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Chanterelle finds a family : creating an original book for children

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Chanterelle Finds a Family

Creating an Original Book for Children

By

Nicole Brierre

Mentor: Sal Vascellaro

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Education
Bank Street College of Education
April, 2013

Chanterelle Finds a Family
Creating an Original Book for Children
by Nicole Brierre

Abstract

Chanterelle Finds a Family is an original story for children of age's five to seven. In the Northeastern woodlands lives a carefree, independent puppy. During the day she plays with her friends Porcupine and the Beaver family, but at night she often wonders what it would be like if she had a family of her own. One day she encounters a human family hiking in the woods. She secretly follows them enjoying their camaraderie. The parents are nurturing and the children are playful, just like the Beaver family. When the puppy is accidentally quilled by Porcupine, the family comes to her aid and ultimately decides to adopt her. In turn, the puppy chooses to stay with the family.

Following the book, this thesis includes four sections relating to the making of the book and it's developmental appropriateness. The first section outlines the process of writing the story. The second section examines how the book's three major themes relate to the development of five to seven year olds: that children have a drive for independence and at the same time a need for safety and security through adult nurturing; peer relationships take on a new importance as they offer camaraderie and a way to identify with a group; and children have a natural desire to extend their environment beyond home and family. The third section considers children's literature with similar themes. Finally, the fourth section analyzes responses to the book of children in Kindergarten, first and second grade.

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I would also like to thank my brother, Ben Brierre, and Sidney Hoang for the stunning illustrations. This book would not have been possible without their creativity, expertise, time, and energy.

Introduction

Chanterelle Finds a Family originated from a deeply personal experience.

Chanterelle, the main character of the story, was a real dog. She was my family's dog for eight years. How she happened to become a part of our family in large part influenced this story. Chanterelle was an abandoned puppy alongside a remote highway in Northern Vermont. A kind woman found her and decided that she would find this puppy a home. As the woman was kayaking that evening she came upon my family at our summerhouse. I am not sure what made this woman think we were such a deserving family but she paddled right up to us and said, "You seem like a nice family. I found an abandoned puppy and I am looking for a home for her. Are you interested?" Well, we saw Chanterelle and most of my family was determined to keep her. We accepted the woman's offer and Chanterelle was ours. We named her Chanterelle, after the burnt yellow wild mushrooms that grow in Northern Vermont around our summer home.

To my surprise and my parent's dismay, Chanterelle immediately proved to be much more of a disturbance than a benefit to our household. She was aggressive and stubborn. Chanterelle barked a lot, chewed everything and would bite if anyone came too close to her food or anything else in her mouth that she considered food. My parents called a dog psychologist to come and observe her to see if this kind of behavior was going to be temporary. But despite her behavior there was something about Chanterelle that was immensely special. She barked but she also made lots of other noises. You would come sit by her, or talk to her, or rub her belly, and she

would make all of these guttural sounds we never heard from a dog before. It felt like she was trying to speak. My family and I have often remarked how much we wish we could have somehow understood Chanterelle's language because it seemed as though she was trying to say something. Furthermore, her intense eye contact supported her canine language. I remember having staring contests with her and thinking she knows exactly what I'm doing right now and she's going to win because she is stubborn. Chanterelle could really stare and she could also wink.

Above all else, Chanterelle was fiercely devoted to our family. She hated being apart from us. At the lake where we adopted her, if all of us were in the water, so was Chanterelle. If we left her outside while we were inside she would bark relentlessly. She needed to be near us at all times but at the same time had her own personal boundaries, like young children who want to claim their independence but also desperately need their mom and dad for comfort and love. Chanterelle needed us but wanted the liberty to strike off on her own whenever she felt like it.

Chanterelle died at a young age due to cancer. I had been contemplating writing a story about Chanterelle long before she got sick. There was so much to write about. I thought about all of the noise and funny sounds she made and of her uncanny knack for finding herself in all kinds of predicaments. She would get lost on a hiking trip, find porcupines and get quilled, dig out a weasel and then fight with it. There could be chapters of Chanterelle stories. I had attempted several times to write one of those stories but none got off the ground until I was asked to write a story for children in the *Language, Literature and Emergent Literacy* class taught at

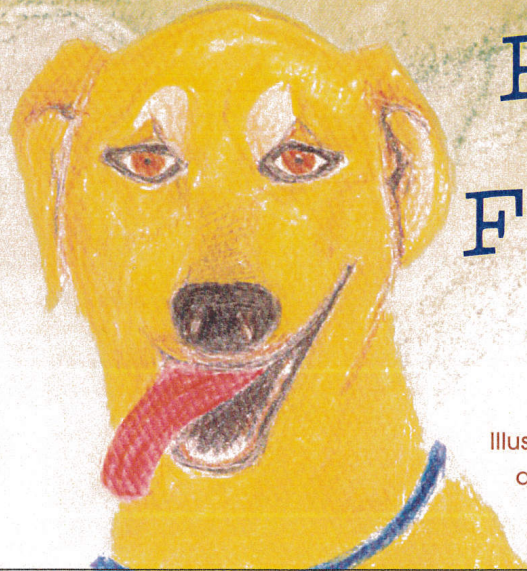
Bank Street College. What follows is the story *Chanterelle Finds a Family* and a rationale for reading the book with five to seven year old children.

Note:

The following story is a Xeroxed reproduction of *Chanterelle Finds a Family*. The original book is formatted horizontally, 10" x 8". The pictures and text are meant to be formatted on both the left and right pages. The illustrations were created in colored pencil and watercolor paints.

Chanterelle

Finds A Family



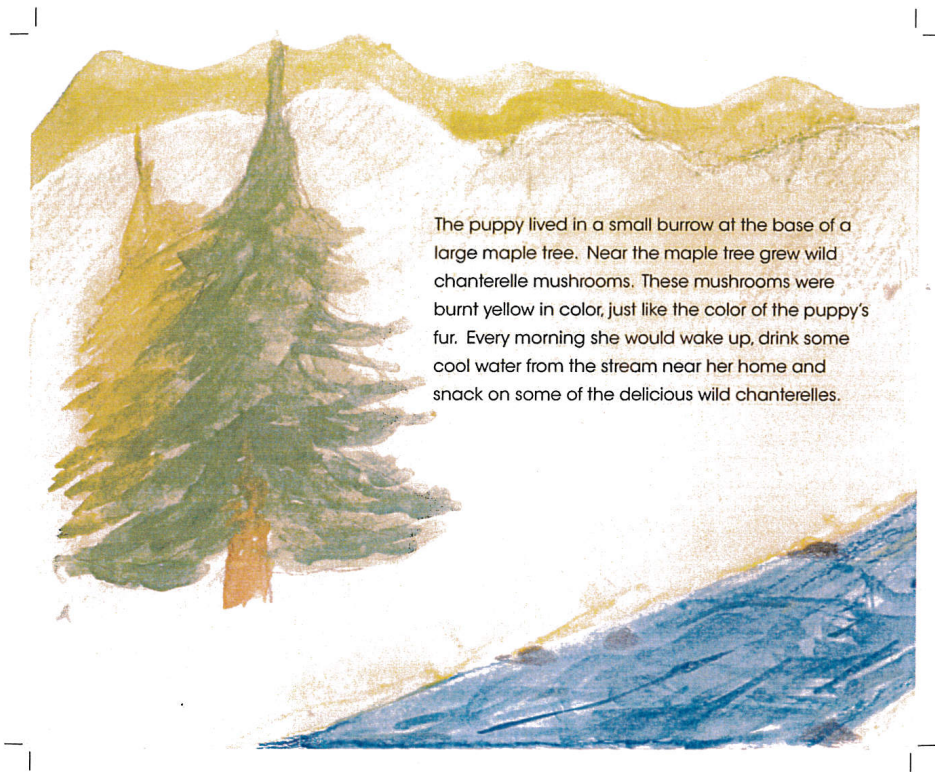
By Nicole Brierre
Illustrated by Ben Brierre
and Sidney Hoang



Once, in a cool, wooded forest lived a puppy. She was smart and very curious.

She was also proud and stubborn. She did not need help from anybody.

Right Page



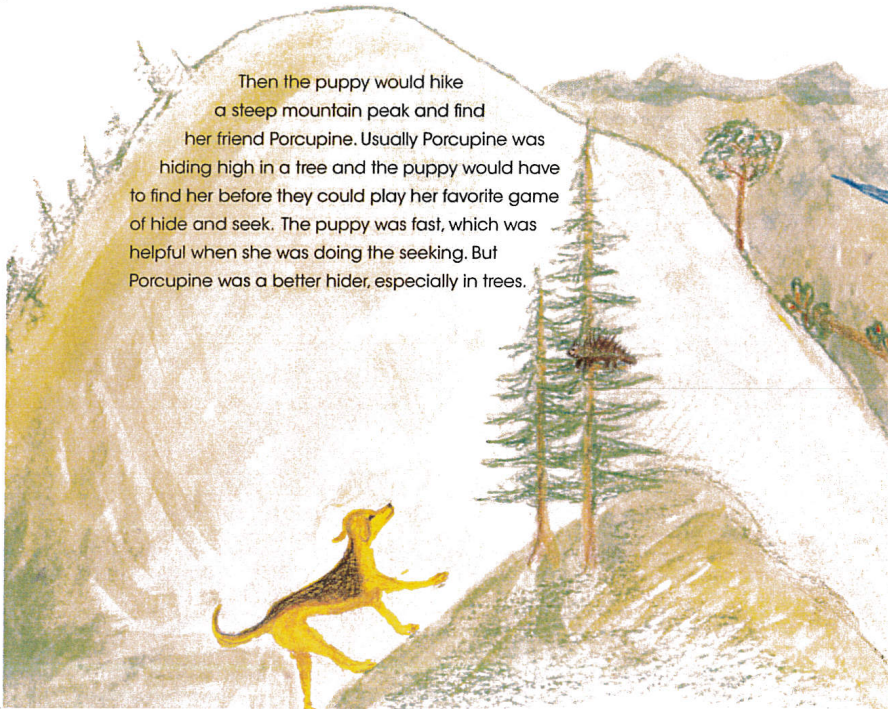
The puppy lived in a small burrow at the base of a large maple tree. Near the maple tree grew wild chanterelle mushrooms. These mushrooms were burnt yellow in color, just like the color of the puppy's fur. Every morning she would wake up, drink some cool water from the stream near her home and snack on some of the delicious wild chanterelles.

