

PENN & INK

E A S T E R N P E N N S Y L V A N I A C H A P T E R

Fall 2003 RA's Message

Lazy Days of Summer

Don't know what's happening in your neck of the woods, but my summer days have been anything but lazy. I am juggling four jobs, which consume my life. Sadly, only one of the jobs deals with writing. Of course, there are teenagers to contend with and all the demands that accompany them. I wonder if the driving age can be lowered to 15. Vacations (what's that?!!) have to be planned and fun summer activities like day trips, picnics, camping, and beach days need time, as well. Summer is anything but lazy! Still, summer gives way to a lazy feel. It's a time when we can sneak away from work a little earlier, sleep in a bit later some mornings, carve out more time for our kids, and linger at the art table to finish that sketch or at the computer to complete another chapter. Somehow, summer gives us permission to do those things. With that said, I plan to keep this message short. After all, today's summer activities await!



Kate Hamilton

The upcoming Philly conference is the big news for fall and the line up looks great! Philip Tietbohl and his volunteers have done a terrific job! If you haven't registered for this event, please go to the website at www.scbwiepa.org and sign up! There is talk about hosting an Illustrator's Day (much needed in our chapter) and planning for the 2004 Pocono Mountain's Retreat is well underway. All volunteer jobs have been filled (and a big thanks to those who stepped forward to offer their time!!). News about the retreat will begin to appear on the website later this year.

The other important news is that Les, our newsletter editor, will be taking a much-needed hiatus from the demands of everyday life to set off on a travel adventure for a few months. How lucky!! What all that means is that this newsletter will be the last until she returns. So we will not be sending out a winter newsletter. But newsletters will resume when she gets back from paradise.

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Editor's Note

I remain impressed with how much talent lies in our chapter! The enthusiasm for promoting people, books, ideas, artwork, gatherings, tips...I could go on and on. I feel privileged to be in a position that gathers all of these important pieces and scatters them out to the chapter (and beyond!) in a colorful and hopefully interesting form.

Our enthusiasm is also being seen in the diligence we have for sending information to Dane Troup, our webmaster, in order to keep our website flowing with information. We certainly are doing all that we can to stay on the front end of the technology curve while maintaining our individuality as creative people, aren't we?

As Arlette mentioned, the newsletter will be on a 1-quarter hiatus while I am away. Which will give everyone even more reason to visit our website often, and to be in touch with Dane. He has kindly accepted the potential extra work load for a little while. Thank you, Dane, for being extra strong glue for the chapter!

As with all transitions, whether it's moving from hot lazy days by the sea to cool autumn nights by the fire, an idea in our head to a written word or painted picture, or from the stability of routine to an open-ended travel phase, it helps to know that we are not going through them alone. It is worth the reminder that SCBWIEPA is a strong net that committed members have built for us in this precious area of our creative lives. Our continued support and contribution to the chapter is why there are so many successes coming from Eastern PA into the marketplace! -Leslie Hanlon

RA MESSAGE...continued from page 1

And she better, since she does such a fabulous job!!! To get important information about the chapter, simply check the website for any updates or check your email for elist information.

I hope you all enjoy the rest of your summer! And above all, find the time to create whether it is writing or art. Remember, summer allows you to do that!

Arlette N. Braman

Eastern PA SCBWI. Eleventh Annual Fall Philly Conference

Theme:

Perseverance!



Where: Whitford Country Club, Exton PA
(Easy access from exit #23 of the Pennsylvania Turnpike or Route 202)

When: Saturday, October 4, 2003

Time: 8:30am - 5:00pm

Presenters:

Peter Catalanotto, Illustrator-painter/Author
Polly Kanevsky, Art Director, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, McElderry Books for Children, Simon and Schuster Children's Book Division
Suzanne Reinoehl, Editor, Holiday House
Karen Riskin, Editor, Dial Books for Young Readers
Nancy Springer, Author
Pat Thomas, Writer, Editor, Teacher, and Author
Elizabeth Van Doren, Editorial Director, Gulliver Books, Harcourt Trade Children's Division
Deborah Wiles, Author

Conference Fees:

\$85 SCBWI Members
(Please bring membership card to registration)
\$95 Non-Member
\$35 Optional Manuscript or Portfolio Review
Registration is limited to 140.

