An interview with Gordon Korman

Chris Ferns

Gordon Korman is twenty-one-years-old, and is currently completing a Dramatic Writing course at New York University. He wrote his first book, *This can't be happening at Macdonald Hall!* when he was twelve; it was published when he was fourteen. Since then, eight other books have appeared: *Go jump in the pool* (1979), *Beware the fish* (1980), and *The war with Mr. Wizzle* (1982), which recount the further adventures of the heroes of his first novel, Bruno and Boots; *Who is Bugs Potter?* (1980) and *Bugs Potter live at Nickaninny* (1983), which deal with the exploits of a young rock drummer; *I want to go home* (1981), which is set in a summer camp; and *Our man Weston* (1982). His most recent book, *No coins, please* (1984), describes the experiences of two teenage counsellors taking a van load of eleven-year-olds from Montreal on a tour of the United States. A straightforward enough scenario — except that in the course of the trip one of the eleven-year-olds contrives to make $150,000 out of some dubious business enterprises which ultimately attract the attention of the FBI.

Gordon Korman was interviewed at his home in Thornhill, Ontario.

FERNS: You wrote your first novel at the age of 12. How did it all begin?

KORMAN: It was basically an accident. When I was in 7th grade we had this English assignment which I got kind of carried away on, and I accidentally wrote the first book. You know, the characters sort of became real people to me, and they more or less wrote the book for me. The class had to read all the assignments at the end of the whole business, and a lot of people were coming to me and saying how they really liked it. I suppose anyone who writes 120 pages for class is going to attract a certain amount of attention anyway — and I just got the idea of seeing if I could get the book published. It seemed to me like a distant goal, but then again, there seemed to me no reason why it shouldn't get published, as I was pretty sure it was as good as the stuff I'd been reading. I had a lot of confidence back then — certainly in that first book, anyway. At the time, I happened to be the class monitor for the Scholastic Book Club, and it gave me this sort of corporate responsibility towards Scholastic, which of course they didn't know about. So I sent the book to them when I was thinking of a publisher, and they published it.

FERNS: So this was the first publisher you sent it to.

KORMAN: Yes. It was sort of a shot in the dark.

FERNS: Had you done much writing before this, or was this something that

suddenly took off?

KORMAN: I always really enjoyed creative projects, and I always liked writing stories. I'd done a couple of speeches for speech competitions, all of which I lost, because my delivery wasn't good enough, and other things like that. If you want to win the speech contest, you sort of have to write about extinction, not how to handle your parents, or how to handle your teachers, or things designed to entertain. And I was a big writing fan. I wasn't a big reader for some reason. I was a good reader in grades one, two, and three, but then I dropped reading in grades four, five, and six — which leads me to suspect that I may be filling in the hole that I left on the first pass. But I always tried to put in creativity where I could: if we had a sentence with all the spelling words for that week, I would try to come up with the stupidest sentences, or the funniest sentences, or the craziest sentences I could think of.

FERNS: Since then you've written-or rather published — eight more books. How do you think your writing has developed since that first novel?

KORMAN: In a number of ways. First of all, I got older — and my characters got a little older. I tend to write about stages which I've just been through, meaning that when I was in high school I wrote about 13 year-olds, and now that I'm in University, the last couple of books (which aren't out yet) are about high school students. My writing's changed in a number of ways: when I was writing the first couple of books I sincerely believed that my strength was not so much as a writer, but more as an idea person: I came up with ideas, and I communicated them the best way I knew how — meaning that a pencil and paper were a lot more accessible to me than two million dollars worth of film production equipment, or video, or something. So I did what I could. I considered myself a guy who had the ideas, and somehow or other managed to find the words to string them all together and express them. But somewhere around the sixth book I began to get the impression that there was something more to writing: that I actually was a writer, rather than someone who just managed to express himself through prose because that was the only way, and I think that now I'm very much a prose writer. I'm studying screenwriting and playwriting at University, and I'm very conscious of my prose background now — to the point where I think it almost holds me back when I try to do stuff.

