

of the stale Evening in Paris cologne in its blue bottle. That anomalous breed of "old Country" woman, headstrong and self-reliant, curiously disapproves of non-sexist play patterns (Grandma insists that her granddaughter buy a doll and not a Ping-Pong-Pow Gun). At the same time, however, loving Grandma can't wait to teach her granddaughter how to play "real" cards — straight poker, five-card stud, three-card monte, chicao, and blackjack. The problem is Grandma always wins.

But Grandma isn't all kinky. She can knit, and she makes wholesome lunches. She also has a sense of social responsibility; she gets all the neighbourhood grandmas together to gamble for "trifles." The Sunshine Ladies Card Club meets in the backyard between the lawn mower and the umbrella clothes line. And this I know from the exquisite, brightly coloured illustration, naive yet exacting.

The book is convincingly written from the point of view of the little girl until the last paragraph (where she has supposedly, but not convincingly, grown up). When the storyteller's grandma dies, she says what other people say: "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that." Then she goes upstairs to her grandma's room, and mourns in a child's way. She hugs the dresses and checks the drawer. Khalsa's images, carefully repeated in the right places, both in joy and in sadness, are shared only by grandma and granddaughter, and they continue to be part of the repertoire of all grandmothers and their precious grandchildren.

Marlene Kadar, a researcher and editor affiliated with the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, teaches Creative Writing.

A STOCKING STUFFER ANTHOLOGY

Seaweed in your stocking, Stories and poems by Nova Scotian writers. Children's Writers Workshop, 1985. 56 pp. \$5.50 paper. ISBN 0-9692342-0-1.

There is considerable talent in this group of Halifax children's writers. This book, their first effort, a collection of stories and poems for Christmas, offers six short fiction pieces and five poems with appeal primarily for the eight to twelve age group. Many of the authors illustrate their own stories and the black and white line drawings (no one east of Montreal has the resources to print full colour) show charm and a fair degree of finesse,

although the change in style with each story tends to break up the flow of the book.

Some stories, such as Susan Kirby-Smith's *Recipe for a merry Christmas*, about economic difficulties at Christmas and a child's solution for them, have a universal appeal. Other stories are anchored in specifically eastern locales, such as Geraldine Hennigar's *The lightship, the cow and the turkey*, about lighthouse ships along the Atlantic coast, or Lynn Davies' historical account, *Starring Starr skates*, about the Starr Manufacturing Company in Dartmouth which was the "largest producer of skates under the British flag" in the late nineteenth century. Susan Atkinson-Keen (of Broughton Bear fame) offers a story that will appeal to younger children, *The elves' adventure at icy cliffs*. It uses the format of Three Billy Goats Gruff with a Christmas setting and characters and so offers both familiarity and some novelty. Kathy Densmore includes a computer story for older children with a program which they can try on a Commodore 64.

Norene Smiley contributes several poems based on Dennis Lee style nonsense word play, but her poem *Winter yard* is far superior to these for its sense of story, its particularity, and its authenticity. It begins

Bundled
eyes watering against the glare,
we wade
into the crusty winter yard.
Bushes hang heavy
with suet-soaked onion bags.

The bird food is described and the children retreat inside to wait for action. Suspense builds until just the right moment. Among the other poems, Scott Jamieson's *The tide before Christmas*, a take-off on that ubiquitous Christmas verse, stands out as especially lively and clever for his east coast vision of Santa 'Claws' as a lobster delivering to creatures on the sea bed. He accompanies his revision of this standard work with his own first-rate illustrations: the reindeer become sea horses, for instance, each individualized with a hat or scarf and names like 'Boy Dulse' and 'Rudolphin'.

What is remarkable about this little book is that it exists at all. It is published by the group, and, from the account on the final page, the process provided an impressive learning experience for the participants. More remarkable, the group has, in the meantime, produced a second book — for Hallowe'en.

Carol Anne Wien teaches at Mount Saint Vincent University and trains *Early Childhood Educators in Halifax, Nova Scotia.*