

## TWO FACES HAS KEVIN

*Kevin's story*, Dvora Levinson Ph.D. Illus. Deborah Drew-Brook-Cormack. IPI Publishers, 1984. 40 pp \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-920702-22-8.

The subject of learning disabilities is one which needs much consciousness raising. Although many books have been written on the subject, they have usually been non-fiction, aimed at adults. Children's books featuring a learning disabled child as the main character are a rarity. Because fiction can be a powerful tool to encourage compassion and understanding, I received this book with great interest and hope.

In *Kevin's story* Dr. Levinson has given us a fictional ten-year-old character with a learning disability. However, in her desire to make sure we learn all we need to know about learning disabilities, Dr. Levinson has given us a cardboard character. The plot unfolds in a third-person narrative, and we are presented with a contrived situation which never really develops the main character. Like medicine, even though you know it's good for you, it is difficult to swallow.

Had Kevin told the story from his point of view, or had he been allowed more freedom to develop, a more powerful story would have resulted. As it is, the reader has everything explained. Kevin doesn't get a chance to "live". Only in the dialogue when Kevin speaks and shares his feelings do we get glimpses of what might have been. Knowing that the potential for a compelling story exists and is not exploited is frustrating.

On one hand, as a teacher of learning disabled children and as a parent of one, I know full well the book's value. It offers excellent information in an easily readable form both for children and adults. It can be used as a springboard for classroom discussion, as well as being a book for parents who are having to cope with an exceptional child. It provides the reader with insights on how and why a learning disabled child learns or doesn't learn. It also encourages understanding and acceptance from everyone.

On the other hand, from a literary vantage point, I have certain misgivings. It is not clear for whom the book is intended. The picture-book format implies it is for younger children, but the blocks of text belie this assumption. The reading level seems aimed at a grade four child, but the concepts seem to be aimed at adults. This ambiguity is maddening. As an adult reader, I object to being talked down to, but I greedily appreciate the insights and information offered. The blend of fiction and non-fiction does not work. It is neither fish or fowl. In trying to reach too wide an audience, the story suffers. Unlike good fiction which presents us with a conflict that the main character has to resolve, we are given a pat situation where everything flows smoothly, along with an explanation which is snapped up "hook, line and sinker" by Kevin. If you have ever had to deal with exceptional children, you would realize that it is not true

to life.

The artwork of Deborah Drew-Brook-Cormack sums up Kevin's feelings beautifully. His pained expressions in the classroom and in the psychologist's office tell us much. The five two-page illustrations not only support the story quite well, but with some innovation could easily be used without the text to stimulate creative writing.

Although Dr. Levinson missed the opportunity to write a piece of powerful fiction, she has managed to provide enlightenment in a greatly misunderstood subject.



Fig. 1

**Kathlene Willing, M.Ed.,** *Teacher and author of The primary computer dictionary, has worked with exceptional children at her learning centre, Education In Progress, in Toronto.*

## A BOY AND HIS DOG REVISITED

***Molly: the dog that wouldn't quit,*** Charles Perkins. Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1984. 130 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88826-092-X.

Originally published by Longmans Canada in 1966 under the title *Molly*, the book was also released in the United Kingdom a year later and in the United States in 1968 with the title *Wilderness friend*. In its first go round, the work received favorable critical response and was included in the biography section of the second edition of the *Junior High School Library Catalog* (N.Y.: H.W.