

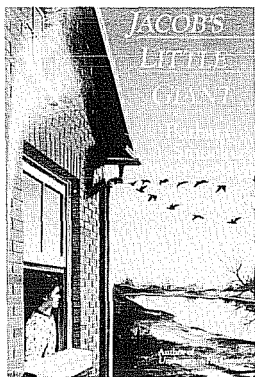
as "ungulates" and "lichen" are helpfully explained in a comprehensive glossary by Mark McCullough, the leader of the transplant project. It was just slightly disappointing to find no explanation of the clicking sound of the caribou's walk, a fascinating characteristic of this animal.

In the illustrations, each letter is presented in upper and lower case, and interwoven with watercolours of caribou. Owens has done her homework; the animals are portrayed with absolute realism and their special appeal is enhanced not by a prettified style but by a speckling technique which adds glow and softness. The northern environment is depicted authentically for the most part, and in naturalistic colours, with the possible exception of the W word, "woodland," which is distressingly shown as completely deciduous; the northern forests of the caribou habitat are of course largely coniferous.

A caribou alphabet has justifiably won kudos from the major American journals of review, as well as a listing in *Parenting* magazine's Top Ten Books of 1988. All children will enjoy and learn from its lively text and realistic pictures; teachers and librarians should not hesitate to recommend it to youthful researchers. And because its subject is the Canadian reindeer, it's going on my list of books to read and give at Christmas.

Cathy Simpson teaches writing at the Community College in Lewisporte, not far by off-road conveyances from the Mount Peyton caribou herd of central Newfoundland.

A LITTLE GIANT ABOUT "LITTLE GIANTS"



Jacob's little giant. Barbara Smucker. Penguin, 1987. 101 pp., \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-81651-5.

Jacob's little giant is a story about two little giants – "little Jakie" Snyder, the smallest boy in his class and in his family, and the smallest Giant Canada Goose gosling which he loves dearly. Only 101 pages without the major historic adventures or large external and social conflicts which we find in most of Smucker's earlier work on slaves, Mennonite emigration and life, and native Canadians – this book itself is a kind of "little giant." Its calm simplicity and dignity give it special stature among the books Barbara Smucker has written.

Smucker sets the story in 1969 on the Beavertdale Road near Kitchener-Wa-

terloo. She knows the time (the year in which she and her husband Donovan Smucker came to Waterloo), and the place (the Smuckers still live in Waterloo), and the Mennonite Community. Her love of time, place, and people shines through in descriptions of sky, pond, field, barn, kitchen, and of Mennonite mealtimes and gatherings, and a wedding.

The book also gives us Jacob Snyder's inner life: his wild imaginings (frowned upon in the hard-working and practical Mennonite household), his fears, his insecurities. When his father puts him in charge of a pair of Giant Canada Geese, relocated by the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests on the Snyders' farm, seven-year old Jacob takes his job very seriously.

The geese settle on the pond and four goslings hatch in early June. One much smaller than the rest becomes Jacob's favourite. Both little boy and little Giant gosling exhibit unexpected bravery during the summer and early autumn. So Barbara Smucker weaves together the stories of six Giant Canadas and one small Mennonite boy – stories about ecology and emotional growth.

The "Note to the Reader" at the end of the book explains the Co-operator's Programme developed in Southern Ontario during the 1960's to save the Giant Canada Goose from extinction. The programme has been so successful that now hundreds of Giant Canadas are found in Southern Ontario. Here, as in all her books, Mrs. Smucker begins in fact and creates a fictional world which celebrates the kind of heart-felt values that centre the other books which she has written: growth, love for one another and for the world of nature.

With a poignancy like that found in *Charlotte's web*, the book gently presents birth, growth, separation, maturity, and death in both natural and human worlds. Jacob increases his own stature in the family; his sister marries and leaves the family nest, and the Giant Canada Geese, with "Little Giant" bravely flying last, leave their nest on the pond to travel south.

The pacing in the book is excellent: slow at first as we get to know Jacob and his insecurities about being "little," quick in the middle episodes about the geese growing, and very fast at the end with the wounding of "Little Giant" and Lydia's wedding. There is less overt didacticism in this story than in some of Barbara Smucker's earlier books. The apparently effortless story-telling makes it one of the best-written of her books to date.

Cory Bieman Davies is an Associate Professor of English at Huron College, University of Western Ontario, where she teaches Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Literature, and Children's Literature.

A FLURRY OF SERIES

What's in a name? Pauline Carey. Illus. Lee Munroe. Aya Press, 1987. Frances and Josephine series. 32 pp., \$6.00 paper. ISBN 0-920544-48-7;