FERNS: You're becoming more conscious of the actual technique of writing?

KORMAN: Yes. I can play with it more, and if I can say so myself, in the last little while I've gotten good at it. I've just done so much of it that I've eventually picked up the hang of it.

FERNS: In one interview you said that you perhaps felt more confident about your writing when you started off than you do now.

KORMAN: More confident in the book. I'd say that as far as my actual writing goes, I'm a lot more confident now. I guess what I mean is more that had I known then about the publishing industry in general, and the book situation in Canada and the United States — had I known then what I know now, I would

have felt a lot more pessimistic and a lot more nervous about trying to break in. At the time I just thought I had a good book, and I felt that a good book had to get published. Now I realize that a million things could have gone wrong. I think my confidence then partly came from just not knowing what the deal was.

FERNS: Is this from learning about other people's experiences?

KORMAN: And my own. I don't want to say anything negative about the publishers I've dealt with, but there came a point in my own development as a writer when I realized that these people I was working with weren't really my aunts and uncles. At first that was sort of the impression I was getting. But these are people who are adults, who have to make a living, and who are in a sense in competition with one another. You know, it's a fairly competitive business — and eventually I grew into someone who's every bit as competitive as the next idiot. So there were a lot of revelations. I really did think everyone was my aunt and uncle for the first couple of books, but as I got older this began to change.

FERNS: *This can't be happening at Macdonald Hall* was highly popular. How did the publishers feel about your branching out from the initial Bruno and Boots saga?

KORMAN: They were very receptive to anything I did, and they've been seeing me move in a number of different directions. Scholastic has always welcomed my experimentation. My work with their editorial department has always been very good, and they've come up with a lot of great stuff. Of course, I've gone in certain areas they didn't like so much.

FERNS: Such as what?

KORMAN: Such as when I was writing *Our man Weston* and *Bugs Potter live at Nickaninny.* What I was dealing with at the time was a lot of contrivance of events. So-and-so does this, and it just happens that at the same time this happens, and it happens at exactly the right moment. Those books tended to have an incredible number of contrived circumstances; they also had a large number of adult characters, many of whom were crazy and wild. But those works certainly do just as well as the others, and Scholastic certainly had the vision to see that these books were going to do well, even though this wasn't necessarily what they expected from me.

FERNS: It's funny you should mention those two books in particular. I think those are probably the ones I enjoyed most, partly because there was that sensation of juggling more and more balls in the air and keeping them all going at the same time.

KORMAN: It's very much a question of individual taste. There are going to be people who say: "I liked all your books except *Our man Weston*", and then there are going to be kids who write and say that *Our man Weston* is the greatest thing since sliced bread. But that was a stage. Now my stage, I guess, is writing what they call Young Adult. I think I've already been hit-

ting a good percentage of the Young Adult market, but I've yet to have a book that is technically a YA title. Now I'm writing my favourite stuff — but then I always like whatever's the most recent! My last couple of books have both dealt with high schools. I think they have the most realistic character relationships I've done, and the humour has been a little less slapstick. I'm not going to abandon slapstick, but I'm going to use it differently. I'm going to depend more on my character relations, my sarcasm, and when I use slapstick I'll use it sparingly. But I'll still use it — maybe have a whole page where there's nothing but insanity. It's a development: you can see a little bit of it in *No coins, please.* There are shades of where I'm going.

FERNS: I thought you could see that as early as *I want to go home,* where the actual pacing of the action begins to get more sophisticated. I liked the recurring scenes where everything is seen from the beaver's point of view, where he's trying to get on with his own life, and only sees the actions of the crazy human beings so far as they affect him. I thought that was a very good comic touch.

