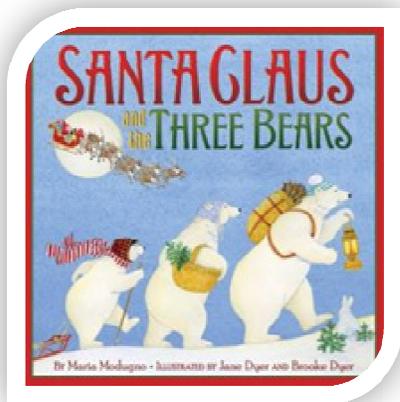


Readin' & Writin' with Lauraine- December 2013

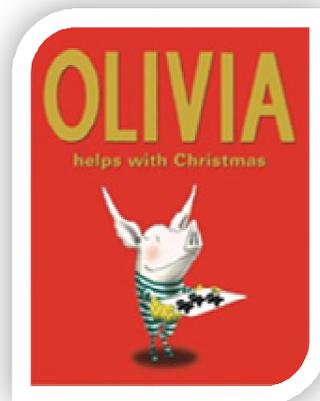


Today is the first day of December and the final day of Thanksgiving weekend. Those two things aren't usually so close together. We have snow on our mountains and sixty-three degrees with glorious sunshine here in Tehachapi. And I am supposedly getting ready for Christmas.

But I did do my annual visit to a bookstore, and browsed around for the latest children's books to share with you. I not only share about them with you, I also buy them and bring them home. Every year I say that I love picture books, and that never changes. I now have quite a collection of them, even though my youngest child is over thirty.

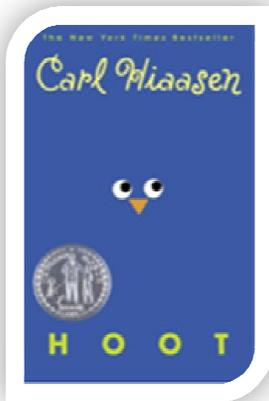
The first of four books that caught my eye is *Santa Claus and the Three Bears* by Maria Modugno, charmingly illustrated by Jane and Brooke Dyer. The cover shows three polar bears out for a walk with the tallest one holding a lantern, and Santa with his reindeer flying across the moon. I was hooked before I even opened the book. Everyone needs at least one three-bear book on their shelf. I know your little kids will ask you to read it again and again, probably long past Christmas time.

The second book is *Olivia Helps with Christmas* by Ian Falconer. I thought I had all the Olivia books, so I was delighted to find another one. This little piglet with such a big heart, who always messes up so badly, endeared



herself to me many books ago. Baking cookies? You guessed it—a mess. Setting the table? Oh, she is trying soooooo very hard.

Perhaps you have little ones like that, be they your children or grandchildren. By the way, Olivia's mother has the patience of a saint. Make that two saints. As always, the art is fun and funny and reading aloud is always a delight. So pick up a book and let your voice ring out.



This year I skipped the bookstore section on chapter books and went right to books for middle readers, the eight-to-twelve year old group. Three different kids, one former librarian, and a complimentary review that I'd read somewhere convinced me I had to read *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen.

This is a great story about Roy, a boy transplanted from Montana to Florida who loves the out-of-doors and is not impressed with Florida's flatness and weather. Besides being the new kid, he is under attack by the school bully, especially on the school bus. But when Roy sees a boy running barefoot, he is intrigued and thus the adventure begins: a quest to save burrowing owls, befriend another boy who never fit in, and stop the bullying. Wild and wacky characters will entertain not just the kids but adults, too. This adult sure loved it. My eleven-year old granddaughter, who loved *Hoot*, vehemently insists that I must read *Flush* next.

My fourth recommendation is written by Susan Fletcher and titled *Falcon in the Glass*. I have read all of Susan's books, starting with *Dragon's Milk*, which is still one of my all time favorite YA books.



The hardest part of *Falcon* was that I did NOT want to put it down, and I can only read right before I go to sleep because I have to finish the book I am currently writing. A young boy in Venice, son of a master glassblower, wants to follow in his deceased (possibly murdered) father's art, but first must leave his position as a drudge and find an apprenticeship to a new master. Enter a bird girl, with a kestrel. Intrigue, suspense, all the ingredients of a compelling tale, are in this story. After this book you can go back and find *Dragon's Milk*. I do so love the draclings.

Just a reminder: My *S.A.V.E. Squad* series for middle readers is available in local stores and online. Four girls, four adventures. *Dog Daze* has a basset on the cover, much like my very own Sir Winston ob de Mountains, and involves the girls' attempts to save one little basset puppy and track down the person who threw it into the lake. I will admit reading this story always makes me laugh.

In *The Great Cat Caper*, the girls devise a plan to save some feral cats, while *Second Hand Horses* stars a miniature horse, along with several other boisterous animals including a goose and a goat. The final book, *No Ordinary Owl*, leads the girls on an adventure to save two small owls. These four books make a marvelous Christmas gift; charming readers from eight to... well the oldest I know so far is eighty-five and she said she laughed herself silly.

My two other series, *The Golden Filly* and *High Hurdles* are perennial favorites, along with my stand-alone book, *What About Cimmaron?*. If you have a horse lover in your life, these books will bring hours of delight.

So, as our year comes to a close, I wish you all a blessed Christmas and a new year filled with adventures. And perhaps you might even try your hand at storytelling.

Until next time,

Happy readin' & writin' from Lauraine