Left Page

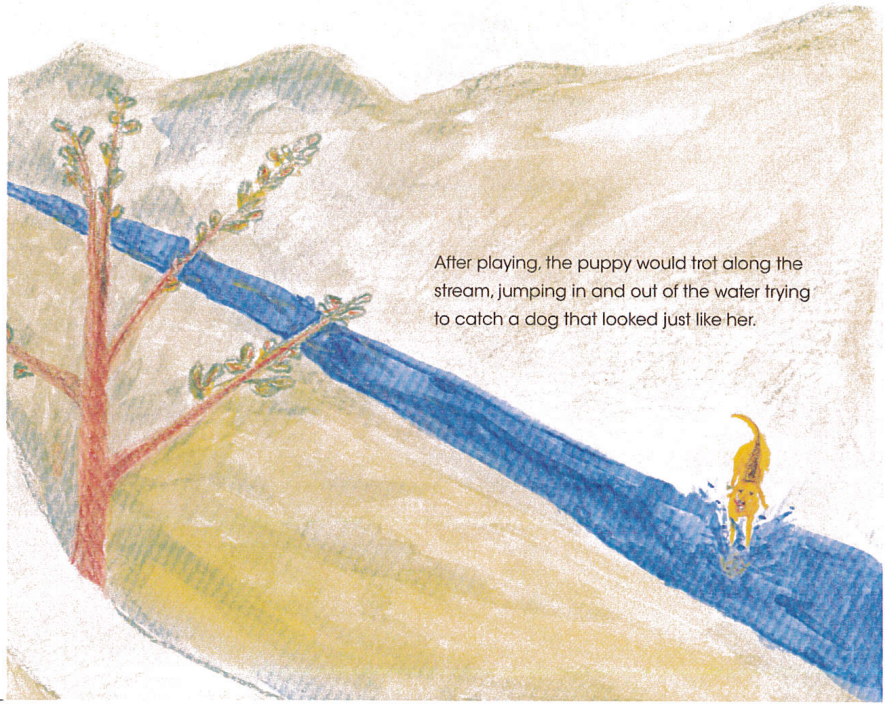


Right Page

Then the puppy would hike
a steep mountain peak and find
her friend Porcupine. Usually Porcupine was
hiding high in a tree and the puppy would have
to find her before they could play her favorite game
of hide and seek. The puppy was fast, which was
helpful when she was doing the seeking. But
Porcupine was a better hider, especially in trees.

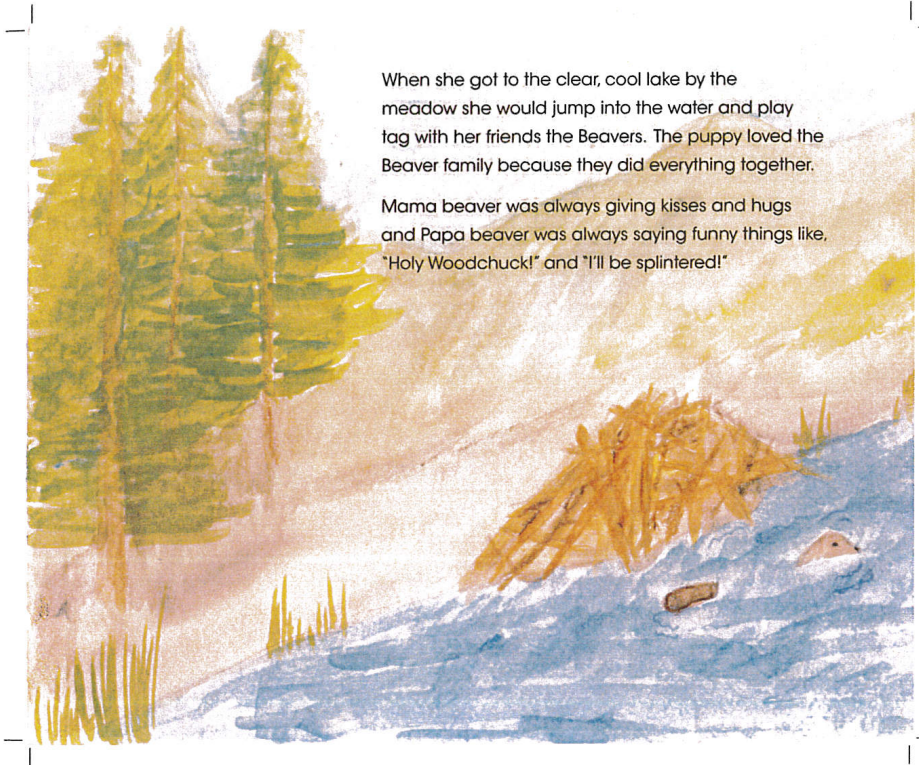


Left Page



After playing, the puppy would trot along the stream, jumping in and out of the water trying to catch a dog that looked just like her.

Right Page

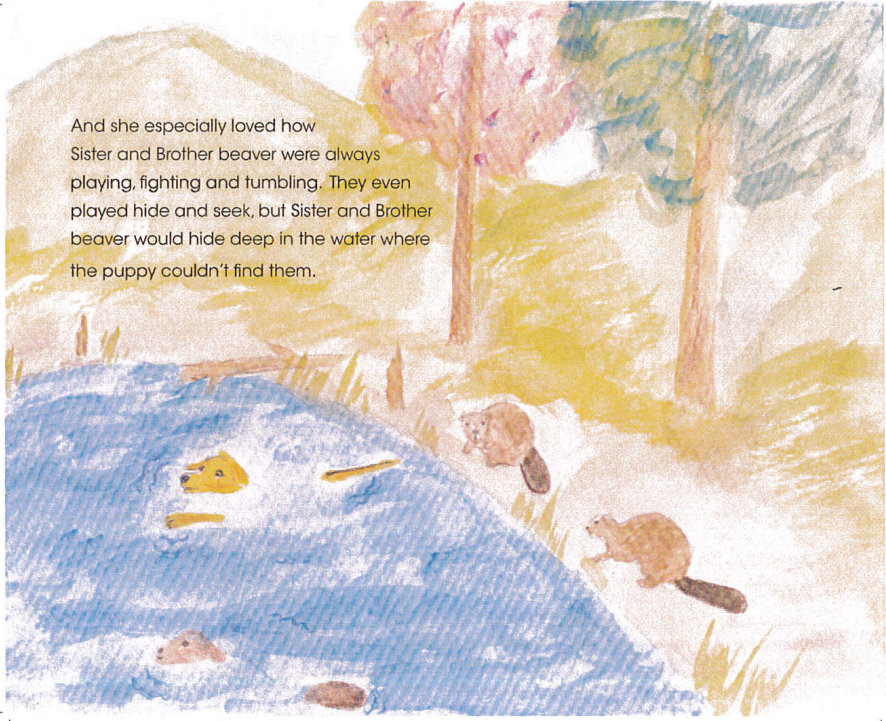


When she got to the clear, cool lake by the meadow she would jump into the water and play tag with her friends the Beavers. The puppy loved the Beaver family because they did everything together.

Mama beaver was always giving kisses and hugs and Papa beaver was always saying funny things like, "Holy Woodchuck!" and "I'll be splintered!"

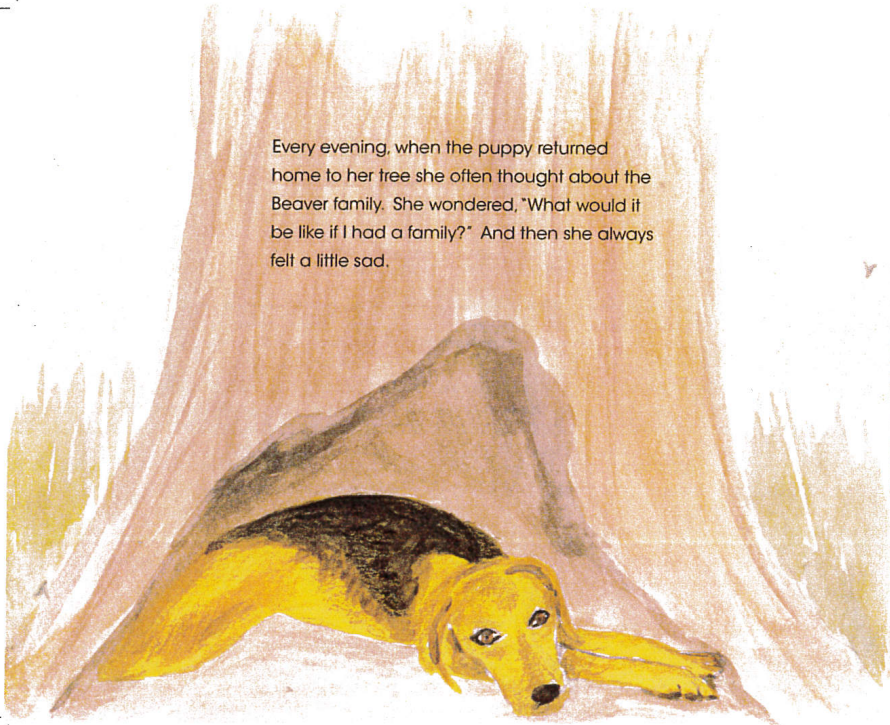
Left Page

And she especially loved how
Sister and Brother beaver were always
playing, fighting and tumbling. They even
played hide and seek, but Sister and Brother
beaver would hide deep in the water where
the puppy couldn't find them.



Right Page

Every evening, when the puppy returned home to her tree she often thought about the Beaver family. She wondered, "What would it be like if I had a family?" And then she always felt a little sad.



Left Page

One sunny day, as the puppy made her way up the mountain peak all the while keeping an eye out for her friend Porcupine, she heard voices just around the corner.

"Watch your step now!"

"Look at this rock!"

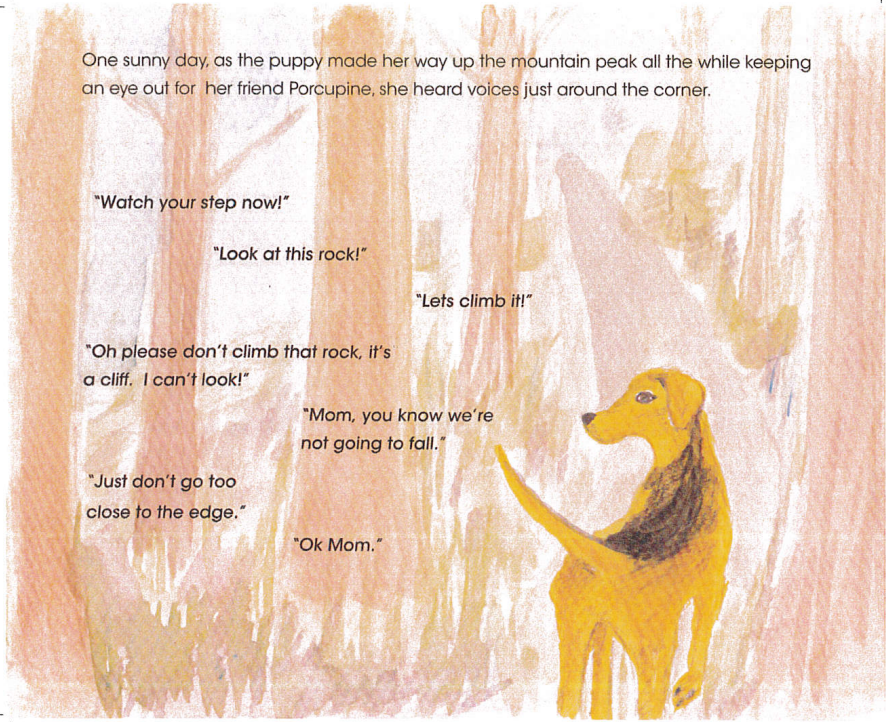
"Lets climb it!"

"Oh please don't climb that rock, it's a cliff. I can't look!"

"Mom, you know we're not going to fall."

