RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF MR. MCAFEE'S MEADOW

A SENIOR HONORS PROJECT
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by
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LITERATURE</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. PROCEDURE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. SUMMARY</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOOK INSERTED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART I
INTRODUCTION

In our growing world with all of its mass communications we need to know more about the different peoples. More necessarily, we need to know how to relate to others different from ourselves. One will find gypsies a cultural group little explored and written about in children's literature. Therefore, the investigator planned to use gypsies as the basis of a children's picture book for her avenue of communication.

On the personal side, the writer confesses a considerable amount of ignorance about gypsies. By writing this book about them, a combination of old concepts with the new information was assembled. This book plus others listed in the bibliography could be used in the elementary schools as a resource for social studies. More classes are studying peoples of the world and their different cultures. A teacher could also apply units about peoples around the world as a lead-up to variances in individuals and in human relations.

The author also hopes that in the creation of the story she might gain a better understanding of the vocabulary, artwork, themes and education expressed in our present children's literature. Expanding library programs and pupil interest in them are a "golden key" to the progress of our nation's reading aptitude.
PART II
LITERATURE

Much of the basis of this book is due to literature written about gypsies by others and by gypsies themselves. Facts were gathered on gypsy dress, natural habitat, ways of earning a living, customs: their culture. Many of the books contained a glossary of Romany terms and their English equivalent. One of the more extensive lists is found in the back of A Romany Life by Gipsy Petulengro. Most of the words that appear are simple such as fiddle = bosa, highway = boro-drom and field = puv.

Bentz Plagemann's book, How to Write a Story and two anthologies, one by Arbuthnot and the other compiled by Johnson, Sickels and Sayers conveyed technicalities in such a production. Theme, plot, characters and style were explained, examples amply given and means suggested.

During winter quarter 1972, as part of LIB 331 the investigator attended a talk given to a small group of Ball State students by Robert Burch, author of Queenie Peavy. Mr. Burch related how he initiated his career in writing, and his personal method of developing characters so well that they become life-like in his mind before he embarks on plot, theme or the style to be used. He said that many times authors are asked to use the illustrations of another person or to re-write parts of the story.

Johnson's Anthology of Children's Literature states that the first illustrations made to accompany print consisted of wood blocks: crude, simple pictures drawn on a block of wood then cut
in relief to form an inking and printing surface. Other possibilities mentioned were ink sketches, water colors, oils, collages and murals. Illustrators usually form a style and are recognized by it.
PART III
PROCEDURE

The investigator researched different author’s approaches to writing a book. Some develop the characters until they almost become as past acquaintances in one’s mind, others set a theme first, others redo old legends, fables, etc. This author combined two methods by picking characters that intrigued children -- gypsies. Then it was decided to relate a moral, not too flagrantly the writer hopes, which related to the gypsy characters. The moral would be a warning about stereotyping people, also the needless fears associated with the aforementioned.

The next step was to research facts about gypsies which would be realistic for writing and illustrating. The theme or moral was first established and then some facts about the everyday lives of gypsies were worked into the plot. Facts were used about gypsy dress, especially jewelry. The silver earring is a designation of noble birth in the group.1 The fireside reflections come from the gypsy's tradition of passing history by word of mouth rather than the written word.2 For existence a gypsy band works, as most migrants, along the way. Crafts, tissue flowers, etc., are sold, as John Hornby's Gypsies tells us, plus their famed fortune telling. Ever the mother of invention the fact that you can tickle a trout's stomach until it relaxes to slumber, then quickly flip it out of the water also appeared

1Walter Starkie, In Sara's Tents, p. 32.
2Ibid., p. 40.
Throughout the research an overall carefree spirit was found, but within the band a strictness for members which disregarded outside cultures existed. For example: Milane, a gypsy boy was mocked by village peers for his long curly locks while his own people consider the physical trait as a sign of manliness.

The decision was made to write the book from the first person point of view so any reader could easily identify with the main character's actions. For this person a little boy, around the age of the children mentally ready for reading this book, was chosen.

Next, the writer concentrated her mind on its dream mission, for she is an illustrator through the images which appear in her mind's eye. After a scene was visioned, live models were used to pose hoping to portray the stances more realistically.

The words used developed along with the illustrations, sometimes they came first and sometimes they evolved after the picture was imagined. These words were checked for a reading readiness level with word lists from "Dolch Basic Word Lists", area basal readers, and elementary teachers. These words were hand printed on the book pages with the skills learned in the Ball State writing course.

After producing the story and illustrations which are based on technical, adult references, the author composed a list of present children's literature about gypsies. As previously stated there are

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3 John Hornby, Gypsies, p. 37.

few books on the topic. The following is a select group with comments:

Valenti Angelo's *Nino* is an illustrated adventure for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. (244 pages)

Ludwig Bemelman's *Madeline and the Gypsies* is a delightfully illustrated account of Madeline, the orphan, as she meets the gypsies who are running a zoo. (56 pages)

Natalie Savage Carlson's *The Family Under the Bridge* is charmingly illustrated by Garth Williams. This story is realistic and good reading for the third or fourth grader. (97 pages)

Patricia Gordon's *Rommany Luck* is an adventure illustrated by Rafaello Busoni for upper fourth or fifth grade. (206 pages)

Nora Tully MacAlvay's *Cathie Stuart* is the story of a young girl who takes a trip back in time which includes some gypsies, for the fourth or fifth grade readers. (159 pages)

Kate Seredy's *The Good Master* is an adventure for the fifth or sixth grade reader. (196 pages)

Robert Varva's *Milane: The Story of a Hungarian Gypsy Boy*, is beautifully illustrated with real life photographs. The teacher should read this book to third, fourth and fifth grade classes for a modern view of the gypsy. (25 pages)

Dora E. Yates's *A Book of Gypsy Folk-Tales* is a collection of 44 tales appropriately suited for reading to the fifth grade. (197 pages)

Crayon relief was used initially to illustrate the book because of the detail easily achieved with this scratch method.

After working with that media the author decided to change because
the density of crayon on a frame was easily smudged and therefore hard to protect. One would almost need to frame and cover each illustration with a transparent sheet. The second artistic media chosen was a combination of water colors with crayon for shading and inkwork for detail on top of the water colors. This method proved very satisfactory and was used throughout the book. The characters drawn are imaginary, but dress customs and physical traits of the gypsy peoples were authentic as a result of research. They were easy to duplicate after once created and sketched.
PART IV

SUMMARY

The writer has learned many things from this experience and feels more appreciative of authors now, especially those who can reach out and touch a reader's life with their words.

She has found that there are a lot of technical parts, from the birth until the emergence of a finished book, but that the true key to writing is a free creative mind. Initially the author went at this project in the wrong way. It then seemed good to carefully research the parts of a story, decide on an exciting topic, formulate vocabulary plans, select an artistic media, etc.; the author even began to think that about three lines of print on each page would be appropriate. This all, very definitely, adds to the professionalism that can be found in writings, but before she could write the text of the book she had banished all of these plans from her mind.

One needs to be free to express. The burden of creation at its best, takes us, as it will ... like unto the wind, destroying man's barriers, driving its own patterns and eroding the best laid plans. The mind and heart's secrets try desperately to get out. This book was written to "teach" others a joy of life, and yet as the book was formulated the author learned more about that same joy. She shared, and surprised herself at what she shared.

Try it! She hopes you'll like it! She's glad she did.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


