The illustrator employs pen-and-ink drawings scantly painted in primary colours. On a predominantly white background, cool blues and greens with dabs of red and yellow enhance our sense of the wintry scene, and the crudely drawn map with the red-pencilled path on the map mother and tot follow lends an improvisory feel to the work. But down to the lilting rhyme in the mother's calling her child to attention

'No Shea. Come this way'

not very much turns out to be unplanned in this picture book.

Jordan's Days Are Numbers revolves around the counting principle up to the number four—Jordan's fourth birthday as well as the ideal reader's age. Just as the poster in making the animals look so friendly appeals to a child's sense of the familiar, so the child in drawing for himself one cat, two horses, three bears and four whales on the four invitations, makes them part of his world too. From the countdown of four days until Jordan's fourth birthday, to the four invitations and the incremental numbers of the four animals he draws on the invitations, the counting principle is made concrete and fun. As with the seemingly inconspicuous "No Shea. Come this way" in *To the Post Office*, the friends' names not so coincidentally all end in half rhyme: Simon, Aryan, Ryan and Sian. This lilting sing-song, recurring as a kind of refrain on every page, accelerates the countdown. And the child's drawing of the animals as a way of making them part of his world is carried further when each of the friends gives him a toy shaped as one of the animals he desires. His mother's gift of a poster, of course, completes this process. While reading *Jordan's Days are Numbers*, I was at several points reminded of the old English folk song "The Twelve Days of Christmas," with its fantastical anticipation and its sense of wish fulfilment.

Deceptively simple at face value, *To the Post Office with Mama* and *Jordan's Days Are Numbers* disprove the assumption that writing for the very young is necessarily a casual process.

***Gillian Harding-Russell** has published both scholarly articles and poetry in numerous journals. She helps out with writing courses with the writer's Guild, is poetry editor for **Event** and the mother of three children.*

Dealing with Changes and Aging

Nanny-Mac's Cat. Anne Louise MacDonald. Illus. Marie Lafrance. Ragweed, 1995. 24 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-54-3. *Alfie's Long Winter*. Greg McEvoy. Stoddart, 1995. 32 pp. $17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-29100.

Glynnis visits her grandmother, Nanny-Mac, and her cat Patches every Friday. Their time together is special and reassuringly routine, with their "... supper of fish sticks blackened on one side, peas from a can and orange pop." Every Friday Glynnis coaxes the timid Patches to come out and the three curl up in the fat turquoise armchair and, "... talk about grown-up things, like potholes in the

sidewalk, the price of tea, the letter-carriers knobby knees. But most of all they talked about Patches and how she was afraid of everything."

However, this cherished routine is not to last. Nanny-Mac breaks a hip and must go into a nursing home. Patches cannot follow and must be given away. Glynnis is worried that everything will be just "too different," especially for Patches in the home of the "big man" who adopts her. Glynnis learns from Patches, however, that even those who seem "afraid of everything," can adapt and that not everything changes — Nanny-Mac still grins impishly when they curl up together to talk about "grown-up" things, even in a hospital bed.

This charming, warmly illustrated book would be an invaluable tool to help young children understand their feelings about the changes that come with aging grandparents and other family. It may help them see that change will happen, but need not be feared. And, like Glynnis's special Fridays with her Nanny-Mac, some things are special because of the *people*, not *where* they are.

Greg McEvoy has written what appears on the surface to be a simple tale for the three- to six-year-old set, of Alfie the Leaf who learns to overcome his fear of falling from his tree in autumn. In fact, when asked why he liked this book so much, this reviewer's own four-year-old said it was because Alfie learns not to be afraid to leap off the tree and join his friends below on the ground.

However, this story is not this simple, and has some troubling possible alternative interpretations. The seasonal metaphor of the shift from autumn to winter often is used to represent aging and death. In essence then, is Alfie afraid to die? Because of his fear, he must endure the cold November rain and the winter snow. Alfie does have the strength to survive the rigours of winter however. Then, in the spring, he passes on his experience (the wisdom of age?) to the new young buds. Uncle Alfie is there to tell them "about life in the big tree" including the jump to the ground in autumn, which horrifies the young leaves. Alfie tells them not to be afraid; they can follow him because he will go first.

What is the message here? Alfie's fears allow him to have unique experiences — to learn about life and pass along his wisdom to the next generation. But did Alfie do the right thing? Should he have jumped down with his own peers the year before? Why is he ready to jump first the following autumn? Is Alfie choosing is own/right time to die? Or did he defy the inevitable earlier and has now learned to welcome it? Why is he no longer afraid to jump? — because living (through winter, a metaphor for old age) was too hard?

While these sorts of questions may not come to the minds of most preschoolers, the images are embedded in this story and may be more than the adults using this book expect or want to deal with. The images of the cycle of life presented here may be disturbing or even offensive to the parents or educators buying and using this deceptively "simple" storybook.

Bonnie Hallman *received her doctorate in the Department of Geography, University of Guelph, doing research in social gerontology and social geography. She is currently an assistant professor in Human Geography at California State University, Chico. Her research interests include the cultural representation of aging and old age.*