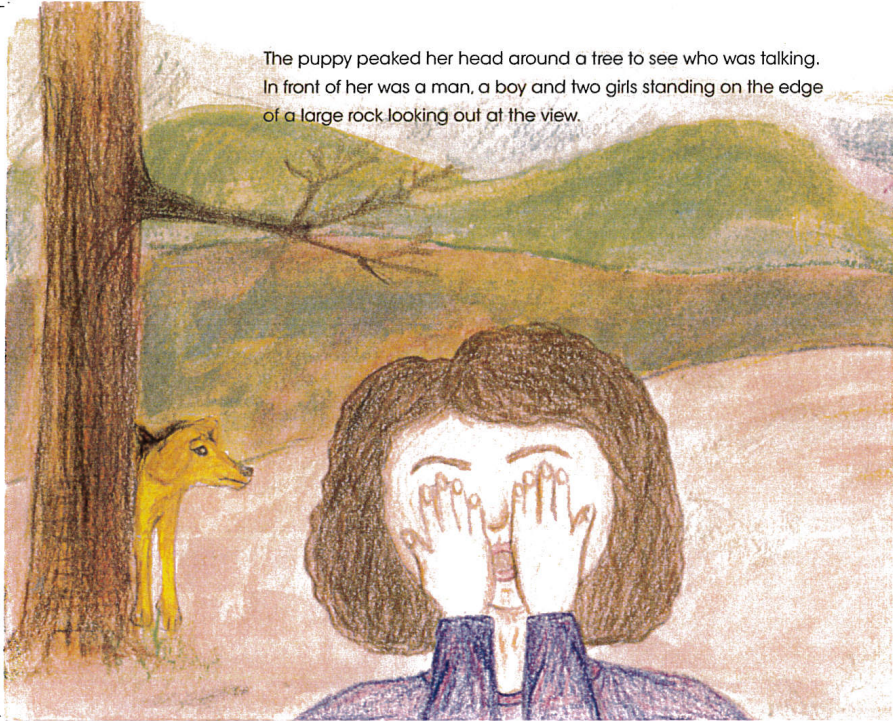
"Just don't go too close to the edge."

"Ok Mom."



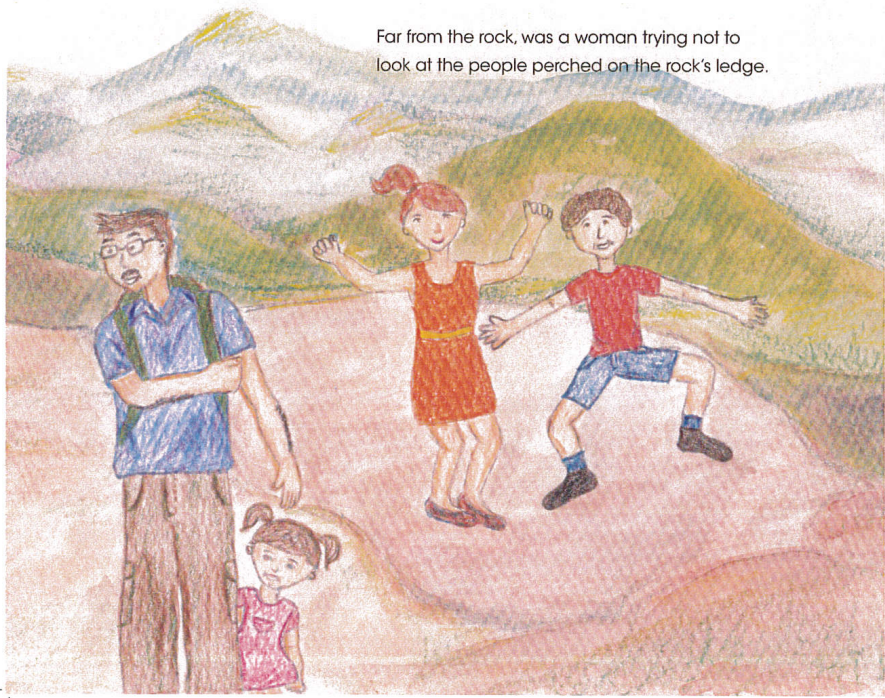
Right Page

The puppy peeked her head around a tree to see who was talking.
In front of her was a man, a boy and two girls standing on the edge
of a large rock looking out at the view.

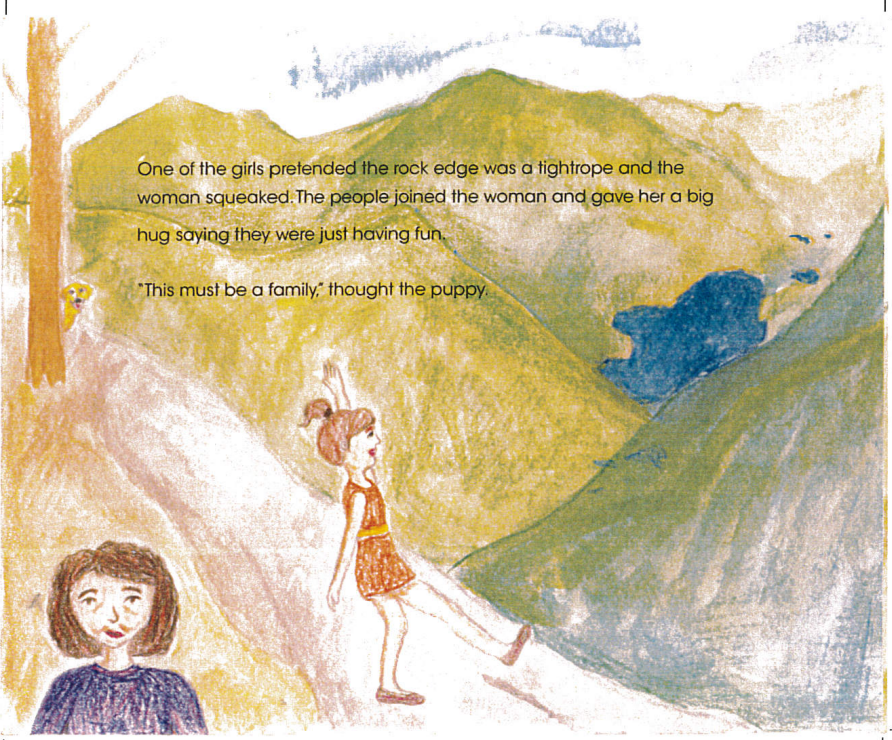


Left Page

Far from the rock, was a woman trying not to look at the people perched on the rock's ledge.



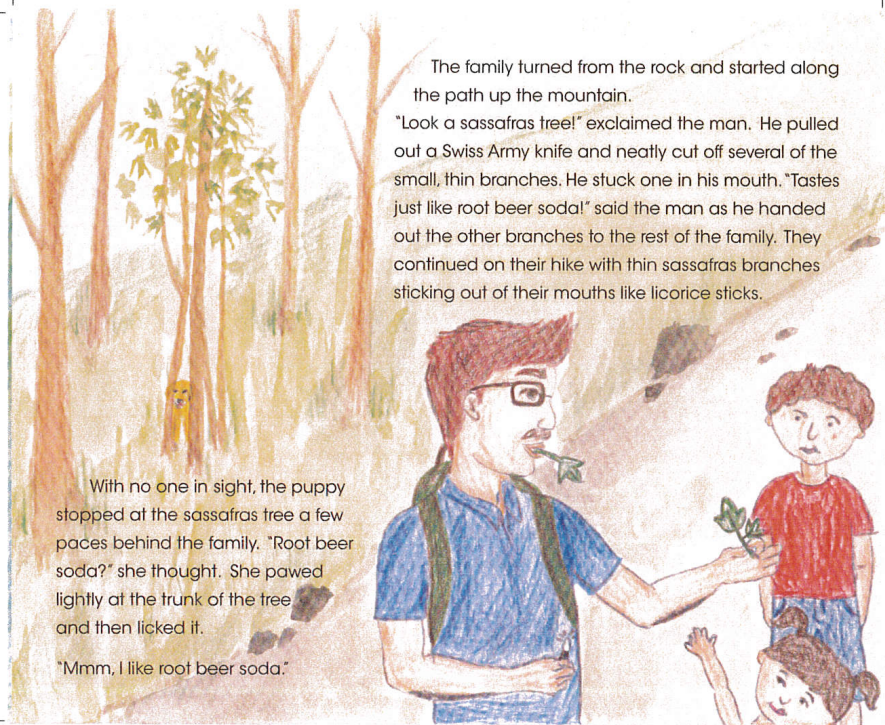
Right Page



One of the girls pretended the rock edge was a tightrope and the woman squeaked. The people joined the woman and gave her a big hug saying they were just having fun.

"This must be a family," thought the puppy.

Left Page



The family turned from the rock and started along the path up the mountain.

"Look a sassafras tree!" exclaimed the man. He pulled out a Swiss Army knife and neatly cut off several of the small, thin branches. He stuck one in his mouth. "Tastes just like root beer soda!" said the man as he handed out the other branches to the rest of the family. They continued on their hike with thin sassafras branches sticking out of their mouths like licorice sticks.

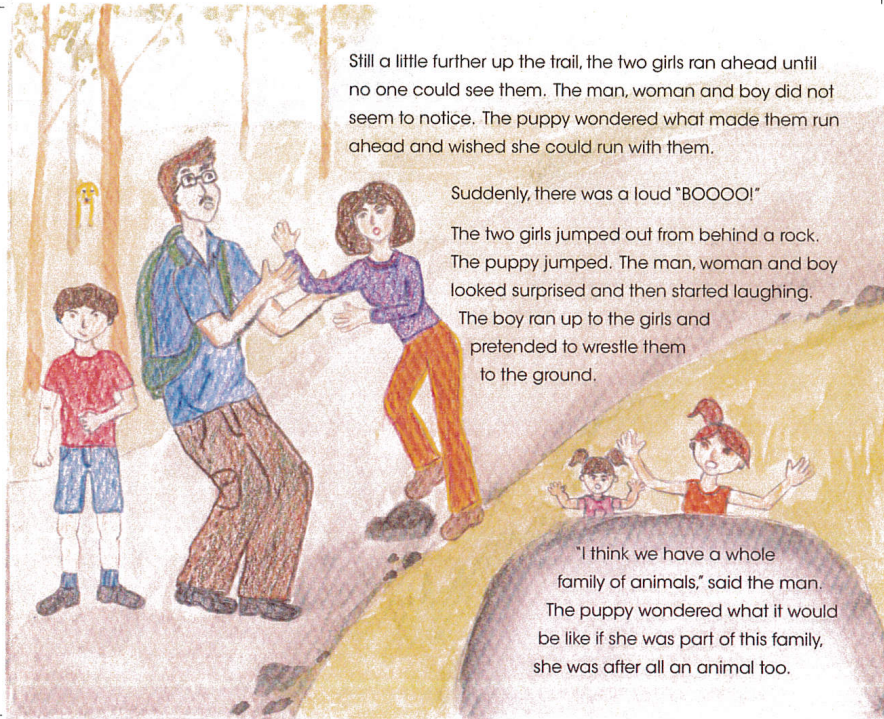
With no one in sight, the puppy stopped at the sassafras tree a few paces behind the family. "Root beer soda?" she thought. She pawed lightly at the trunk of the tree and then licked it.

"Mmm, I like root beer soda."



A little further up the trail, the boy suddenly ran ahead and then jumped like a monkey up to a high branch of a tree. He swung in the air back and forth. "Oooo, Oooo, Oooo!"

