

teenagers rafting down a Klydor river from which they narrowly escape death by drowning and by sea monster. After a number of other exciting and rapid fire adventures including separation from each other in an eerie and mysterious cave, and the near death of one of them at the hands (tentacles) of a razor-backed cave monster, some of the children meet and make friends with the initially perplexing, mysterious but life-saving Latham. He turns out, of course, to be as morally solid as the rocks of Klydor themselves. The story then becomes a good guys-bad guys chase through the caves and badlands of Klydor as the five children and their new ally, Latham, test their mettle against the Crushers and their formidable leader Captain Warreck.

Those of a psychoanalytic bent will have a ball with this novel. There are caves and ravines a-plenty here as well as all sorts of menacing mouth imagery, suggesting perhaps devouring and loss of identity. Rites of passage hunters will also be happy with this novel since in it there is a lot of hurried maturation as the result of the numerous crises in which the teenagers find themselves. In other words, here too there is a "Secondary World." But all of these more arcane elements are finally things inessential. *The caves of Klydor* is a good children's book — which is to say it is a good book — because its author knows both how to create story and character. And in the case of the latter, what is most remarkable is the particular and distinctive voices that each of the novel's seven main characters has. If your New Year's resolution was to introduce yourself or your teenager to one science fiction book in 1985, you might try *The caves of Klydor*.

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LIFE AND GROWTH AND CHANGE: ALWAYS A JOURNEY

Up to Low, Brian Doyle. Greenwood, Douglas and McIntyre, 1982. 113 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-17-0.

This book for adolescent readers tells Young Tommy's own story of how he comes to terms with changes: changes in his life after the death of his mother; changes in the world around him as he moves out of childhood into adolescence; changes in his relationships with the adults around him. As the cover notes state, perhaps a trifle portentously, Young Tommy and his friend Baby Bridget discover that "loving and healing and dying are not always what they seem."

In the story, Young Tommy journeys with his father up to Low, where they have a summer cabin. It is a journey well known to Young Tommy, and one

he loves. He relishes the anticipated pleasures of the things which are familiar to him. He and his father have a strong, affectionate and deeply respectful relationship, one which is obviously a keystone in Young Tommy's fluctuating world. This trip will mark their first return to the cabin since the death of Young Tommy's mother.

For Young Tommy, life is unpredictable at this stage, and he values highly what he knows and what he can understand. The simple journey, 40 miles from his home to the Gatineau Hills, becomes, however, not the soothing passage into the known — but an excursion into a world of new perceptions and concerns. In many small, concrete ways, the trip is used to mirror the complicated changes taking place in Tommy's inner world. They travel to Low, for example, not in the familiar train, but in the brand new 1950 Buick Special which belongs to drunken Frank, Tommy's father's friend. "It had three air vents on each side of the hood, whitewall tires and an aerial in the middle of the windshield pointing back with the wind, four door, wraparound bumpers, and teeth — nine big long teeth, chrome teeth, for a grille!" Young Tommy is eager to get to Low, to explore and reminisce. Instead, he is taken on an odyssey of meandering, at the mercy of Frank, who "was the worst driver in the whole Gatineau." The trip is punctuated with stops at hotels and bars and gas stations, alternately to fuel the car and to fuel Frank. "It only took us," remarks Tommy mildly, "around six hours in a brand new 1950 car to go about forty miles. . . Six point six miles an hour. . . Could have walked."

The arrival is thus delayed until expectations have faltered in the face of the new information and perceptions Young Tommy gleans along the way. Threaded through their peripatetic excursion is one constant, the rumour of the impending death of Mean Hughie: "They tell me Mean Hughie's going to die. . . supposed to have the cancer." Mean Hughie is a character modelled after the characters from the Tall Tales: bigger and stronger — and in Mean Hughie's case, meaner — than anyone else. Tommy's dad is the only person who has been a match for Mean Hughie over the years. "He had a notion he was goin' to set fire to my cabin. I tried to explain to him, when I caught him, that he'd better not do that. Had to slap him with the shovel to get his attention." The boy listens, in the bars and other watering holes, to the men who speculate on Mean Hughie's death. "I'll believe it when I see it," many say. "He's too mean to die." The men share reminiscences of Mean Hughie's mean doings, the pattern of their telling a call-and-response of anecdotes. And all the while Young Tommy turns over in his mind thoughts of Baby Bridget, and what it will be like to see her again after three years.

Baby Bridget is Mean Hughie's eldest child. She lost the lower part of one arm in an accident with the binder when she was a toddler. Mean Hughie was the cause of the accident. Tommy recalls the strange and powerful affinity he felt for Baby Bridget, and he wonders what she will be like now, older and with her father dying.