For information, email Conference Director, Phillip Tietbohl at Pjtietbohl@aol.com or Co-Regional Advisor, Laurie Krauss Kiernan at lkiernan@tacsolutions.com. Current information and registration forms will be available at www.scbwiepa.org

Interview with YA Novelist Brent Hartinger

By Debbi Michiko Florence

Brent Hartinger lives in Tacoma, Washington and is the break-out YA author of *The Geography Club*. Here, he shares some of his insights about the writing life. Brent is a joy to chat with and has a great sense of humor. For more about him, see his website at:

www.brenthartinger.com/

DMF: Between third and eighth grades you published a newspaper. You've also had articles, essays, short stories, newspaper columns, cartoons, and greeting cards (!) published. Obviously, writing is a passion for you. When did you decide to pursue writing as a career? And how did writing for young adults come about? (And do tell, what was writing greeting cards like?)

BH: It wasn't until I graduated from college that I specifically decided to make my living as a writer, but I'd been doing creative projects with my friends since I was a small child—movies, stories, tapes, plays, you name it. As a result, I knew I wanted to do something creative with my life. I tried acting, but I was too shy to be any good (plus, I kept forgetting my lines). Filmmaking seemed too technical. And I didn't have the talent to be a fine artist. So writing it was!

Like most YA authors, I was put in the genre by my first agent, after I wrote a book with a teenage protagonist. I strongly resisted this, but only until I started reading YA literature and realized it was some of the best writing around.

Because of the limited number of pages, you can't afford to be self-indulgent. It's got to be about the story. And when you're writing for teens, you're competing against Nintendo and Britney Spears in a thong. So if you don't keep things fast-paced and exciting, you're out of a job!

Writing greeting cards was just as frustrating as every other kind of writing. They always picked the jokes of mine that I thought were lame. And the ones I loved, they always rejected.

DMF: You spent fifteen years trying, unsuccessfully, to get a novel published. You supported yourself as a freelance writer and counseling teens. How did you deal with that long road? How did you deal with rejection?

BH: I dealt with rejection horribly. For much of my thirties, I was deeply depressed. When I hit age 35 and realized I had no 401(k) and my social security payment was estimated to be \$150 a month (in 2030 dollars!), I succumbed to outright panic—not fun to be around. But I had no other skills, and no other employment prospects, so I just kept on writing. Thank God I got published, because I'd really be screwed if I wasn't.

DMF: In 1996, you won the Judy Blume / SCBWI Grant for Best Young Adult Novel. How did that affect your writing and your career?

BH: That was extremely important. First,

there was the money, which really helped at the time. And that novel got read by many different editors. For five minutes, I was "hot." The book didn't sell, but it was really an education in how publication and editing works. You can read all about at the time in my life in the article I wrote for Harold Underdown's *THE PURPLE CRAYON*:

www.underdown.org/no_freerewrites.htm

Through that award, I landed a new agent, who didn't sell my books, but he did eventually introduce me to my current agent, Jennifer DeChiara, and she was the one who, in 2000, really turned my career around. Getting published is only 1/10th about writing a great book. The other 9/10ths of the process is about meeting people and learning the market and the business. It's about getting your project into the hands of the right person, and that means making contacts and getting into the system any way you can.

DMF: GEOGRAPHY CLUB, your debut YA novel, and you are getting a lot of great press — interviews in print and online, profiles, fabulous reviews. Why do you think that is? Is this a result in part of PR efforts of your own? How important is marketing for a new author?