KORMAN: Yes. That goes back to *Our man Weston,* too, where no-one really knows what's going on. One person starts something, and then someone else finishes it for him. Another thing I used to do, from *I want to go home* right up to *Our man Weston* and *Bugs Potter live at Nickaninny,* which was working well, but was also really holding me back in some ways, was that I was describing everything. *I want to go home* took place in fourteen days, and it was practically a chapter a day. *Our man Weston* was virtually the same. But in *The war with Mr. Wizzle,* which a lot of people thought was a bit of a regression, I more or less got over my attachment to that one chapter, one day thing. And that was a big thing for me: *Mr. Wizzle* was just a story — it wasn't complicated or anything — but it helped me to do that. To finish off the series, if you like, and move on.

FERNS: Yes. Often realizing that you can get from A to Z without including all the other letters of the alphabet on the way is something it's difficult to learn. Though that's probably something the readers aren't so aware of.

KORMAN: Well, the readers are really going to pick up on two things. Is it funny? And, are the people real? Those are the two most important things. Lately, I've been thinking that "are the people real?" is even more important than "is it funny?" It has to be a little bit funny, but with real people, and genuine character relationships. That's what the readers are going to pick up: they don't care about structure. They won't necessarily see any structural difference between *Live at Nickaninny* and *No coins, please.* If the kids say something, it's more like "I like Bruno and Boots because they're so real". Whereas an adult reviewer might say, "Yes, the book is good, but it does lack a little in believability". The kids don't get that at all — they think that Bruno and Boots are real. Very rarely will there be an event where a kid will say, "I don't buy that." I've never seen it.

FERNS: Perhaps you could say a bit more about the reactions you've been getting from your readers. What kind of feedback have you been getting from the children you've talked to?

KORMAN: Really good. I've been to a lot of schools. I've done a lot of trips across Canada and the U.S. — and the books are getting there. The kids are reading them, and they're liking them. The reactions I'm getting can be very very different, but as a rule nobody hates the books! I don't think I've excluded any kid: maybe a handful here and there. You get a number of different reactions: you get kids who just get so into the books that they take it further. You get a couple of kids who get T-shirts where one says "Bruno" and the other says "Boots", and they go around as self-proclaimed Bruno and Boots. Or a group of girls officially declare themselves Miss Scrimmage's Finishing School for Young Ladies. A lot of kids get very into Bugs Potter, if they're into the rock scene: they come up with their own rock groups, they do Bugs Potter things. The same with *I want to go home:* a lot of people really admire Rudy Miller. Another reaction is that the kids who are lousy readers get into the books. Many times I've had letters from teachers saying, "This is my fourth grade remedial reading class, and your books have sort of turned them on." In Vancouver I was doing a tour, and I did a reading. Afterwards the teachers made all the kids do a letter home from camp, from the model of the letter in *I want to go home,* and one teacher phoned me in my hotel room to tell me that her class write-off had got turned on enough to write three pages of foolscap, and that that was the first thing he'd really done. The other thing that seems to happen is that the kids get not only into the books, but into me personally — which is good, for the simple reason that it shows I have a distinctive enough style to inject my own personality into the book. So when I get to see a group of kids I'm not just this nothing coming out of a vacuum who just so happens to have his name on the books — they expect to find a certain amount of my personality in my writing. And when I talk to them I want to show them that, basically, they're right.

FERNS: Do a lot of kids see your writing as semi-autobiographical, then?

KORMAN: Yes. Except that when kids ask questions they tend to oversimplify: "Did it happen?" So I explain, well, some of it did — but it's more the feelings. I may describe something totally crazy, but it instills in the mind of the characters and therefore the readers the feeling of something that at some point or other did happen to me. The problem with personal experiences, eight times out of ten, if you use them exactly, is — you've got to be there. You can tell someone something that happened to you, and you may have been dying then, but he just sort of misses it. A lot of times that happens with personal experiences. But it's possible to take a manufactured experience, and use it to create the same feeling between two characters, or humour of the same atmosphere as had happened in real life.

