

chitect, another homemaker, musician, pilot, farmer, computer salesperson, bus driver, and fitness instructor — in that order. Jobs are assigned to genders with mechanical regularity: the first is a mommy, the second is a daddy, the third is a mommy, and so on. Thus, a mommy is the pilot and a daddy is the dance teacher, and both a mommy and a daddy are homemakers. There is no development in the text; it is simply a loose list. Deirdre Bettridge's illustrations in mixed media contain a wide range of colours and intensity from the pastel to the vibrant in a mood that is perhaps also best described as relentlessly up-beat. They contain a recurring motif of cats watching or participating in the action. The illustrations are deliberately naive, almost as though they were imagined or drawn by a happy child, but the distortions of proportions can be confusing, as when, for example, a side mirror on the farmer's tractor looks like an animal or a fat child's legs look as narrow and weak as those of a rag doll and her face looks like a pear.

David Bouchard's *Fairy*, illustrated by Dean Griffiths, also confronts gender stereotyping and children's fears, but with humour and panache in both the text and pictures. The fairy who "take[s] care of the magical and mystical needs of the kids on [her] street" is a mischievous young woman with long blonde braids who rides a Harley and wears a black helmet and sunglasses. The text informs us that the fairy watches over the Stubbs family because their little girl Victoria "is just adorable," but the reader suspects a symbolic connection between the fairy's unorthodox means of transportation and the motorcycle that Victoria's rough, tough dad drives. When Victoria's tooth is loose one morning, the fairy arrives on the breakfast scene in a "burst of exhaust," and secretly decides to teach Victoria's skeptical dad a lesson about letting "his kid believe in magic." Later that day, when Victoria is showing off her wiggling tooth to her schoolyard friends, and "Bruno and his bruising buddies" are "bent on bursting Victoria's bubble," the fairy deals with the bullies by making their pants fall down. When Victoria's tooth finally comes out and she puts it under her pillow, the fairy makes Victoria's dad rise "like a puppet on a string" and float (grimacing "in horror" and prancing and pirouetting) to his little girl's bed where he leaves a silver coin. The marvelously detailed watercolour illustrations are hilarious: the fairy's black, shining Harley is lovingly rendered; the bullies' pants falling down provides a harmless but effective burlesque; Victoria's tattooed, beer-bellied, hairy dad floating in a ballet tutu is a laugh-out-loud treat. Evidently political correctness does not have to numb the mind.

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Surviving the Stings

In Spite of Killer Bees. Julie Johnston. Tundra, 2001. 253 pp. \$21.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-537-8. Ages 11-16.

When the three Quade sisters explode into town, the inhabitants of Port Desire have no idea how much the girls will disrupt their staid lives. The sisters have come to attend their grandfather's funeral and, so they believe, claim his millions.

Soon they discover that there is little money and they cannot have the family house unless their great-aunt moves in with them — but she believes they are imposters.

The ensuing struggle of the three to adjust to their heritage is told from the point of view of fourteen-year-old Aggie in snappy present-tense scenes, quite different in style from the author's previous novels. What isn't different is Julie Johnston's usual vivid characterization. The sisters are immediately real: serious Helen, "smart-ass" Jeannie, and Aggie, who sees life as a movie and "believes she's becoming quite interesting." This is an understatement. Aggie's exuberance and optimism, her passion for vintage clothes, and her touching belief that her lost mother will return make her an immensely appealing hero.

The peaceful lakeside setting is a shimmering contrast to the cruelly suspicious reaction of the small community to the girls. The lucid writing is deepened by metaphor. Aggie's constant fear that her restless older sisters will abandon her is intensified whenever she goes down to the dark cellar. Great-aunt Lillian's presents of warm bread are symbolic of the family love Aggie craves. The killer bees of the title are "like knowing that the worst that could happen is finally starting to happen." The movie metaphor infuses the whole story. In the end, after surely one of the most satisfying Christmas dinners ever portrayed, the scene fades beautifully into a statement of hope.

These strengths keep the novel at almost the same high level as the author's previous ones. The plot, however, is strangely slow. All the ingredients for suspense are here: the mysterious disappearance of objects from the house, their long-lost mother turning up, Aggie being accused of stealing, whether Aunt Lillian will live with them. Yet somehow these elements don't pull the reader along, and in places the action almost drags to a standstill. Despite these reservations, however, this is a heartfelt and at times hilarious novel that celebrates the kinship of family and the unquenchable courage of an unforgettable young girl.

*Kit Pearson is the author of six children's novels. Her seventh, **Between the Lion and the Eagle: the 1812 Diary of Susanna Merritt**, will be published in the fall of 2002.*

The Materials of History

Canada: Our History. Rick Archbold. Doubleday Canada, 2000. 160 pp. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-25971-9. **Building Canada.** Bonnie Shemie. Tundra, 2001. 40 pp. \$22.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-504-1. Ages 9 and up.

Historians are accustomed to finding clues to the past in unlikely places; often the most prosaic artifacts turn out to be the most revealing. In this truism of the historical profession lies the value of these two books. In *Canada: Our History*, Rick Archbold spins the stories of some of the most significant events in the life of the country — homesteading in the west, the Halifax Explosion of 1917, Hurricane Hazel striking Toronto, the FLQ crisis, the Canada-Russia hockey series of 1972. But each of the vignettes in this ingenious book begins with a single photograph, with the author imagining how the child in the photo might have been affected by the events, and might have described them as they occurred. This *Forrest Gump*-esque device is