BH: At the risk of sounding immodest, I think a lot of attention is due to my own efforts. HarperCollins has been great, but they publish hundreds of books, and my

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Next Deadline: February 1

Penn&Ink Submissions: For the next issue please email articles, COLOR artwork, member news items, events, marketing news, and letters to Leslie Hanlon at dimeboxgx@earthlink.net

Eastern Pennsylvania SCBWI

Free for All

January 20, 2004

Bucks Co. Free Library • 150 S. Pine St.
Doylestown, PA 18901

Beat the January blues!
Hear a lively panel from the Bucks Co.
Authors of Books for Children
tackle...
**high hurdles that
writers overcome!**

Hear the trade secrets, the trials by fire, the successful strategies (and some that bombed) that professionals use to deal with rotten reviews, non-existent publisher promotion plans, getting started on a new project, keeping on, revision, revision, revision, navigating contract delays, keeping positive in a downsized market, and what to do while we wait to hear!

Members of the Bucks County group include Joyce McDonald, Elvira Woodruff, Kay Winters, Sally Keehn, Deb Heiligman, Pam Swallow, Wendy Pfeffer, Laurie Anderson, Martha Hewson, Susan Korman and Pat Brisson. See you in January!

Juice will be provided. Bring a snack to share. No pre-registration required.

Directions:

Phila and south: Take PA turnpike to Willow Grove exit.

North on 611. At Edison Furlong Road keep right to

Doylestown. One mile on South Main to first light. Right on Ashland,

one block to Pine. Right on Pine to library parking lot on left.

Allentown and north: Take 309 south to Quakertown. Turn left on 313 and follow 313 south to 611. Turn right at Cross Keys onto 611 south. Follow 611 (South Main St.) through Doylestown. Turn left on Ashland. Go one block to Pine. Turn right onto Pine into library parking lot. Accessible by train from Philadelphia.

Coming from a different place? Use MapQuest for individual directions.

Questions:

Kay Winters KayWinters@KayWinters.com

Sally Keehn Sallykeehn@aol.com

little debut novel was not necessarily their lead title. From a month before the book was released until two months after it was out, I did nothing but book promotion full-time. As a result, I had tons of press coverage, which supplemented the coverage that HarperCollins solicited. I think if I hadn't done all that promotion, my book might have been a modest success, but then would have been quickly forgotten. But it's now going into its third printing (three months after the pub date), it's been featured in dozens of newspapers and national magazines and columns, and it was just named a Summer 2003 Children's Book Sense Pick. None of this was accidental. I had a detailed strategy, and I followed through. Targeted print and banner ads, a 20-city author's tour, radio interviews, newspaper interviews, speaking engagements, self-syndicated articles and press releases, promotional items and events, an elaborate web-site, press kits, silent auction donations—I've done it all! (Note to other authors: once they saw me take the initiative, HarperCollins was fantastic in supporting and financing much of my efforts.)

Book promotion is absolutely essential. Not to be too blunt, but if you don't have the time to do it, or if you're uncomfortable doing it, I say forget about being a writer. Literally every single successful novelist I know did tons and tons of book promotion. Literally every single failed novelist I know said they did tons, but didn't really. It's a lousy state of affairs when authors have to be book promoters too, but that's where we are, so you accept it and succeed, or you reject it and fail.

Incidentally, book promotion isn't nearly the drag I thought it was going to be. Readings have turned out to be a lot of fun (readers are generally wonderful people), and it's very flattering to be interviewed by the press. Unlike the political press, feature writers want to make you look good.

DMF: In a Publisher's Weekly profile, you said you hoped that GEOGRAPHY CLUB appealed to both gay and straight audiences. I think you've been very successful at this. GEOGRAPHY

THE WRITER'S BOOKSHELF: Three More Reading Suggestions

By Dianne Ochiltree

As the kids head back to school each autumn, I begin the painstaking process of putting my office (and work routine) back into order. One by one, I shake the sand from the covers of my summer reading stack and file them away on the shelves dedicated to the business, art and craft of writing for children. Before I close the glass doors on the bookcase, I'd like to pass along a few titles that were especially helpful and thought-provoking:

THE WRITER'S JOURNEY: MYTHIC STRUCTURE FOR WRITERS, by Christopher Vogler. Based on the work of Joseph Campbell and his studies of world myths through the ages, the author suggests ways in which modern storytellers can use mythic structure to create powerful narratives. Although Vogler illustrates his points within the context of the screenplay, all writers interested in strengthening the story structure of their fiction, no matter the reading level or format, could benefit from this great book.