FERNS: Part of the appeal of your main characters is that most of them

have a healthy disrespect for authority. Bruno, Boots, Rudy Miller, Bugs Potter — they're all pretty anarchic. But there seems to be a line they themselves draw. In the end Bruno and Boots accept the school's authority. Rudy does stay at the camp. Do you ever feel inclined to let them go still further, and end up in total anarchy?

KORMAN: I was writing at the time of *Animal house,* and things like that. I think one of the things which makes the books fairly strong, so that they defy being compared to things like that, is that they don't cross that line. Considering how crazy the books are, I keep a firm foot in reality. For a number of reasons: first of all, this is Scholastic — and while I could ask Scholastic to make an exception, and they probably would, Scholastic is basically a quite traditional publisher. Not so much now, perhaps, but four years ago, definitely. Also, in a book — in a movie it may be different, depending on the visual image you're portraying — in a book, if something is going to be crazy, it has to happen in the context of something fairly sane, or else you can't really appreciate how crazy it is. The reason it's great when Bruno and Boots break rules is that in the long run you know that, while they don't necessarily accept the rules themselves, they accept the basic fact that there *are* rules. They accept the fact that they are kids, and that the administration is the administration, and that that's it. And the fact that they do this makes it all the more interesting when they do decide what they can and can't do.

FERNS: You don't see yourself doing something in the vein of Lindsay Anderson's *If,* where breaking the rules finally leads to total rebellion?

KORMAN: I'm trying to think. Rudy Miller is definitely a rebel, but he finds his own energy level. I wouldn't say he respected the rules.

FERNS: No. Scarcely.

KORMAN: But when he leaves, and he drags a counsellor into the water, he goes back to see if the guy is alright. And when he's caught, he's caught. He may try again tomorrow, but once caught, that's it. With Bugs Potter, I think it's a little different. He tries to follow the rules — only there are other priorities so strong that he has to live with them first, and follow the rules whenever it fits in. He's not really actively misbehaving.

FERNS: He's never really aware that he *is* breaking the rules — or if he is, he feels that surely people will understand why he's doing what he's doing.

KORMAN: Yes, because how else could one act? And Sidney Weston has a calling: so what if I break the rules, because I'm saving such and such. . . With *No coins, please* it starts to become a little more ambiguous, because the sympathetic characters set up are the counsellors, almost, and the guy who's crazy is more someone to bounce off them and the other kids in the group. So Artie's motivation. . . I've been getting this real enjoyment, lately, from witholding information — I really think that if Artie had ever said why he wanted all that money it would in some way have robbed the book.

FERNS: Yes. I think it was good to leave that unspecified. Although in the

end I think it's pretty clear that it was just the fact of doing it, and that there was nothing he really wanted to spend it on. He just wanted to show himself he could do it. Which is perhaps another of the things which appeals to kids. You show that children can have power, that they can act in an adult world and achieve things.

KORMAN: And that's totally important. I think it's *No coins, please's* strongest point. How many books have you read — and good books — about a kid who makes money: oh boy, isn't he cute, he raised sixty bucks, a hundred bucks, something like that? I mean, why can't an eleven-year-old make $150,000? If Bugs Potter is a good drummer, why can't he be the best drummer in the world? Whatever an adult can do, somewhere in the world there's one sixteen-year-old who can do it as well. You read about it in the paper — it just keeps coming up. And that's important, because a kid around twelve is just starting to find out that he can do certain things as well as his parents or his teachers. By the time he's fifteen he probably does some things better. You hear a lot of teachers talk about behaviour problems at the grade 7 or 8 levels — perhaps that's because in public school the teachers can do everything better than the students just by virtue of being adults, ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Whereas in high school, teachers have usually accepted that these people are almost adults and can do certain things better than them. It's not out of the ordinary to see that happen. The problem is with the age level where kids are starting to be able to do things, but it still seems unnatural. And I think that's one of the reasons why the books do well in that age bracket, which they're not really supposed to because of their presentation — because they address that situation of kids being able to triumph over the adults, and in many cases with the adults coming to terms with it.

