

## IN OTHER WORDS

Columns and Letters to the Editor

# A story behind the storybooks

**T**HERE IS A story behind every published story, and a really interesting one behind *Treasures from the Deep*, a new children's book by Minden-area author Irene Davidson Fisher.

*Treasures from the Deep* is the story of Ashanti, a young girl who wants to buy her grandmother a birthday present but she has only 75 cents. Grandma loves sea shells, and when Ashanti spots Grandma's book about shells, she sets off on an adventure to find Grandma's favourites.

The story behind the story is how Irene, who came to Canada from Scotland as a child, became a writer of children's stories. She spent most of her adult life in business, forming her own consulting company.



**JIM POLING SR.**  
From *Shaman's Rock*

Her business life included writing event scripts for conferences, speaking notes for members of boards and speeches for a number of politicians. But writing children's stories was a dream – something for maybe off in the future.

About five years before she retired, Irene was flipping through an old magazine when she noticed one of those postcard advertising inserts. It was for the Institute of Children's Literature, which offers correspondence courses on writing for children and teenagers. She set it aside, but didn't do anything with it.

Some years later, after she retired from her business career, a good friend handed her an envelope. It contained the Institute of Children's Literature postcard and a note saying: "Promise me you will fill this out and follow your dreams."

She sent in the application and a sample story and was accepted into the Institute's basic program, later graduating from the advanced program.

The story behind the story became even more interesting in 2011 when she and her husband lost everything in a house fire. Her computer, containing Institute assignments and stories, was burned but the Institute still had some of her work on file, and some of her saved ideas and work later became children's books.

Her first children's book, *Robbie Raccoon and the Big Black Blog*, was followed by the *Best Present Ever* and now *Treasures from the Deep*.

Each story has a message for children. *Robbie the Raccoon* is about listening to your mom; *The Best Present* tells how the best part of Christmas is about giving. *Treasures* is a lesson about money not being necessary for a special gift and never giving up when faced with a problem.

Irene donates \$1 from each book sale to Autism Canada, which she describes as a charity "near and dear to my heart."

She also recently published online a flipbook poem titled *Achoo*, which gives positive messages to children about COVID-19. It is illustrated by her granddaughter.

She is working on a new book titled *Percival Penguin*, based on an idea she has had tucked away for some time.

Talking to Irene about her journey into writing and her books reminded me of a valuable lesson: the importance of getting children into the habit of reading.

Albert Einstein, a brilliant mind and a man considered by many to be greatest scientist of all time, is reported to have told someone:

"If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."

Reading storybooks is a critical part of the growth and development of children. Children's books are the homes of characters that young readers get to know and become like friends.

Books are doors to discovery, magic portals through which children walk into other worlds and meet other characters with different lives and different ideas. In practical terms, reading helps children exercise their brains, sharpen their imaginations, develop critical thinking, and of course improve language skills.

Just as important, reading helps to improve concentration, something much needed in a world of digital games and other distractions.

Most importantly, reading helps children develop empathy, which is the ability to experience and understand the feelings of others and to learn how to be helpful.

Empathy is something humans are not born with. It is developed. And, if you want to see what happens when it is not developed, watch the Jan. 6 insurrection videos of all the boneheads pulling apart the once United States of America.