MAKING A GOOD SCRIPT GREAT, by Linda Seger. Again, although the author is a screenwriter and script consultant, and uses the screenplay format for illustrations and examples, there is much in this book that speaks to all writers of fiction. It helped me re-think 'the basics' and come up with some new ideas to try in my own manuscripts.

THE FOREST FOR THE TREES: AN EDITOR'S ADVICE TO WRITERS, by Betsy Lerner. This isn't a standard writing manual, or a 'how-to' book of any type in the traditional sense, but it nonetheless gives information that's as important for a writer to know as the elements of grammar. With wit and humor, Lerner uses her years of experience as an editor to help writers work through the maze of their own mindsets and working habits, seeking insights on how to find your true writing 'voice', or discover why you can't start or finish a particular project, among other issues. Lerner also gives us a look at the publishing process, and the industry itself, from the editor's side of the desk. I found her advice both honest and compassionate...and creatively inspiring.

So as the kids pile on the school bus, you may want to 'hit the books', too...maybe one of these titles will provide fresh inspiration, and help ease you back into your creative routine. *



MEMBER NEWS

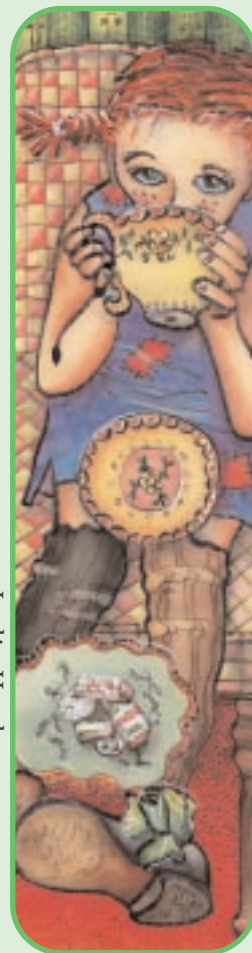
Put down your pens and paintbrushes and
clink

Susan Campbell Bartoletti's cats are terribly excited about the fall publication of her picture book, *NOBODY'S NOSIER THAN A CAT* (Hyperion), illustrated by Beppe Giacobbe. Her dog is a bit jealous, but he is looking forward to *NOBODY'S DIGGIER THAN A DOG* (Hyperion 2004), also illustrated by Beppe Giacobbe.

Wendy Pfeffer has two new books coming out this fall, *THE SHORTEST DAY*, from Dutton Children's Books, and *DOLPHIN TALK, WHISTLES, CLICKS, AND CLAPPING JAWS*, from HarperCollins. In *...SHORTEST...*, winter begins on the shortest day of the year. Through lyrical prose and cozy illustrations, this book tells about the winter solstice and how it has been celebrated throughout history. *DOLPHIN TALK...* teaches about how smart dolphins are. They talk to each other by communicating underwater for the same reasons people talk on land: to let others know who they are, where they are, and maybe even how they feel.

Kay Winters reports that *ABE LINCOLN: THE BOY WHO LOVED BOOKS* was the main selection for the Children's Book of the Month Club, a Junior Library Guild Selection, named a Recommended Social Studies title by Public Broadcasting, and was featured on CSpan2-Book TV in May and June. She signed books at Book Expo in California with Barry Moser, illustrator of her new title *VOICES OF ANCIENT EGYPT*, published by National Geographic. This is a picture book for 6th graders which focuses on the lives of the ordinary people who lived and worked along the Nile. Scholastic Book Club and Book Fair bought 16,000 hard cover copies of the book which sent it back for reprinting before it came out!

Leslie Hanlon



INTERVIEW WITH YA NOVELIST...continued from page 4

CLUB is about feeling isolated and finding a common bond. Most teens (and some adults) feel like that at some point in their lives. How did *GEOGRAPHY CLUB* develop into the story it is today? Did Russel Middlebrook (the main character) come to you first?

