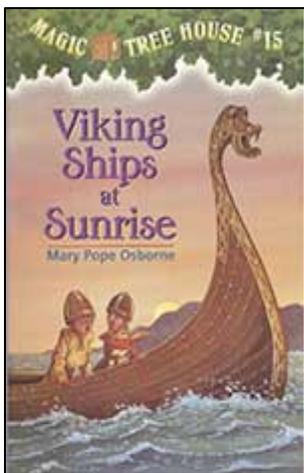
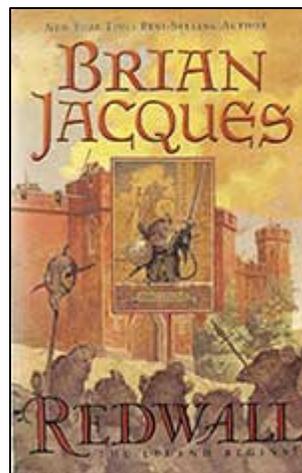


Readin' & Writin' with Lauraine- December 2007



I love writing my December column because I get to go picture book shopping. I buy books for older kids too, but picture books are the most fun. I can't get over the numbers of Christmas titles. Two of my favorites, one of *Olivia, the little pig*, and a new one by Jan Brett, *The Three Snow Bears*, had to come home with me. But



this year, I hit the jackpot. I interviewed two kids who were picking out their own books, their mothers, and the two clerks who ran the department.

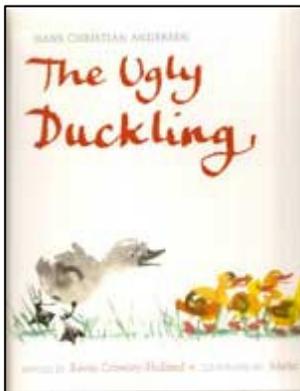
While perusing the Newberry winner shelves I kept an eye on a little girl as she studied one of the shelves. She went right to it, so this was not a new experience for her; she fingered a couple of titles, pulled one off the shelf and sat down to read another release of *The Magic Tree House* series. According to her mother, the older sister started the collection and Misty, at six and reading at a second grade level, is continuing it. She said she likes adventure stories.

I studied *The Magic Tree House* titles and bought one called *A Viking Ship at Dawn*. A chapter book with a few black and white illustrations and plenty of adventure as the boy and girl characters are transported back in time, thanks to the magic tree house. Books always were my method of time travel as a kid and so they are today.

There were lots of kids of all ages around the store, so next I watched a boy who seemed to know his way around. He was there to meet the author Brian Jacques, who hails from England. David said he'd read two of the Harry Potter books but all the books by this author, several of his books a couple of times. Now that's a good advertisement.

When I asked why, he said he couldn't put them down and always looked forward to the next book in the series. When I asked him where to start and where I'd find the books, since the display table was nearly empty, he led me back to the proper shelf and pointed to *Redwall*, the first in the series. I thanked him and he ran downstairs to make sure he got a seat to hear his favorite author. The whole store knew when Brian Jacques was introduced because so many kids were clapping and cheering.

I wished I had time to listen to the man speak, but my ride was getting impatient.



I bought another picture book, *The Ugly Duckling* by Hans Christian Andersen as re-told by Kevin Crossley-Holland, because of the art work. The story is always a great one but this artist, Meilo So, stole my heart with her watercolor illustrations. You have to see them. You'll fall in love with that poor little non-duckling immediately.

Some general observations backed up by my discussion with the parents and bookstore clerks: fantasy is not fading but gaining more shelf space all the time. All the way from picture books and first readers to thick volumes that kids eight or nine and up are devouring. So much for the idea that all children want short books. There are series in all age levels. If we like the characters, we want to read more of their adventures. Take

Redwall that David introduced me to. The characters are all mice and woodland creatures living in a kingdom where rats and an adder are the villains and the hero, a little mouse called Mathias, is a novice at an abbey where all the animals can come for healing and respite. Give even a little mouse a sword and a legend and you'll keep reading to find out what happens next.

At that bookstore, which was kid-friendly with mats and comfortable places to read, I saw fathers reading to toddlers, older siblings helping younger ones, some adults like me who just love kids' books, and others already Christmas shopping. What a refreshing place to spend a Sunday afternoon. It probably was a good thing I had to leave, my suitcase wouldn't hold any more and my credit card was groaning.

With all the proliferation of techno games and gizmos and toys for all ages, there is great fear in the publishing world that printed books are on the way out. But there is a special connection when families read aloud together. The closeness, the cadence of the spoken word, the delight when the reader sounds like the different characters, the chance to stop and ask questions, the delight of a little one learning to turn pages.

Books fuel the imagination in ways video and movies never do. Lest you think it is only kids who love to be read to, I've talked with husbands and wives who read to each other. My high school drama coach delighted the other residents at her retirement home by reading my books to them.

Encourage children to read to each other and to you. Reading aloud can lead to all sorts of things; self confidence, heightened intelligence, problem solving skills and just plain

old enjoyment. Give it a try this Christmas and all during the year. You might even find your family communicating more often and with more things to talk about.

Now I think I'll get out *Josephina Havelina Goes to Pasadena to be a Ballerina*. That one always makes me laugh... but I'll save my talk about the side effects of laughter for another post!

Until next time,

Merry Christmas, and Happy Readin' and Writin' from Lauraine