The whole family burst out laughing. "That's our monkey boy," said the woman smiling. The puppy watched and felt the same feeling she often got when she watched the Beaver family together.



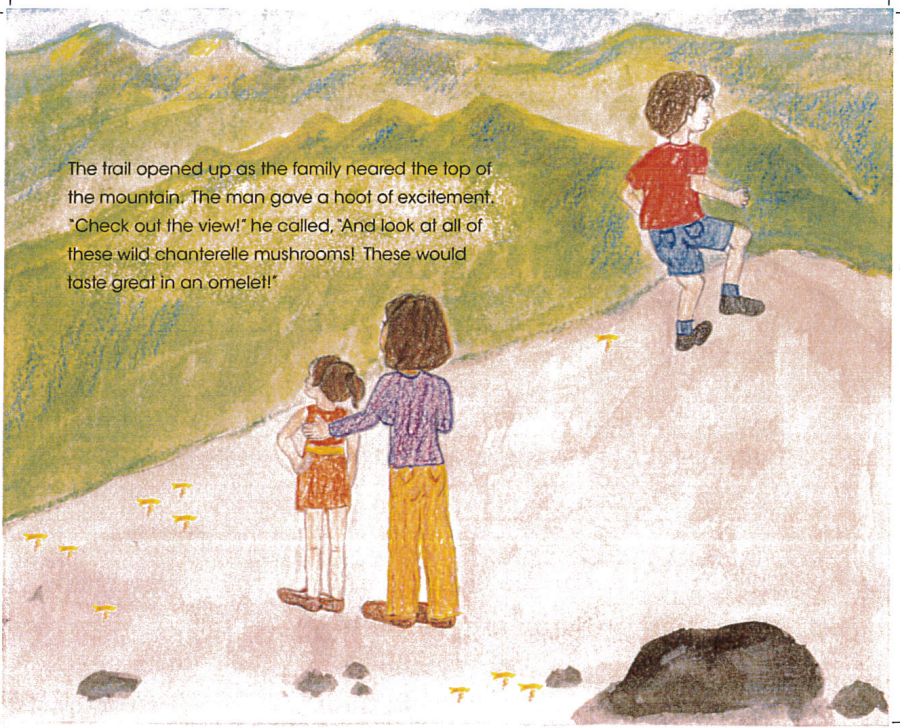
Still a little further up the trail, the two girls ran ahead until no one could see them. The man, woman and boy did not seem to notice. The puppy wondered what made them run ahead and wished she could run with them.

Suddenly, there was a loud "BOOOO!"

The two girls jumped out from behind a rock. The puppy jumped. The man, woman and boy looked surprised and then started laughing.

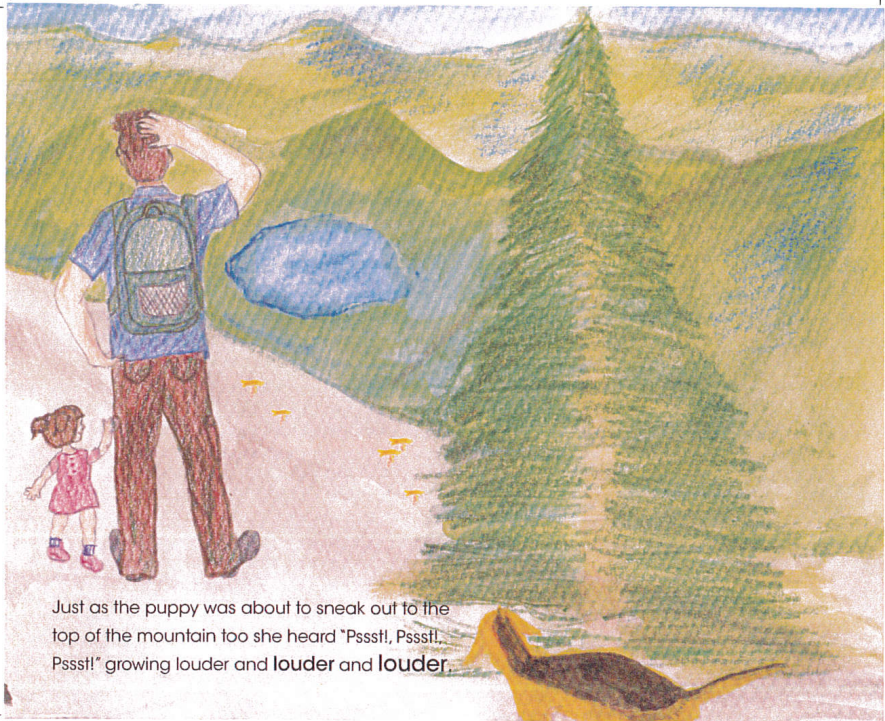
The boy ran up to the girls and pretended to wrestle them to the ground.

"I think we have a whole family of animals," said the man. The puppy wondered what it would be like if she was part of this family, she was after all an animal too.



The trail opened up as the family neared the top of the mountain. The man gave a hoot of excitement. "Check out the view!" he called. "And look at all of these wild chanterelle mushrooms! These would taste great in an omelet!"

Left Page



Just as the puppy was about to sneak out to the top of the mountain too she heard "Pssst!, Pssst!, Pssst!," growing louder and louder and louder.

Right Page

The puppy turned her head towards the noise. At first she did not see anything and then, just barely, she could make out the shape of Porcupine pressed up against the trunk of a large pine tree trying to make herself as small as possible and shaking.

"Hello Porcupine!" said the puppy happily.

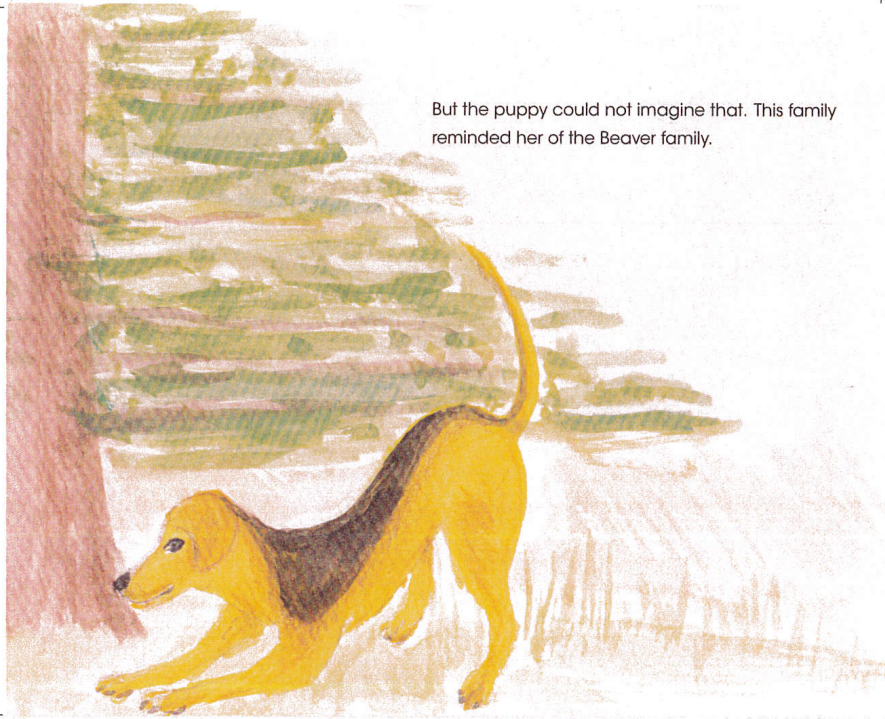
"Who are these creatures?" Porcupine shuddered, "Why are they in my home?"

"Creatures?" asked the puppy, "Why Porcupine, these people won't hurt you."

"I don't like them one bit," said Porcupine.

"I've seen people before and let me tell you, they don't like us one bit either."



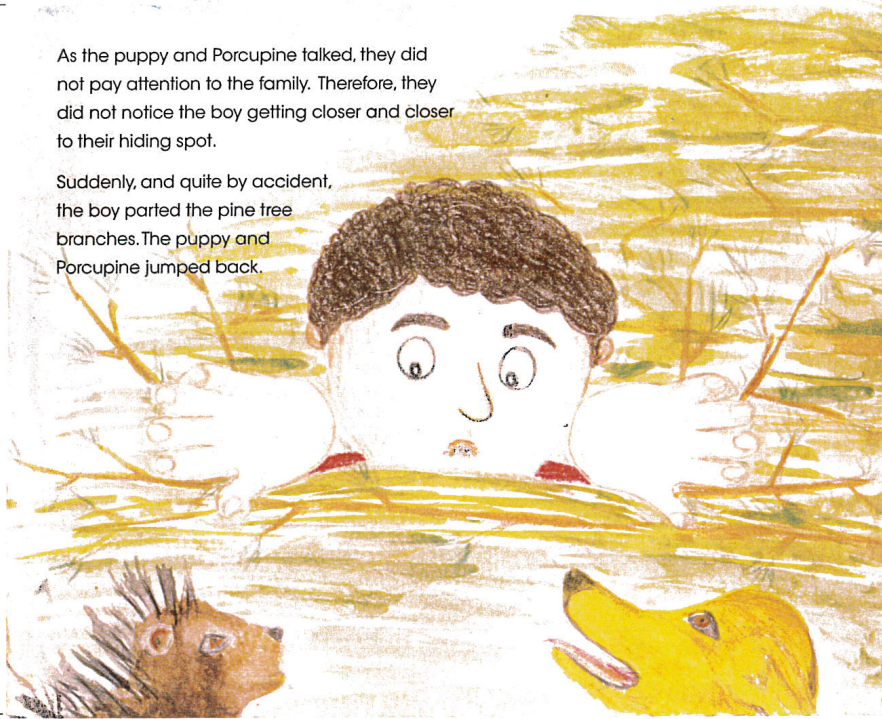


But the puppy could not imagine that. This family reminded her of the Beaver family.

Right Page

As the puppy and Porcupine talked, they did not pay attention to the family. Therefore, they did not notice the boy getting closer and closer to their hiding spot.

Suddenly, and quite by accident, the boy parted the pine tree branches. The puppy and Porcupine jumped back.



Left Page

Now if you know anything about porcupines you know that they have quills. You may also know that when a porcupine is scared it lifts its quills. And if you know that, you may also know that if the porcupine's quills touch the thing that scared it, those quills stick like cactus needles right into your skin.

This is what usually happens.