FERNS: One of the things about the way you present, say, Bugs Potter becoming a star drummer, or Artie Geller making a fortune, is that it isn't shown as simple wish-fulfilment. There's a certain lunatic plausibility about the way it happens.

KORMAN: Yes — and I think one of the most important things about *No coins, please* is that while Artie may violate the letter of the law, he never really violates its spirit. He doesn't really rip anybody off. He extracts a small amount of money from everybody: his fortune comes from the fact that he does it to a lot of people.

FERNS: It comes as quite a shock at the end of the book, when you discover just how many laws he *has* broken. Because he hasn't really done any damage at all. Everyone has enjoyed betting on his toy car races, and buying his attack jelly, and so forth.

KORMAN: I think the books are very respectful of people. In some cases it may be oversimplified, but basically if someone isn't liked, it's because he deserves it. One of the things I couldn't stand about school was that it could very easily happen — it happens in the adult world, too, but in school it's most

obvious — that someone could look at your face, and not like it, and want to exclude you from the group, or make your life miserable. In the Bruno and Boots books — in all the books, really — people aren't really disliked or acted against unless they've done something to deserve it. It may be a tad unrealistic — but I think it's better unrealistic. I mean, realism, yes — but who wants to read what *really* goes on? Of course, every now and then someone comes up with a super-realistic thing, and it's amazing: a movie like *Diner*, or something like that. But for the most part, while realism is very important, something extraordinary should happen to keep your interest in the book. And that's what I like to do now. I've got a book coming out called *Don't Care High*, about a kid who comes from a small town to a big city, goes to a big city school, and is very shocked by the fact that the city is not what he's used to. Everything seems to work against him: he lives on the thirty-third floor; ninety-nine million things are seemingly going on in the building across the street. In his school there's no school spirit: no-one seems to care — they're all zombies. Every time he tries to eat in a restaurant it somehow destroys his stomach. There's even a local DJ who's yelling at him 24 hours a day: every time he turns on the radio, the guy's there. That's fairly realistic. But then I threw in a very strange and distinctive plot line, which is that he and a friend take the dullest guy in the school and make him student body president, and build an empire around him, and convert Don't Care High into zealots. Which is distinctly non-realistic. It's a question of taking the very very normal, and adding this touch to it.

FERNS: One reviewer talks of your work having "a distinctly Canadian stamp to it". Do you see yourself as a specifically Canadian writer?

KORMAN: In ways, yes, in ways, no. It comes out in parts, but I think there's more to it. In terms of my Canadian identity there may be something to the fact that many Americans think I'm British, and many British think I'm American. I think I'm a Canadian writer because I write books and I live in Canada, and my cultural exposure has been to this place. I wouldn't necessarily call myself a Canadian writer, though: I might just as well call myself a suburban Toronto writer. I don't think it's really important whether or not a Canadian identity comes out in my books, because they don't really mention anyone's identity. There are a certain number of characters who may or may not be representative of a certain percentage of youth. I have a lot of trouble with what the Canadian identity is. Reading all the trade publications, I sometimes believe that in order to achieve the Canadian identity, tragedies have to befall everybody. Or you have to write about native peoples, or something like that. I don't.

FERNS: I thought *Live at Nickaninny* played on that to some extent. It was almost as though everyone wanted there to be someone or something up there in the frozen North.

KORMAN: And the guy's from Manhattan!

FERNS: Absolutely. Also, in *No coins, please,* you show how the group of

kids from Montreal who go down to the States find their identity through their shared resentment of everyone more or less saying, Canada, where's that?

