



## Editorial ? September 2010

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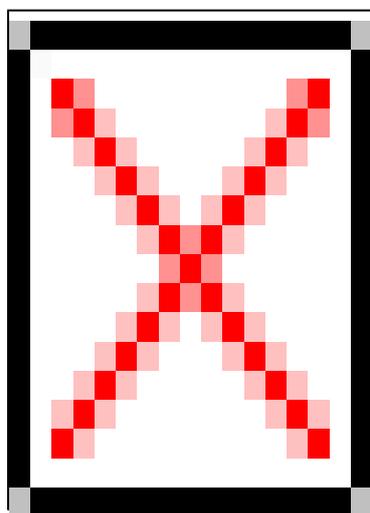
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At the beginning of July this year Random House hosted the first Random House/**Books for Keeps** Live Event, 'Talking Pictures', at which illustrators Chris Wormell, Sue Hendra, Nadia Shireen and Mini Grey talked about their work.

Chatting before the event to Nadia Shireen whose debut picture book **Good Little Wolf** will be published by Jonathan Cape next year, I asked how she came to be published. Nadia explained that before Cape showed interest in her work she had been approached by another publisher who wanted her to illustrate a particular story. After agonizing about whether it was wise to turn down an opportunity to be published (would she ever get another!), she had refused the offer because she didn't like the text. 'But of course,' murmured Chris Wormell, understanding completely. 'You didn't like the text?'

A good text is, after all, the heart of the matter for a picture book because it is its narrative structure ? even if it is a book without words. Blessed with a good text (whether their own or one by another's hand), the illustrator's job is to serve it as well as possible by determining the nature of the illustrative demands needed and responding to their particular character. If the text is flawed, the illustrations are doomed for even the finest artistic response cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, as Nadia Shireen was well aware when she turned down the text she didn't like.

**BfK** has seen interesting changes in picture book illustration over the years. When I worked in publishing in the early '90s I was keen to publish Sara Fanelli's **Wolf**. At that time, however, this particular publishing house was not ready for illustration they saw as 'too sophisticated', not an essentially representational visual interpretation of a text. Fortunately **Wolf** found a more receptive home. However, like Fanelli, an increasing number of new and innovative artists were recognising the potential of the picture book as a vehicle for their illustration. Some of those early innovations misfired

as their creators were not essentially interested in creating texts that communicated with children. But the boundaries of what had been considered suitable for children began to be pushed out and eventually resulted in the explosion of new picture book talent we have today.

### **Discriminatory attitudes to mental health**

Last year the mental health campaign, Time to Change, published a report pointing out that many eminent historical figures who suffered from depression, amongst them Winston Churchill and Marie Curie, might never have succeeded in their respective fields if they had worked in 21st-century Britain with its discriminatory attitudes to mental health.

The taboos associated with this discrimination can make life particularly painful and difficult for children whose parents have mental health problems. Until Jacqueline Wilson's pioneering **The Illustrated Mum** about a girl whose mother has bipolar disorder, such issues rarely featured in novels for children. Kate De Goldi's **The 10pm Question** in which the hero's mother has agoraphobia is another pioneering title. See this issue's 'Editor's Choice' in which it is featured.

Rosemary Stones

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