BH: Because Russel is pretty autobiographical, I guess I have to say the character came first! He's a normal, well-adjusted guy who just happens to be gay. It's the rest of the world that has the problem.

As for the whole "mainstream" issue, I was talking to another author recently, and she said she really felt like she had to make compromises to make a gay character of hers more palatable to straight audiences. I had no idea what she was talking about. I don't feel that I made any compromises at all; this is exactly the book I wanted to write. Lots of straight

people are responding to it anyway, so I guess I just have a mainstream sensibility! Fortunately, gay teens and adults love it too, so apparently I've written the *WILL AND GRACE* of YA literature.

DMF: By the way, Russel is one of those characters that stayed with me long after I'd finished reading the book. I miss him! I'm so glad to hear you'll be writing a sequel. Did you plan this or did your editor ask you to do this?

BH: Thanks so much! That's so flattering to hear. Regarding the sequel, which is called *THE ORDER OF THE POISON OAK*, my editor asked. Who was I to say no? But I like Russel, and I've missed him too. It's a delight to revisit him and his friends. Unfortunately, it won't be out

your tea cups together in a
lively toast to our
members!

until 2006, which means I have a lot of teenagers very mad at me.

DMF: You've successfully created a story that is honest yet funny. You mentioned in interviews that you wanted *GEOGRAPHY CLUB* to be more like dessert and less like broccoli. How difficult was it for you to create "dessert"?

BH: It wasn't too difficult, because it was my intention right from the start. I'm a big believer in not wasting a reader's time. They've paid sixteen bucks for my book; I'm not going to pay them back by writing lots of boring description or pointless dialogue.

It was very important to me that

my book not be yet another of those earnest, angst-filled or “issue” YA novels that we’re all so sick of. I think most adult authors remember the angst and the drama of their teen years, but for some reason, they don’t remember the humor and the fun, which is just as important. Go figure.

Incidentally, I’m flabbergasted by how many people respond to the humor of the book. One of the most common comments I get is, “It’s so nice to read a YA book where the character is a genuinely nice guy, and where everything isn’t all gloomy and depressing!” Might be something for your readers who are writers to keep in mind.

DMF: You never identify where this story takes place. Why? Was this a conscious decision on your part?

BH: Good observation! Yes, it was a very conscious decision. I wanted the book to be set in a sort of Anytown, USA. Because “geography” is such an important metaphor in the book, I wanted the actual geography to be ambiguous. I’m talking about emotional geographies that are hopefully universal. It seemed that identifying the place would limit it somehow, or make the book about something it wasn’t. The teen years exist outside of an actual place and time anyway.

Another conscious decision is the fact that there are almost no adults in the book. I’ve always believed that there is a world of teenagers, and a world of adults, and while the two worlds are aware that the other one exists, there’s almost no real interaction between the two.

DMF: How has your past experience helped shape GEOGRAPHY CLUB?

BH: In many ways, the book is my own story, since it includes many of the things I experienced in high school. In some sense, I think I wrote the book to rewrite my own adolescence, but give it a better resolution (and a happier ending!).

DMF: In an online interview with Cynthia Leitich Smith, you say that you got the inspiration for GEOGRAPHY

CLUB from the support group you founded for gay teens, Oasis. Can you tell me a little about this group? Why you founded it and what is your involvement with it?

BH: The most interesting thing was how gay kids from completely different walks of life could come together and find they have a common bond. I never would have believed that jocks and farm boys and street kids and suburbanites would have anything to say to each other. But they all shared this sense of being outsiders, of not quite fitting in, and so they rose above their superficial differences. That part of GEOGRAPHY CLUB is lifted straight from my experience with Oasis.

It’s a support organization for gay teenagers, and I helped get it started because I saw the need. There was literally no safe place for gay teens to gather in the town where I was living. It was one of the most positive experiences of my life.

DMF: GEOGRAPHY CLUB is being developed as a play. How exciting! You’ve written quite a few plays. How is play writing different from writing novels?