KORMAN: And *No coins, please* is probably the book that got the best acceptance from American people. It was written after my first year of school. It comes from the fact that Americans tend to think that Canadians must be exactly like them — only somewhere at the back of their mind there's this vague uneasiness that there may be something different somewhere in there, although they can't imagine in a million years where it comes from. In the first version of the book, and it isn't there now, after Butcher lays down all the rules about how everything's got to be 100% perfect, he pauses, thinks about it, and then adds, "and that goes for you Canadian guys, too". Just in case they're thinking, that's for the Americans only, and we can do what we please. That was a little unsubtle, I admit, and I think it was a good idea to chop it, but that's the sort of hint that's there. In America, when you follow a tour, you follow a schedule — and that's one of the things I ran into in my first year in the United States.

I want to say that I've got nothing against the notion that I'm a Canadian author, but I definitely don't think that where you're an author from is based on a heart affiliation. Does it make me a New York author, because I live in New York? I don't really think there's a decision at the beginning of a book, of equal importance to the book itself, where you say "Whose identity is this book?" I think it's my identity, and I don't think that national boundaries, or state boundaries really come into that.

FERNS: Since your first book came out, there have been school, university, readings, trips to schools, book fairs — to say nothing of the distractions of living in New York! Yet you've managed to produce rather more than a book a year. I was going to ask, how do you do it? Perhaps you could say something about your approach to writing, and the way you work.

KORMAN: As a rule, I've written a book every summer. I wrote *I want to go home* in the winter — but I wouldn't do that again! It was very tough. Also, I got out of school a trimester early, so I had time to do some writing before I went away to University. The system is usually that I write a book in the summer, finish it in the first few weeks of September, and by Christmas I'm starting to think about moving on. Very casually, in conversations with my parents or my friends, I'll start throwing around a few new ideas, and even in very idle conversation something is bound to germinate in January or February. And I'll just keep thinking about it — very often I get these ideas while I'm sitting in class — and the idea begins to grow. I begin to talk about it more seriously with other people, and they give me their ideas, so that by the time I come back from school I'm usually ready to start writing.

FERNS: You've got a pretty good idea of where it's going to go before you put pen to paper?

KORMAN: It definitely grows as I write. I have to know vaguely where I'm

going, but I think that the most time-consuming thing in that pre-book think is deciding what not to write. There are so many ideas flying around in this world that you've got to really narrow it down in order to write one thing. When I think of a character, I'm going to have a few introductory defining thoughts about that character, but for the most part the dialogue comes very naturally. It comes more naturally with every passing book, I think. And in terms of the plot, the characters can usually dictate that. I have a vague idea where I'm going, and I'll know some specific events along the way, but for the most part it's the characters who dictate.

FERNS: You're studying Dramatic Writing at NYU, and that involves screen writing too. There's also been a lot of talk about possible films of your stories, possible television series, and so on. Is that something you'd like to get involved in personally?

KORMAN: I'd like to, just for my own "in" in the market, and also to make sure no-one screws it up. That makes me a little bit nervous. I've had various film options on my stuff, and I used to think, "who cares about the books — you've got all these film options?" But now, after six years, nothing has happened with the film options, but the books are really doing alright without them. I used to put all my hope in those options, and I don't any more, for this reason — I think that one of the reasons the books succeed is that they are *books.* In *I want to go home,* there's a scene where Rudy is pulling Chip along, who's holding on to the mooring line of his boat when he takes off, so that Chip is basically water-skiing on his face. Now that, using very very straight prose to describe something weird, only doing it totally deadpan, comes out very funny. Whereas if you actually saw that happening on a movie screen, while it might be funny, it would be fighting against an entire history of B movies, every single one of which had Don Knotts hanging from a flagpole suspended 500 feet above the street, and all the *Animal house* things. You know: "Sure, O.K., someone's water-skiing on his face — but in this movie someone's *naked!*" I don't think some of the events would cut it as easily on film.