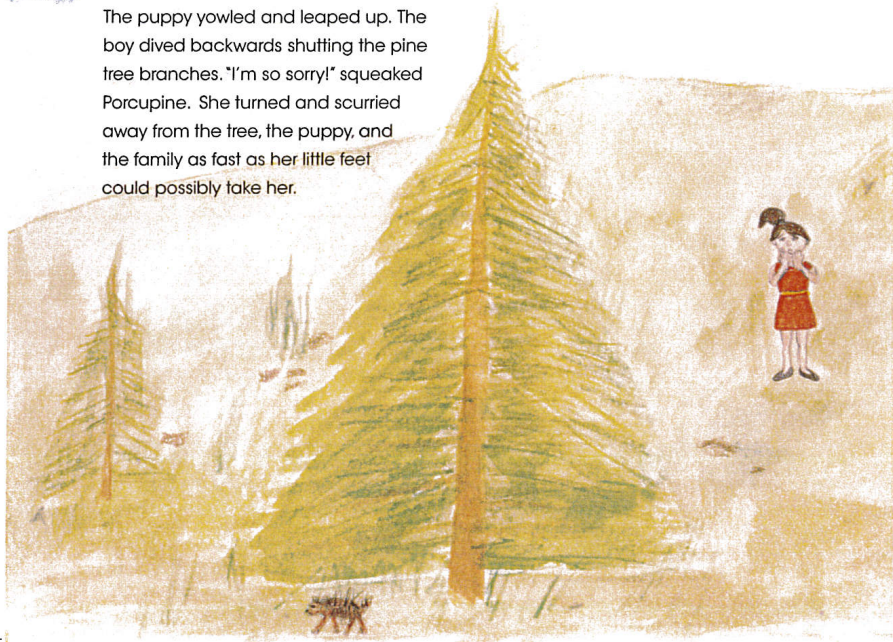
However, the boy was too far away and when Porcupine jumped back the puppy was the closest thing to Porcupine's prickly body.

Accidentally Porcupine quilled the puppy!



Right Page

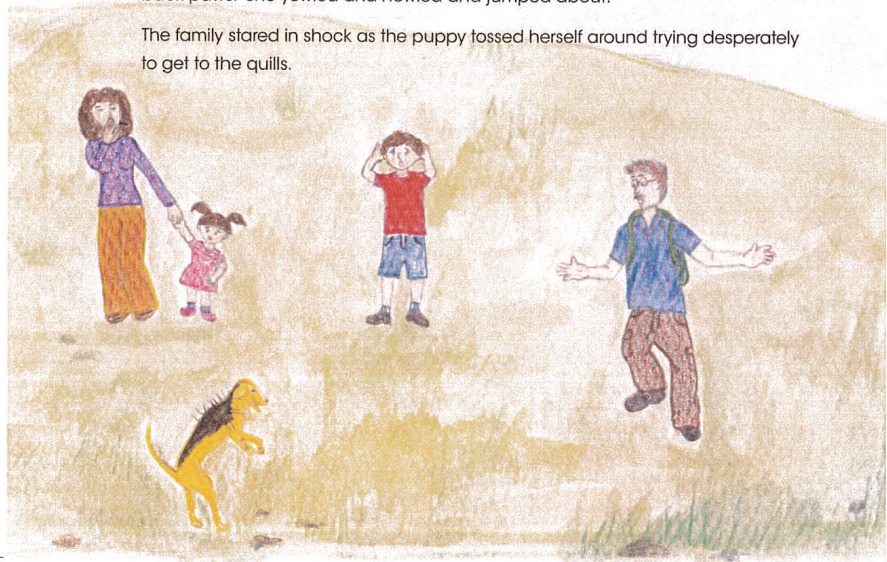
The puppy yowled and leaped up. The boy dived backwards shutting the pine tree branches. "I'm so sorry!" squeaked Porcupine. She turned and scurried away from the tree, the puppy, and the family as fast as her little feet could possibly take her.



Left Page

The puppy burst out from the pine tree like a fox with its tail on fire. The quills had landed on her neck and back so she was unable to reach them with her teeth or back paws. She yowled and howled and jumped about.

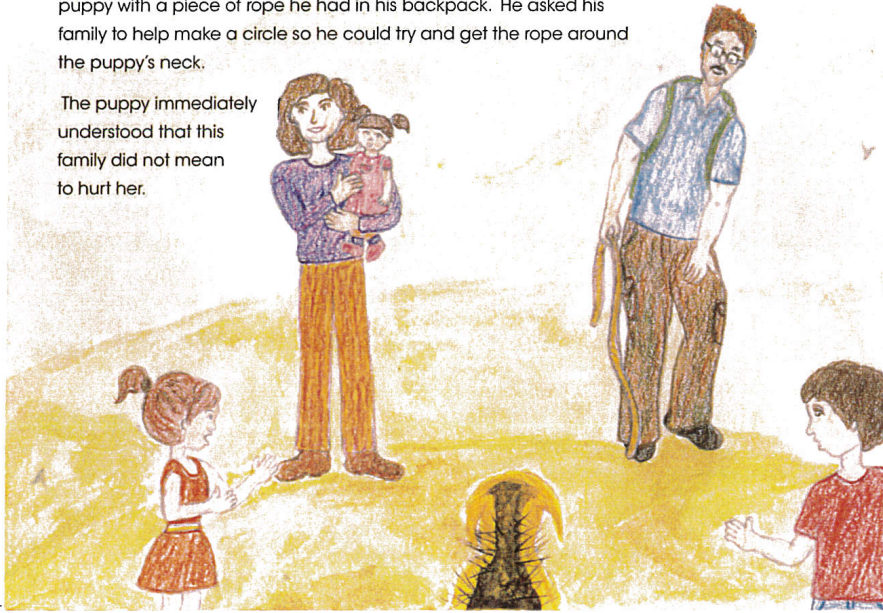
The family stared in shock as the puppy tossed herself around trying desperately to get to the quills.



Right Page

But the family only remained shocked for maybe a minute. Then they jumped into action. The man calmly and cautiously approached the puppy with a piece of rope he had in his backpack. He asked his family to help make a circle so he could try and get the rope around the puppy's neck.

The puppy immediately understood that this family did not mean to hurt her.



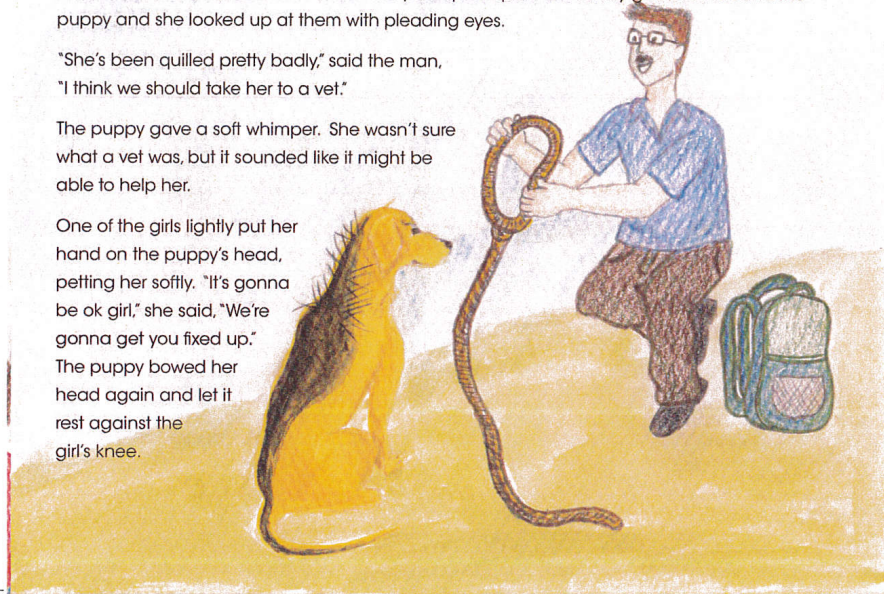
Left Page

The man eased up to the puppy. "Hello girl," he said softly. His eyes were kind and he gently put his hand on her head. The puppy bowed her head, allowing the man to slip the rope around her neck, careful not to knock the porcupine quills. The family gathered around the puppy and she looked up at them with pleading eyes.

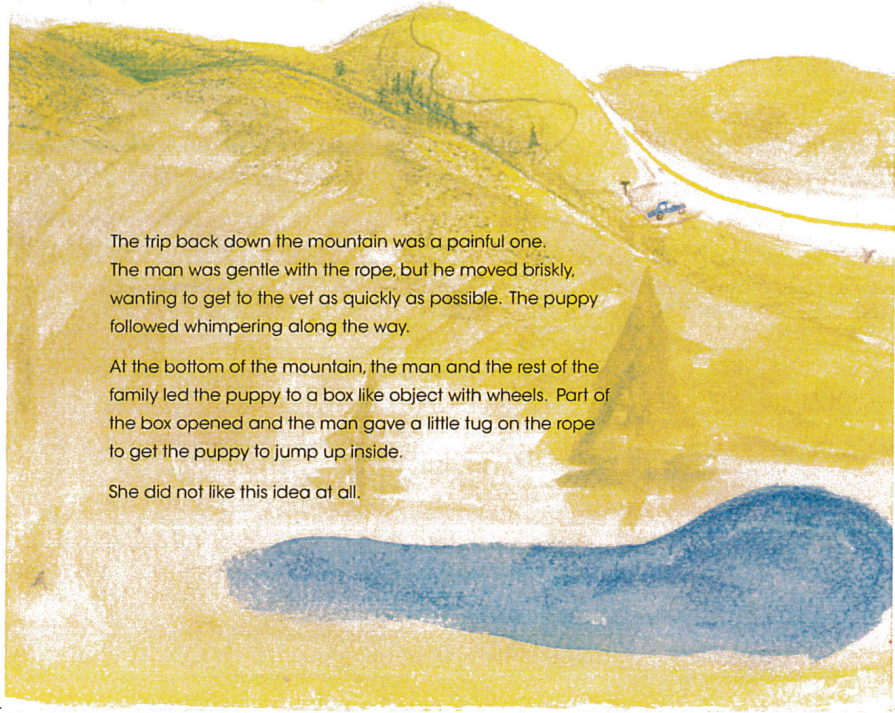
"She's been quilled pretty badly," said the man, "I think we should take her to a vet."

The puppy gave a soft whimper. She wasn't sure what a vet was, but it sounded like it might be able to help her.

One of the girls lightly put her hand on the puppy's head, petting her softly. "It's gonna be ok girl," she said, "We're gonna get you fixed up." The puppy bowed her head again and let it rest against the girl's knee.



Right Page



The trip back down the mountain was a painful one. The man was gentle with the rope, but he moved briskly, wanting to get to the veí as quickly as possible. The puppy followed whimpering along the way.

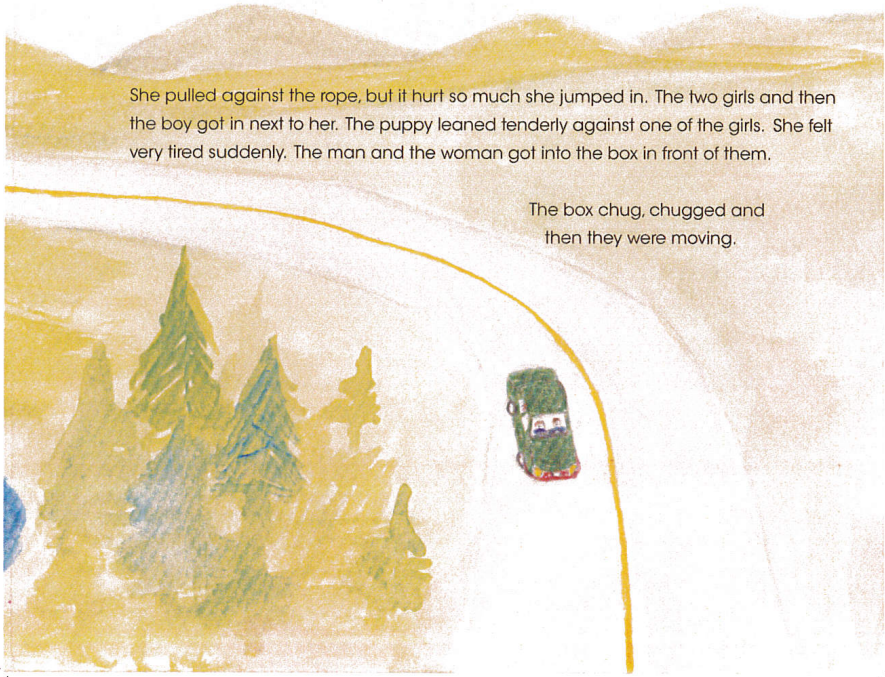
At the bottom of the mountain, the man and the rest of the family led the puppy to a box like object with wheels. Part of the box opened and the man gave a little tug on the rope to get the puppy to jump up inside.