BH: Everyone says that book and play genres are completely different, but that’s not been my experience. Maybe it’s because I started out as a playwright, so I structure my books like plays (three acts, active narrator, conflict in every single scene). As a result, GEOGRAPHY CLUB has been pretty easy to adapt for the stage. Plus, young adult novels aren’t that long, so there haven’t been any major plot-points that I’ve had to cut!

DMF: You have a great web site www.brenthartinger.com. Did you create/design it yourself? Any advice for writers wanting to develop a web site?

BH: I read all I could about designing web-sites, about where everything should go and why. But the advice contradicted all the things I think are great about the web. So I ignored the advice and just did what I thought looked cool. I had a

designer who brought it to life (Greg Glick at Millenium Design, who works fast and cheap www.millenniumdesign.us/), and I’m thrilled with the result.

If you’re designing a site, I say be creative. There’s got to be some reason to go there other than jacket text, a photo of the author, and some reviews—that stuff’s all on the book. There are so many boring writers’ sites! These days, I don’t judge a book by its cover, but sometimes I do judge it by its web-site. If the author isn’t clever enough to have come up with a great web-site concept, why would I think he or she is clever enough to write a great book? And if you’re writing for teenagers, do I really need to point out that a eye-catching, creative web-site is a must?

DMF: You mention that you think young adult authors are writing some of the best books today. I agree! Do you have any recent favorites? What draws you to a book?

BH: My favorite book of the year is M.T. Anderson’s FEED, about a futuristic society where the corporations have literally taken control of our brains. It’s a terrific, chilling read, and I am very very jealous, because my own books aren’t nearly as good. I also liked Avi’s CRISPEN: THE CROSS OF LEAD. I like a book with a strong story and indelible characters (duh!). I’m really drawn to the classic YA themes of alienation and being misunderstood, but these days, I yearn for some new twist or angle. BREATHING UNDERWATER, that book about an abusive guy told from the point-of-view of the abuser, was fresh and interesting. So was CUT, about the self-mutilating girl. But if you spend much time around YA literature, you see how dour and depressing most of them are, and you quickly understand why people are responding to the humor in GEOGRAPHY CLUB.

DMF: What book are you reading now?

BH: I’m reading ALIA WAKING, the book of my on-line friend, Laura Williams McCaffrey. It’s great so far!

DMF: What is a “typical” work day like for you?

BH: These days, it’s spending about three hours in the morning answering email and doing phone interviews, then trying to write for three hours before I head to the gym and come home to make dinner. After dinner, I read or watch a video.

I’ve signed with HarperCollins for three more books, and I just optioned a screenplay. Now I have at least three other deals in the works, plus the GEOGRAPHY CLUB play deal. This is all great, of course, but it’s overwhelming too. I write fast, and I’m very prolific, but I do worry about not giving each project the attention it deserves. I won’t put my name on something I don’t completely love.



DMF: What do you do when you are not reading/writing?

BH: I work with a summer playwriting festival, I meet friends to go out for dinner (none of us has time to cook anymore!), and I go to a lot of movies and plays. I have an extremely busy social life these days, but that’s okay for the time being. I spent fifteen years with no one calling and no one wanting to take me out to lunch. Now I’m making up for lost time.

DMF: What’s the best thing about being a writer?

BH: I get paid to do what I love, which is to make up stories. And then people write to me and come to my readings to tell me how much they love me and my books! It’s an absolute dream come true.

DMF: What’s the hardest thing about being a writer?

BH: There is nothing I can complain about, because I know how many people would kill to be where I am. There are minor annoyances, sure, but I try to keep things in perspective. Now that I’ve finally broken through, I have just a fantastic life.

DMF: What inspires you?

BH: Other books, plays, and movies. I am in awe of true writing talent. And as passionate as I get about great writing, I am equally outraged by bad writing. There’s just no excuse for these film producers who spend hundreds of millions of dollars on special effects, but seem to have not even bothered

with a script—any script! And—as you may have guessed already—I’m frustrated by artsy, self-indulgent authors who seem intent on eliminating every shred of joy from reading. Yeah, kids are reading less these days, but when I look at some of the books they’re given to read, I think, “Hell, I’m bored with this book too!” Reading is a pleasure—it’s not supposed to be work!—and I wish other authors would remember that.