FERNS: Yet there's a very strong visual sense in your writing — perhaps increasingly as it goes along. Also, I think you do something which is very difficult, which is to *write* slapstick, although the pace of reading is much slower than the frenetic pace you can get in a film. Even so, I'd have thought that something like the concluding scenes of *Our man Weston,* with all the mayhem at the hotel barbecue, or the scene in the Las Vegas hotel in *No coins, please* would work very well in a film context. Scenes like that almost seem as though they were conceived in cinematic terms.

KORMAN: That scene in *Our man Weston* definitely has a lot of visual depth. I'm pretty sure I constructed that scene visually, and layered it very consciously. Although *No coins, please* might be the best book to film. I'm just thinking about it now.

FERNS: Yes. I'd like to see, for example, the model racing track which Ar-

tie builds outside the Capitol. Although that's probably something which works better in prose: I'm not sure you could build one as good as the way it's described.

KORMAN: That might be. But something like Attack Jelly would work very well, because you could go for a lot more sales pitch in a movie than you could in prose. The disco might work better, and I think you could do a lot of great stuff with the casino — you know, time-elapse photography of stacks of chips, and so on. There are scenes that I do visually: certain parts of the hotel scene, like the final riot, that's a thing that you layer, right? But for the most part, as with the scene of Artie going to the individual casinos, the intention was to give the impression that he'd gone to a great many of them, but without taking up too much paper. I'm very conscious of not wanting to interfere with the pace.

FERNS: Yes. I think the pacing gets steadily better as the books go on.

KORMAN: And the pacing isn't really visually oriented.

FERNS: You've got nine books behind you, and two more on the stocks — and you're still only twenty. Where do you see yourself going from here? What are your future plans?

KORMAN: Well, I'm in kids' books for a while. Right now I'm solidifying myself in New York as a publishing person there, and looking at the U.S. as a market, rather than as an auxiliary market. I see myself doing Young Adult fiction, but I also want to go back and do a junior fiction book again. I'm torn between doing something totally different, and going back: there's always Bruno and Boots, and I think it may be time for a new Bruno and Boots book, I'd like — I don't know whether it's a romantic notion or not — I'd like to write, not necessarily the great Novel that's going to reshape the world, but a book that makes the sort of splash that *Catch-22* made. I think that's something to aim for, eventually, anyway. But I don't see myself writing an adult book in the immediate future. What I see happening is that one day I'll set out to write about a seventeen-year-old character, and it'll just turn out that this guy isn't seventeen — he's twenty-three or so, and he's an adult. That's how I think the transition will come.

FERNS: Do you see yourself sticking primarily to comedy?

KORMAN: I know that the books I enjoy most are serious books that just happen to be hilarious — so I think that's what I'm naturally going to find myself working towards. As I get older they're going to get that way. In the later books the humour hasn't been so much in the plot: quite serious things can happen, and it's in the discussion of them, or the description of them that funny things come out. I also think that *Don't Care High* is sort of a quantum leap.

FERNS: When is that due out?

KORMAN: It's due in a year. I guess I can't expect people to spend their lives thinking about what's going to come out in a year from me, but I really think it's definitely been the big changeover for me. Another thing that's chang-

ed, for some reason, is that — there are certain ages in your life where you go through a cycle where you like to read books where everything works out, and other times when you like books where it doesn't work out — my thing now, although it's not as serious as it sounds, is a book where it usually doesn't work out. But it's O.K. because there are other things that are good.

FERNS: One last question. If you were interviewing Gordon Korman, what would you most like to hear him talk about, that he hasn't discussed so far?

KORMAN: I don't know. Off-topic is my middle name. I think I've snuck in more or less everything.

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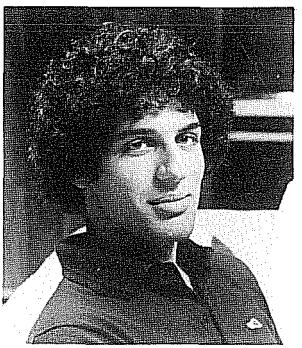

GORDON KORMAN