She did not like this idea at all.

Left Page

She pulled against the rope, but it hurt so much she jumped in. The two girls and then the boy got in next to her. The puppy leaned tenderly against one of the girls. She felt very tired suddenly. The man and the woman got into the box in front of them.

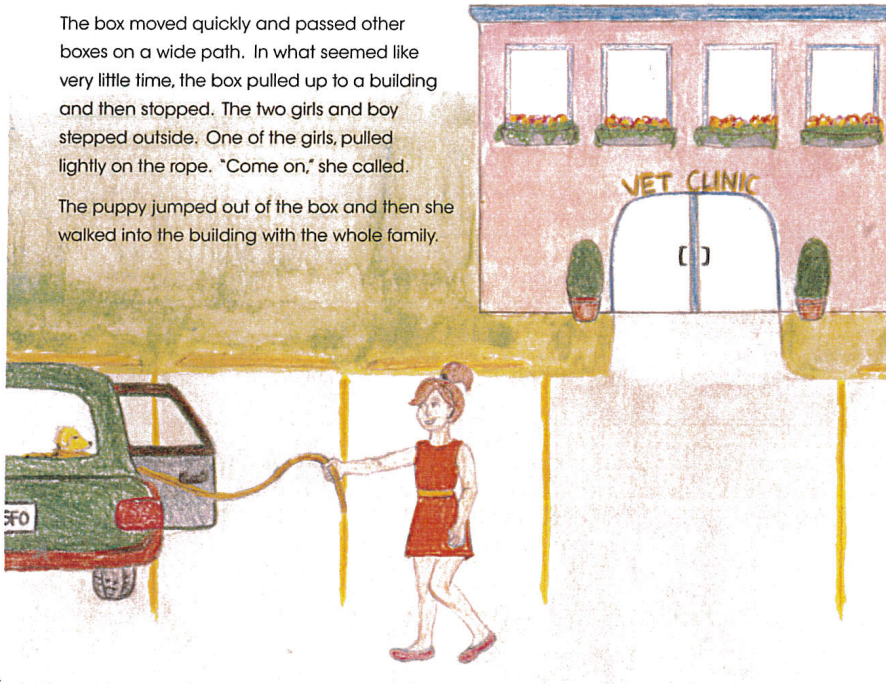
The box chug, chugged and then they were moving.

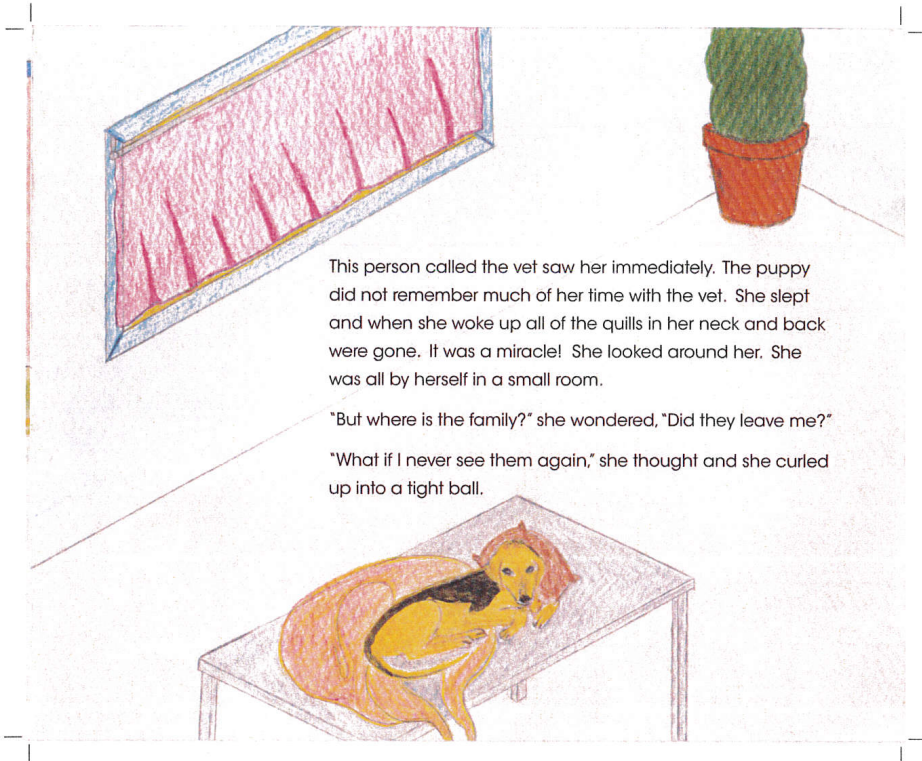


Right Page

The box moved quickly and passed other boxes on a wide path. In what seemed like very little time, the box pulled up to a building and then stopped. The two girls and boy stepped outside. One of the girls, pulled lightly on the rope. "Come on," she called.

The puppy jumped out of the box and then she walked into the building with the whole family.





This person called the vet saw her immediately. The puppy did not remember much of her time with the vet. She slept and when she woke up all of the quills in her neck and back were gone. It was a miracle! She looked around her. She was all by herself in a small room.

"But where is the family?" she wondered, "Did they leave me?"

"What if I never see them again," she thought and she curled up into a tight ball.

Right Page

At that moment, a door opened in the room and the vet walked up to her. The puppy gave a low growl.

"Come on," the vet coaxed.

"It's time for you to go home."

"Home?" thought the puppy, "To my maple tree?"

The puppy followed the vet unsure of what was to happen next.



Left Page

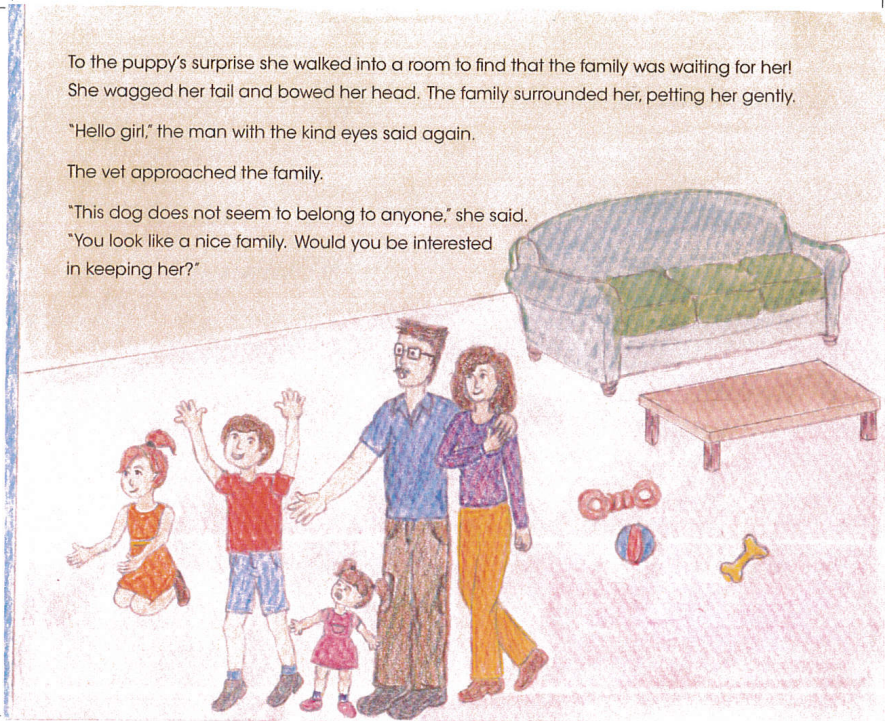
To the puppy's surprise she walked into a room to find that the family was waiting for her! She wagged her tail and bowed her head. The family surrounded her, petting her gently.

"Hello girl," the man with the kind eyes said again.

The vet approached the family,

"This dog does not seem to belong to anyone," she said.

"You look like a nice family. Would you be interested in keeping her?"



Right Page

The family looked at one another. "We have to keep her," said one of the girls. "Yes, yes, yes!" agreed the other girl and the boy, "She doesn't have a family."

The man and woman looked doubtful. "And who is going to take care of the dog?" they asked.

"We will!" cried the children. "We will feed her and take her for walks. We can do it!"

"Taking care of a dog is a big responsibility," said the man.

"Please!" the one girl repeated, "We promise that we will help take care of her".

"Yes, we promise! We have to keep her!" the other children pleaded.

The man and woman began to smile. "Ok, I agree," said the woman rubbing the puppy's ears and kissing her head. "Me too," said the man, "Should we name her Quills?"

"No!" cried the children.

"Well then how about Chanterelle?" suggested the man, "Her fur looks just like the yellow of the wild mushrooms in the woods."

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried the children.



Right Page

Chanterelle... the puppy liked the name. "Do I want a family?" she wondered. She thought of how she loved being with the Beaver family. She thought about Mama Beaver's hugs and kisses. She thought about how the family had helped her with the porcupine quills. And she thought about how it felt right now as one of the girls nuzzled into her fur.



Left Page

"Yes, I want this family," the puppy decided. She jumped up on the children licking their faces and wagging her tail. "I'll teach them to play hide and seek," she thought.

The father and mother looked at their son and daughters and Chanterelle and said, "Let's go home!"



Right Page



The Writing Process

I. Writing the story

When I was first given the assignment of writing a children's book I felt a little stuck. "What am I going to write about?" I thought. Claudia Lewis (1981), in *Writing for Young Children*, remarks that "whatever its form, whatever its content, a story begins with an emotion" (p. 101). Katherine Paterson (1981), a renowned children's author, refers to Goethe when speaking about ideas for stories: "The beginning and end of all literary activity is the reproduction of the world that surrounds me by means of the world that is in me..." (p. 173). A piece of advice from Sal Vascellaro, the professor of the children's literature course, was to write about what you know, that our own experiences can make the most powerful stories. I knew then that I wanted to write a story about Chanterelle.

At home I started making drawings in my sketchbook as I considered how I wanted to write Chanterelle's story. I considered her many adventures and which ones were my favorites to tell. I loved telling the story of the first time Chanterelle got quilled. I knew I would have to include this in the story. I also loved Chanterelle's relationship with the beavers behind my parent's house. It was one of her favorite activities to jump in the water and play chase while I stood on the embankment shouting at her to come back and terrified that the beavers would not find her game fun anymore and drown her. But perhaps they did like her game too. Finally, I thought about how my family obtained Chanterelle. That was always a great story to tell. Slowly, I pieced together in my head the elements of Chanterelle I wanted to write about. I knew I wanted the story to be from Chanterelle's point of

view. As an animal that always seemed to have a strong desire to communicate, I wanted to give her a voice. I also knew that I wanted Chanterelle to be independent but in search of a family and a home because the security of adult nurturing is critical to children. Children ages five through seven can relate to Chanterelle as they too seek independence but still need love and security from their home and family.