The boy who has lost his mother is about to re-encounter the girl who is about to lose her father. Young Tommy comes from a solidly middle class family, captained by the fastidious Aunt Dottie, who always "covered her face when she coughed and when anyone else coughed too . . . And always put toilet paper on the seat if you're at someone else's house . . . and never touch the toothpaste tube on your toothbrush." Baby Bridget comes from a poor Gatineau Hills family of squatters, whose apparent means of support is the bread made by her mother, Poor Bridget. They lived in a farmhouse "with the daylight coming through between the logs and the broken floor and the crooked furniture . . . And everywhere you'd look there was a kid peeking, very shy, from behind something or from under something."

When Young Tommy and his father eventually reach the cabin, they carry with them the news flash from the last drink stop: Mean Hughie has disappeared. Not died, just disappeared. Baby Bridget has already "lost" her father. Between Young Tommy's arrival and the death of Mean Hughie at the end of the book, Young Tommy and Baby Bridget embark on a different journey, which acquaints them with their personal strengths, with the power of a real affection for another person, and with the range of those natural human foibles which are better tolerated with good humour than railed against. And finally, they find Mean Hughie, trying to die. Bridget makes peace with Mean Hughie. Young Tommy makes peace with his anxiety over Baby Bridget's arm. And the flawed and colourful adult world around them glides uninterrupted about its business, just as the men-talk in the bars earlier flowed around Young Tommy, allowing him the liberty to scavenge what he could use for his later participation in the world of men his father so amiably typifies.

A reader might take issue with some of the models presented in the character of drunken Hughie and the bar-hopping trip up to Low, as well as with the very funny, but highly dangerous affair of Frank's driving. These are perhaps examples not best set before the young reader. However, what rises from this novel with far more potency than these is the unshakable affection and forbearance which draws the characters to one another. In the long run, Young Tommy's father and uncles get Frank to "take the pledge," promising to drink no more. As they leave the minister's house, Tommy observes Frank closely studying the paper he has just signed. "'He's lookin' for loopholes,' Dad said and we helped Frank into the car and drove back to the cabin.'" Even Mean Hughie is regarded as simply another phenomenon of nature: not mean by intent, or even by malice — just mean by makeup like a mountain goes up on one side and down on the other. It's something to be dealt with.

The book is written with a great deal of humour which nicely offsets the foundation of more sober themes. The author is satisfyingly particular in attention to details of setting, particularly the emotional charge peculiar to each locale. The characters are sketched with great skill, in simple strong strokes of anecdote, and much of the uniqueness of the individuals is displayed through the

colourful crackerbarrel chatter of the others. And there is a lot of attention paid to what people are *doing* as they talk: Tommy's father telling stories about Mean Hughie as he helps Frank to pilot the Buick; Tommy's father making supper; Frank struggling out of his collapsed tent; Aunt Dottie getting ready to sterilise the wild berries she picks. All these actions go on while Young Tommy thinks about, talks about, and finds out about, the changing world he and Baby Bridget are in. And these cameos, concentrations of clear and specific action, sit like brilliant fixed points in the fluid constellation of that world. These are the cherished and sustaining familiars. They are the constants which allow him to steer successfully a course through the confusing mix of fears and sorrows he encounters in Mean Hughie's death.

And overall, the story is told in the manner of a tale of some good ol' boys, with lots of back slapping and high jinks, good home cooking, and the whole family pretty much where they always were. For Young Tommy it "was like a photograph . . . or a painting . . . All the people were there, in their places, all with their faces turned looking at us in our car. Like a big crowded beautiful coloured painting in a museum." In this respect, *Up to Low* draws on a favourite story-telling tradition that suits its subject, its characters and quite probably its readers, very well.

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HOME TRUTHS: ENVIRONMENT AS DESTINY

Eileen McCullough, Alice Boissonneau. Simon & Pierre, 1976. 192 pp. \$9.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88924-052-3; *The treehouse*, Helen Duncan. Simon & Pierre, 1975. Reprinted 1982. 271 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88924-116-3; *Smoke over Grande Pré*, Marion Davison and Audrey Marsh. Illus. Garth Vaughan. Breakwater, 1983. 144pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-919519-25-3.

These novels, written with a young adult audience in mind, deal in different ways with the loss of the childhood home. To present the loss of a precious past time and the confrontation of an uncertain future, each uses a distinct historical period to locate its vision, thus showing the effect of the crucible of environment upon the emerging adult.

Boissonneau's *Eileen McCullough* is set in Toronto in the forties, a world pressed by the exigencies of war and filtered through the eyes of the title character, a teenage girl abandoned by the soldier who is the father of her child. Despite the prominence of the girl's name in the title, the interest in the work