones in black and white; I thought they were more abstract. My impression of the coloured ones when I first saw them was—a colour splashed painting, in which the main characters were still conspicuous.

The black and white illustrations are very bold and right to the point. That's why I think the authoress did the more indefinite landscape type pictures in colour, and the more definite detailed ones like *Minnie* drinking a bowl of milk in black, but both appealed to me immensely.

The story tells of *Minnie's* adventures. I could detect a double meaning in it; some humans rejected this cat, *Minnie*, as we shouldn't, while other kind humans accepted her and made her their friend.

I received sheer pleasure from reading this book and am sure any other animal reading lovers would feel at one with *Minnie*, as I did.

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AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE ITS PLACE IN WORLD LITERATURE is the title of a seminar to be given at The International Students' Centre of N.S.W., Sydney University, on 7th and 8th July, 1972. Papers will be given by Ivan Southall, Nancy Keesing, Prof. Leonie Kramer and John Abernethy. Further details from Miss Brenda Dawson, 660 4481.

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