I wasn't ready for pictures just yet, but once I had an outline in my head of how I wanted to tell Chanterelle's story, my writing came quickly and furiously. It took me two days to write the story. As I typed, I made little notes in parentheses of the images that popped into my mind. I believe this was an important part of my writing process because certain images were so strong and seemed to fit the text perfectly. Rebecca Lukens (2007) notes that text and images should be a partnership on a page. She quotes Maurice Sendak who said that pictures and words "each tell two stories at the same time... Words are left out and the picture says it. Pictures are left out and the words say it" (p. 62). As I wrote I found that some of the pictures that came to my mind did not necessarily match the text but instead extended the text, making the story fuller and clearer, which corresponds with what Lukens and Sendak espouse.

II. Illustrating

With the text finished, I then turned my full attention to the illustrations. I decided to draw the pictures on thick sketching paper in pencil. I was not sure how I would combine the pictures with the text at that moment, but it felt more

important to draw and then consider the formatting later. Upon completing my first illustration I realized quickly how time consuming and difficult drawing is for a picture book. I was pleased with my rendition of Chanterelle but was having a hard time accepting the fact that I now needed to draw a similar picture of her for each page and in different modes of action. I made the decision then to keep my illustrations simple. I would include important details and single images that made clear the place and time of the story, but did not need to create elaborate and complex setting features.

Completing the illustrations took a long time in comparison with how quickly I wrote the story. In particular I struggled with drawing the family. The family in the story is a representation of my actual family therefore I wanted the children to look like young children and the parents a generic couple. However, the children looked more like teenagers or young adults (closer to the actual ages of my siblings and me) and the parents are clearly my parents, especially my dad. As the illustrating was already a time consuming project I decided to continue to draw the family as my fingers seemed to want to draw them. To expedite the process, if the text mentioned a specific family member I included only that person in the picture. It was particularly difficult to draw action, such as when the brother jumps up to swing from a tree branch and when the family circles around Chanterelle after she is quilled. Towards the end of the book I combined some pages that I had initially wanted to spread out because the story was beginning to seem too long. Furthermore, I was starting to feel unsure that I would be able to complete all of the illustrations in time for the due date in class. Upon completing the pictures though I

was pleased with my work. In particular, I felt that I had captured Chanterelle the exact way I wanted to on paper.

III. Formatting

The next step was to combine text with the illustrations. I had printed out the story from my computer and cut up the text in strips. Now I laid out the strips of text with the corresponding picture. To my dismay about half of the text filled up more space than I had anticipated and was going to cover some of the pictures. I felt stuck again. For some reason I did not consider that my text could go on one page and my illustrations on the other. It was not how I had imagined my book in my head and I had purposely left space on each illustration to include text. The formatting of a picture book is important. As the picture and text are a partnership on a page, each component should compliment the other. Virginia Lee Burton designed her books so that the text often follows the same movement of her illustrations. For example, in *The Little House* (1942) Burton's text follows the same rounded curvature of the hill the little house sits atop. In *Maybelle the Cable Car* (1952), the text mimics the same lines as Maybelle's cable route. By "marrying" the text and pictures this way, they become a complete and inextricable combination (Lukens, 2007). To keep my original idea intact I cut the strips further, sometimes to just individual words and pasted the text so that it fit into the picture. On some pages this allowed the text to enhance the pictures. Similar to Virginia Lee Burton, the text and illustrations moved with each other. On other pages, the text and illustrations felt crowded. Once I knew I would be working on my picture book as

part of my thesis, I recognized that formatting would be important element of the revision process. The first draft of the picture book was complete.

IV. Revising and Editing

The revising and editing of the story focused primarily on tightening the text. I elaborated on what was essential and deleted the extraneous material. For example, throughout the book I repeated the word, adventure: “Chanterelle would go on adventures; she was having a wonderful adventure today; she had liked being with this family on their adventure.” It became clear that I did not need to use the actual word “adventure” because by describing and elaborating upon Chanterelle’s actions it was evident that this is what she was doing. My thesis mentor encouraged me to make sure I allowed the text and pictures to “show, not tell.” The language also had to be sensorial and concrete. Lewis (1981) states, “concrete imagery gives life to language” (p. 30). Therefore, instead of using the word “adventure”, I revised the text so that I described Chanterelle’s adventures:

Then the puppy would hike a steep mountain peak and find her friend Porcupine. Usually Porcupine was hiding high in a tree and the puppy would have to find her before they could play her favorite game of hide and seek. The puppy was fast, which was helpful when she was doing the seeking. But Porcupine was a better hider, especially in trees.

In addition to using more concrete sensorial language, I also focused on the dialogue. At the end of the story, the family has a decision to make about whether or

not to keep Chanterelle. Originally, the family makes the decision immediately with little discussion or thought. This created insufficient tension or excitement for the conclusion of the book. By adding dialogue, the final moments of the story become animated and tension is built up to the very end. The children now plead with their parents to keep Chanterelle. "And who is going to take care of the dog?" asks the parents. "We will!" the children cry, "We will feed her and take her for walks. We can do it!" And the parents and children go back and forth for a bit before the parents agree to keep Chanterelle. A scenario such as this is engaging and tension building. Also, I thought the pleading for a pet might resonate with many children.

By tightening the text, the story became smoother but also more action packed. Instead of parts of the story getting tangled in extraneous words, the plot moved from one moment of action to another. The revising and editing never changed the essence of the story; instead it made images and characters more definable and engaging.

While tightening the text, the illustrations were being revised by my brother, Ben Brierre, and his girlfriend, Sidney Hoang. Both Ben and Sidney are artists and work in graphic design. Once I knew I would be improving upon my original story, I asked Ben and Sidney to help with the pictures because I felt they would bring the story to life visually. *Chanterelle Finds a Family* has a special significance for all members of my immediate family. Therefore, both Ben and Sidney were on board as illustrators. I created a storyboard so that Ben and Sidney would have an idea of what I pictured for each page of text. I gave them the storyboard and the revised text. They used both of these items to create illustrations that enhance the text

giving visible shape to the words (Lukens, 2007). Sidney's representation of the family shows emotion in the character's faces and movement in their bodies. Furthermore, the children in the family now resemble the ages of five, six and seven, which is the target age for the picture book. Ben focused primarily on the scenery, Chanterelle and the other animals. Now the environment of the story looks like a true Northeastern woodlands. Chanterelle, porcupine and the beaver family have transformed into more rugged animals that match their setting. Together, Ben and Sidney's illustrations create a coherent whole that works in partnership with the text.

The final step in the revising and editing process was to type the text into the newly illustrated pages. This was considerably easier the second time around because I was able to do all the formatting on the computer. Ben, Sidney and I worked together as a team to format the text so that it fits in with the pictures creating a cohesive page of words and illustrations. Maintaining the same goal I had when I originally wrote the picture book to "marry" the text and pictures, we formatted the words so that they flowed with the illustrations (Lukens, 2007). On pages where there is a lot of text we put all of the text on one page and the illustration on the facing page so that the words and pictures did not feel crowded. The revised version of the book was finished.

Creating a children's book opens your eyes to what constitutes quality children's literature. It has certainly enabled me to look more critically and be more discriminating when selecting books for children. Now I am alert to and seek out concrete sensorial language, the partnerships between text and images, and the use

of dialogue to develop the action in the story. Most importantly, I look at the appropriateness of the text. Would children of a particular age range relate to this story is often a question I find myself asking. The process of creating a children's book asks the author and illustrator to think deeply about this.

Developmental Appeal

Much goes into choosing an interesting and engaging children's book to share with one's class. As a lover of children's literature, the scale by which I judged a good book was that it had been read to me as a child and I remembered it fondly and vividly. While remembered books are a way to choose children's literature, it is critical to think about the developmental appropriateness of the book. Joanne Oppenheim (1986) asks adults to stop and think before rushing home with a rediscovered treasure: "Do you remember when it was that you enjoyed that book? Were you four, or six, or seven" (p. 10)? By not considering the developmental appeal of a children's book, the powerful message and elaborate illustrations may be wasted.

When I began writing *Chanterelle Finds a Family* I did not think about the target age group to whom I wanted to read the book. I wrote first and then reflected on the themes that emerged from the story. From there I decided what age group might most enjoy the book. Using a developmental perspective, I then began the editing and revising process. *Chanterelle Finds a Family* is a book for early primary children (ages five through seven). One reason it resonates with this age group is the major themes: that children have a drive for independence and at the same time a need for safety and security through adult nurturing; that peer relationships take on a new importance as they offer camaraderie and a way to identify with a group; and that children have a natural desire to extend their environment beyond home and family. *Chanterelle Finds a Family* is also appealing to this age group because of how the book was crafted. The kind of language used, the type of plot, and the

nature of the main character are developmentally engaging to children ages five through seven.

I. Themes

*Children have a drive for independence and at the same time
a need for safety and security through adult nurturing*

The child between five and seven is experiencing many feelings about their growing independence. The five year old is now in Kindergarten and going to school every day for the whole day. Cohen (1972) remarks, “to children, five is power and strength, to be tested and expressed with as full measure of autonomy as they dare take” (p. 50). Six and seven year olds are realizing how many things they are capable of doing and longing to do those things on their own. “The growth taking place in children at six and seven impels them toward a strong declaration of individuality and a separate psychological existence while they are still children in their parent’s home” states Cohen (p. 120). It is a transitional time in a child’s life that can be fraught with internal conflict. Anna Dalnes (2006) comments, “On the one hand children at this age want to experience their newfound autonomy, and on the other they want the safety of their parent’s care” (p. 26). Chanterelle embodies some of this conflict. She has the independence young children crave, yet needs and is given the security of nurturing adults.

Chanterelle Finds a Family begins with Chanterelle on her own. She lives by herself, finds her own food and plays. She is content with her life. Oppenheim (1986) notes that books appropriate for sixes and sevens almost always have the adventure begin “with parents left behind or offstage” (p. 145). In *Chanterelle Finds*

a Family the story explicitly states that Chanterelle is a puppy that believes that she does “not need help from anybody.” Immediately the character of Chanterelle connects with the young child’s growing desire to have autonomy. She gives children an outlet to imagine what they *could* do if they were on their own.

While Chanterelle is happy being autonomous, she craves companionship. She regularly visits her friends Porcupine and the Beaver family. It is through these friendships that Chanterelle wonders what it would be like to have a family. Like five to seven year old children, Chanterelle desires both her independence and the security of being cared for, but does not know exactly how to reconcile those feelings. However, children of this age range tend to seek greater independence from adult nurturing, while Chanterelle, having her independence, is looking for adult nurturing.

The search for family and a home is a significant issue for Chanterelle because it is something she lacks. As Chanterelle spends time with the Beaver family she sees how a family interacts. She knows from these observations that a family is something she desires. When Chanterelle encounters the family hiking she sees another kind of family dynamic. The warm feelings she experiences are similar to the ones she feels for the Beaver family. There are many aspects of adult nurturing that are presented to Chanterelle and all of them confirm her desire to be a part of a family. Cohen (1972) notes that young children have a desire to try out independence, “to test and build their competency” (p. 123). But even as children grow older the “home and family continue to provide the firm anchor kids depend upon” (Oppenheim, 1986, p. 148). Early primary children tend to identify with this

need by feeling satisfaction when Chanterelle agrees to be a part of the family and accepts the safety and security of adult nurturing.

