

## FATHERS: TWO VIEWS ON CARING

**Night-time.** Eileen Pettigrew. Illus. William Kimber. Annick Press, 1992. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-235-1, 1-55037-242-4; **What if Dad gets lost at the zoo?** Ginette Lamont Clarke, Florence Stevens. Illus. Isabelle Langevin. Tundra Books, 1991. Unpag., cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88776-265-4, 0-8876-272-7.

It is now considered politically correct in children's picture books to show that fathers are parents too. Too often in the past they have been absent or, if there at all, they have left the parenting to mothers. But, it is not enough in today's picture books to simply move Dad into the kitchen with the cooking and dirty dishes in order to give a feeling of an involved father; an involved father should also seem emotionally committed. It is good to see that each of these books treats the father as someone on whom the children can rely, someone who is not only caring, but who is responsive to their needs.

In *Night-time*, Michael is—although he does not admit it—afraid of the dark and wants his bedroom door left open to be reassured that his parents are near. One night after his bath, his father takes him for a walk into the back yard where “everything seemed dark and deep.” The illustrations do not, unfortunately, match this mood of “dark and deep;” still, the relationship between the boy and father, in both text and pictures, is depicted as a caring and companionable one. Implied is the father's sensitivity to his son's apprehension about the dark; by taking him into the darkness, the father reassures Michael that he is “special and safe.”

In *What if dad gets lost in the zoo?* there is also a warm and caring affection between father and children, although it is seen more indirectly than in *Night-time*. This is because Dad, for most of the book, is only talked and thought about by the two children. He appears only at the beginning of the book to suggest a visit to the zoo, responding to the children's interest and questions about zebras and kangaroos, and returns at the end to take them to see the different animals about which they have been talking. This does not mean, however, that his presence is not felt throughout. The emphasis in this book is not on relationships, but on imparting information. When their father goes off to phone the zoo to see if it is open, Carol and Paul wonder what they would do if Dad got lost in the zoo. Using a “what-if” approach, they begin to speculate about him getting lost in a variety of other unusual environments, and in the process they learn from each other about different animals and their habitats. With each exotic location in which they envision their father becoming lost, the children imagine a legitimate reason why he would be there. They see him doing everything from chasing butterflies to taking photographs and building an igloo at the North Pole. For them, Dad obviously is a special guy who knows just what to do in every situation. The small line drawings of the father in each situation adeptly capture this feeling of a competent, adventurous father.

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