Laurie Edwards

DMF: What can fans expect next from you?

BH: My next book is called THE LAST CHANCE TEXACO (out from HarperCollins in February 2004), and it’s the story of a fifteen year-old group home kid who has one last chance to turn her life around before being shipped off to a juvenile detention facility until her eighteenth birthday. She’s very different from Russel in GEOGRAPHY CLUB, but she’s just as much an underdog. My editor likes the book even more than he liked GEOGRAPHY CLUB, which is very flattering.

DMF: What advice do you have for beginning children’s authors?

BH: Don’t expect to sell your first book, or even your first four books. For those of us who aren’t geniuses, it takes a long time to learn to write fiction well—at least as long as it takes for a doctor to learn brain surgery. Your first book probably isn’t as good as you think it is (mine sure stank). But that’s okay. By writing that first book, you learn a lot of important things about writing. By writing your next few books, you’ll learn even more. Eventually, you will be writing at a professional level. When you do, you will get published. It’s hard to break through, but if you really have a great book, it’s not that hard. There just isn’t that much true talent out there, and every editor I know is desperately looking to discover the next Great Author. *

For other author interviews, please see Debbi’s website at:
www.debbimichikoflorence.com

Black Eyes

by Adele Aron Greenspun

Mother braids the child's hair:
two long pigtails, each pulled to the side
of the straight white part that
divides her scalp from forehead to nape

The comb's teeth bite deep

"You're pretty with hair off your face."

"High foreheads are signs of intelligence."

"But I want bangs."

"Everyone has them."

"You look like Margaret O'Brien"

"You're hurting me."

"Stand Still. I can't get the knots out."

"You're brushing too hard."

"I'm not. Your hair is tangled."

Stand still and stop complaining."

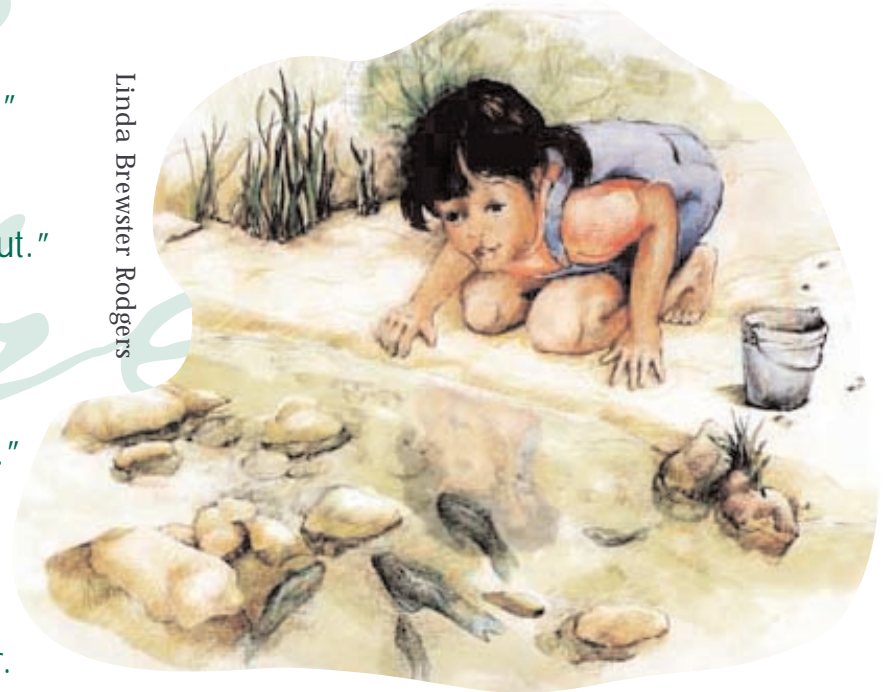
"Ouch"

Fingers yank each clump
over and under, under and over.

The child wonders

Why it has to hurt.

Linda Brewster
Rodgers



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