

BOOKS TO GROW WITH NEWSLETTER FOR DECEMBER 2004

EDITOR'S NOTE

In this issue, we talk about holiday books for Christmas!

RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS

The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree, by Gloria Houston. Dial Books, 1988. The Armistice has been declared, but Ruthie's father hasn't come home to their little Appalachian town. So, Ruthie and her mother must bring home the perfect Christmas tree, which Ruthie's father had found before he left, to donate to the town. A touching and joyful story about courage and the power of family.

Welcome Comfort, by Patricia Polacco. Philomel Books, 1999. Teased at school, an overweight foster child named Welcome Comfort finds acceptance and solace in his friendship with the new school custodian, Quintin Hamp. The Hamps become a stable and lasting force in his life, even though they take a mysterious vacation north every year on Christmas Eve. Plucked from his bed for a sleigh ride with Santa, Welcome wonders if the trip was just a dream, and finds the answer only after Mr. Hamp retires and chooses him as his successor.

December, by Eve Bunting. Voyager Books, 2000. On Christmas Eve, a homeless boy and his mother share their small cardboard-box home with an elderly stranger. The next morning, she is gone. The story ends a year later, when the boy's mother has a job, they have moved to a small apartment, and he observes that his calendar angel wears a rose just like the one the stranger had put on his Christmas tree. The message of charity as a risk worth taking in a dangerous world is a sobering, thoughtful holiday message.

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Some personal musings as 2004 comes to a close. This has been both an exciting and a difficult year in our household, as I know may be true for many of you. I've watched *Books to Grow With* and its message of how good books can help kids – take flight and soar. My family suffered a sad loss with the unexpected and sudden death of a close friend. We watched and participated in a difficult election year that seemed more divisive than any year I can recall.

One thing I'm convinced of – there's always a need for wonderful books to encourage us, to empower us, to strengthen us, to offer us hope and sometimes, just to curl up with and enjoy.

In 2005, as I continue my work on the “sequel” to *Books to Grow With* that focuses especially on those difficult middle-school (junior high, depending where you're located) years, I look forward to sharing my finds with you.

I plan to talk about (and offer interviews) on the role of fantasy as well as the sometimes controversial aspects of gritty realistic books for teens. And, of course, I will continue to offer updates on new books for younger children, as well as new topics.

To all of you whom I've had the pleasure of meeting in person – or hope I will in the future – Happy Holidays and a New Year filled with contentment and peace.

~Cheryl

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