



# Editorial - September 2011

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News and comment from the Editor.

I first met Richard Hill, **Books for Keeps**? now just retired Managing Director, in the 1970s when he was head of the Children?s Marketing Department at Penguin and I was a reviewer for magazines such as **Spare Rib** and **Race Today** and a campaigner around issues of racism and sexism in children?s books. To my surprise, Richard?s response to the points I was making about race and gender stereotyping and the lack of information about those good titles that were available was, ?OK. So what can we do?? I suggested that Penguin publish an annotated guide to their multi-cultural titles and Richard immediately invited me to write it. It was the first such initiative from a UK publisher and followed shortly afterwards by an invitation to write a guide to Penguin?s non-sexist titles which was published as **Ms Muffet Fights Back**.

?OK. So what can we do?? has always been Richard?s approach to the difficulties that surround getting books into the hands of young readers as his subsequent initiatives have demonstrated. Passionate about the importance of reading and story to children of all backgrounds, Richard became heavily involved in the school bookshop movement while still at Penguin before joining the School Bookshop Association in 1979 as Managing Director. This led to the conversion of the SBA?s publication **School Bookshop News** into **Books for Keeps**, a magazine with a wider remit to bring children and books together.

Also there at the beginning were Angie Hill who has provided tireless and invaluable editorial support and Alec Davis, **BfK**?s designer, both now also just retired. It was Alec, described by Richard as ?the best graphic designer of his year at St Martin?s? and a man of great ?literary intelligence?, who came up with the phrase ?books for keeps? which was to become our title; Alec also invented the word 'Authorgraph' for our in-depth showcase author interviews (now 190 of them!). ?Literary intelligence? is a phrase that also applies to Angie. With her customary self-effacing tact, she has often been instrumental in changing things that weren?t quite pitched right. She and Alec have always shared with Richard and with **BfK**?s various Editors (Pat Triggs, Chris Powling, me), a strong sense of the audience for **BfK** and its varying interests and needs and ensured that magazine not only looks good, but responds at the right level.

Richard?s ?OK. So what can we do?? over his thirty years at the helm of **Books for Keeps** has resulted in so much that we now take for granted in the children?s book world but which was at the time pioneering ? not least the democracy of a independent review magazine with a range of interviews, articles and features about children?s books to appeal to both specialists and non-specialists.

Then there were the dedicated **BfK** Guides to poetry, to multi-cultural children?s books, to books about green issues and to books about bullying; there was the introduction of serious critical attention to non-fiction (at the time a novelty); there were the campaigning articles ? against prescribed reading lists and worksheets and for a curriculum with creative

space for literature; there was the inclusiveness, both in terms of the reviewing team and contributors but also in terms of what was reviewed; there was the delight in illustration and in novelty titles and the space and critical attention afforded them and the enthusiasm in promoting new initiatives, from storytelling in libraries to encouraging children's home libraries?.

Above all, Richard, Angie and Alec have been instrumental in providing a forum in which conversations and debate about the importance of children's literature in all its aspects have taken place. These conversations will continue now that they have bowed out and our new Marketing Director, Andrea Reece, and I take the magazine forward.

A belief in the importance of reading for pleasure and that that pleasure should be available to all our children has been central to **Books for Keeps** during Richard, Angie and Alec's tenure and that too will continue for keeps?.

Our love, thanks and good wishes go with them.

Rosemary Stones

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