*Peer relationships take on a new importance
as they offer camaraderie and a way to identify with a group*

Chanterelle provides an example of strong peer relationships because she is dependent on her friends for play and to feel connected with others. Young children can identify with Chanterelle's need for companionship. For five year olds there is a true hunger for friendship (Cohen, 1972). New to the territory, they feel the need to play with other children, but may have reservations of how to go about approaching their peers (Cohen, 1972). On the other hand, children between the ages of six and seven are "developing a new kind of dependence on their peers" (Oppenheim, 1986, p. 141). By this age, children are among their peers daily, "beginning to identify with groups of their own making" and understanding how those groups function (Cohen, 1972). Chanterelle demonstrates this competency for navigating friendships successfully. She visits her friends Porcupine and the Beaver family daily and engages in playful activities with them both.

Chanterelle also shows an aptitude for making new friendships. Her encounter with the family hiking peaks her interest, therefore she follows quietly so she can observe their behavior. What she sees aligns with her idea of fun, play and feeling connected. By the end of the book, Chanterelle has made friends with the children of the family. She identifies them as peers when she thinks about teaching the children to play hide and seek. It is this kind of peer relationship that early primary children wish to develop.

*Children have a natural desire to
extend their environment beyond home and family*

Lucy Sprague Mitchell (1934) remarks that between the ages of five and seven children have most likely “mastered the relationships in their immediate home environment sufficiently to widen their explorations” (p. 13). However, children need assistance to carry out these investigations because they are not yet mature enough and experienced enough. Literature is one way to support children’s natural desire to explore their immediate and extended environment. Stories allow children to vicariously experience new environments and new relationships from a safe space. Oppenheim (1986) comments, “For fives, books that reflect their own journeys out into the big world are very satisfying, especially when all ends happily ever after” (p. 109). For sixes and sevens, stories become more of a vehicle for understanding independence from home and family. “Each day is a kind of adventure out into the bigger world with friendly (and not-so-friendly) people” and books help children better comprehend these relationships and interactions (Oppenheim, 1986, p. 143). *Chanterelle Finds a Family* offers many vicarious experiences for children, from journeying through a new environment, to experiencing new relationships.

Chanterelle’s life in the Northeastern woodlands is a place that may be unfamiliar to some children. Oppenheim (1986) comments that while books cannot replace excursions, they can expand children’s “experiences and give them an unhurried close-up view of many fascinating things they have seen along the way” (p. 111). Throughout *Chanterelle Finds a Family* detailed language is used so that children may better experience some of the Northeastern woodland’s environment.

Specific characteristics of the Northeast are referenced in the story. Chanterelle lives in a burrow at the base of a maple tree and she likes to snack on wild chanterelle mushrooms that grow in the forest. Her friends, Porcupine and the Beaver family, are animals native to the region, and it is beneath a pine tree that the boy discovers Chanterelle with Porcupine. The illustrations work hand-in-hand with the text to ground it in a sense of place, convey the playfulness of the story and, perhaps most importantly, convey the emotion expressed in the story. My hope is that by providing concrete images through text and pictures *Chanterelle Finds a Family* is a journey children will find both interesting and enjoyable.

In addition to the physical journey, there is also the social and emotional journey. The world of peer relationships is a new and tenuous road for the five to seven year old, but also one that becomes increasingly important (Oppenheim, 1986). Chanterelle's movement outward leads to new relationships. Oppenheim (1986) discusses how a picture book offers children an opportunity to "step outside themselves and into someone else's shoes for a while" (p. 143). Chanterelle allows young children to experience what it may be like if they were truly autonomous. Chanterelle is a "child in fur" on her own, fending for herself, seeking adventure and forming relationships (Oppenheim, 1986, p. 110). It is an opportunity for young children to safely identify with independence from home and family, and engage with a bigger world of different people and places.

II. Language, plot and main character

Early primary children learn best about their world through first hand experience (Casper & Theilheimer, 2010). Literature that speaks to children in this age group uses concrete, sensorial language. While I was revising and editing *Chanterelle Finds a Family*, ensuring that this kind of language permeated the story was key. Lewis (1981) emphasizes that children in particular depend upon concrete imagery “to help them translate word into meaning” (p. 30). A critical moment in *Chanterelle Finds a Family* is when Porcupine quills Chanterelle. The use of language here conveys the action, and what it may feel like to be quilled so that the word has meaning:

Now if you know anything about porcupines you know that they have quills. You may also know that when a porcupine is scared it lifts its quills. And if you know that, you may also know that if the porcupine’s quills touch the thing that scared it, those quills stick like cactus needles right into your skin.

Concrete language is used to convey feelings, ideas and action. To further stress how Chanterelle felt after being quilled the language concentrated on action words and similes: “The puppy burst out from the pine tree like a fox with its tail on fire.... She yowled and howled and jumped about”. Farther along in the story, to describe how Chanterelle felt after she saw the vet and wonders if she will ever see the family again, imagery is used: “she curled up into a tight ball”. Throughout the book, I focused on concrete imagery to give life to the story.

Dorothy Cohen and Marguerita Rudolph (1984) remind us “all good children’s stories have an orderly arrangement of content, a satisfying pattern and an intriguing plot” (p. 253). The order and movement of the plot is essential for understanding and enjoyment for children of these ages. Furthermore, children of this age range greatly enjoy a story of adventure (Lewis, 1981). In *Chanterelle Finds a Family* the plot is simple and moves quickly from action to action. From the beginning, the reader is on one adventure after another with Chanterelle. There is an element of repetition in the plot. Chanterelle’s early adventures are similar to the adventures she has later in the story with the family she follows. Chanterelle and the family are joined together by the fateful experience with Porcupine and the plot continues to move rapidly as the family then helps Chanterelle and ultimately has to make the decision of whether to adopt her. A story, built upon the accumulation of suspenseful elements and moving rapidly to a resolution, is both appealing and comprehensible for the young child (Lewis, 1981).

The resolution in the plot is important to children age’s five to seven. This is still the age that a happily ever after is an important conclusion (Oppenheim, 1986). At the end of *Chanterelle Finds a Family* there is one final moment of tension as the family debates whether they should keep Chanterelle as their pet. This moment is drawn out to build suspense so that when Chanterelle decides she wants a family and the family decides they want her there are genuine feelings of happiness.

Young children feel a strong affinity to animals. Animals in literature are most frequently not characterized by gender, race or ethnicity and therefore easy to identify with and more universally appealing (Oppenheim, 1986). Furthermore, the

behavior of many animals often resonates with children. Chanterelle is an animal that could easily be a five to seven year old. She is playful, curious and capable within her abilities. Children will identify with her desire to play, and to strike out on adventures outside of her home. They will understand her curiosity when she finds the family and decides to follow. And children will identify with her need for care when she is no longer able to help herself. Although Chanterelle is a dog, she has many human-like qualities. Early primary children thoroughly enjoy this kind of animal fantasy. This can be seen in the popularity of such books as *Charlotte's Web* (1952), *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928), *Stuart Little* (1945) and untold others.

In addition to being a relatable character, it is important to look at Chanterelle as a companion animal. There are qualities to Chanterelle that are appealing because she is a dog. Companion animals are particularly engaging to young children because these animals are soft to pet, give precedence to play and fun, and demonstrate complete loyalty, patience and love (Renck, Jalongo & Brewster, 2004). Many of these qualities are part of Chanterelle's character. There are numerous references to family members petting Chanterelle "gently", rubbing her ears and "nuzzling" into her fur. Chanterelle's playful nature is clearly depicted in her hide and seek games with Porcupine and the Beaver family, as well as her following the family to observe their fun on the hiking trail. Finally, Chanterelle puts complete trust in the family to take care of her when she is quilled, demonstrating loyalty and patience. She is at once a pet and a friend.

Children's Literature Analysis

A story's theme is what makes it timeless. The themes that emerged in *Chanterelle Finds a Family* have similarities and differences with those in other books for children. The main themes in *Chanterelle Finds a Family* are: children have a drive for independence and at the same time a need for safety and security through adult nurturing; peer relationships take on a new importance as they offer camaraderie and a way to identify with a group; and children have a natural desire to extend their environment beyond home and family.

*Children have a drive for independence and at the same time
a need for safety and security through adult nurturing*

Along with her independence, one of Chanterelle's defining features is her need for adult nurturing, especially when she is vulnerable. Once Chanterelle is hurt she trusts and is drawn to the family to help her. Young children depend on their adults, even as they struggle for autonomy. *Blueberries for Sal* (1948) by Robert McCloskey demonstrates this drive for independence while at the same time needing (and expecting) adult care. Both Sal and Little Bear strike off on their own to eat blueberries. They are content with their independence because they know their mothers are nearby. Therefore, it is a true surprise when Sal finds herself with Little Bear's mother, and Little Bear finds himself with Sal's mother. Sal and Little Bear are never helpless, nor do they doubt the safety and security provided by their mothers. They remain on their own, eating blueberries, until their mothers' find them. *Blueberries for Sal* and *Chanterelle Finds a Family* both explore the dynamic

between independence and adult nurturing, emphasizing the fact that when something is wrong an adult will make the situation better.

Similarly, in *Harry the Dirty Dog* (1956) by Gene Zion there is the notion that adult care is essential. Harry's drive for independence lies in his desire to remain dirty when his family wants him to take a bath. Determined to do what he wants, Harry hides his scrubbing brush and goes off on his own. He becomes so dirty on his adventures he changes from a white dog with black spots, to a black dog with white spots. Eventually, Harry is ready to return home. He is tired and hungry and he needs adult nurturing to fulfill those needs. But he is so dirty his own family does not recognize him. Harry has to prove he is the family dog before he is cared for. Harry is different from Chanterelle in that his drive for independence is spurred by his desire not to take a bath. However, once Harry is in need of basic resources like food and a place to sleep, he seeks out the safety and security of adult nurturing. In this way, Harry and Chanterelle are alike. They both need the care of adults to do the things they cannot yet do on their own.

In *The Story About Ping* (1933) by Marjorie Flack and Kurt Wiese, Ping is literally driven away from the adult care he depends upon to escape a spanking from the Master of his boat. Once on his own, he finds himself on various adventures. One adventure leads to his capture by a boat boy and his family. Ping is going to be dinner that evening, however, the kind boy releases him. On his own again, Ping finds his boat. This time, he takes the spanking by the Master and is reunited with his family. Unlike Chanterelle, Ping's drive for independence is motivated. His gained autonomy is a result of escaping punishment, which in itself

is a statement of independence. Once he is on his own he feels the similar need for adult nurturing that Chanterelle feels. Especially in the situation where Ping is rendered helpless, as Chanterelle was helpless when she was quilled, both characters demonstrate a strong desire for the safety and security provided by adult nurturing.

The story of *Little Bear* (1957) by Else Holmelund Minarik provides an interesting comparison, because Little Bear never goes too far from home. Similar to Sal and Ping, Little Bear knows he needs adult nurturing and therefore his drive for independence never takes him far from his mother's care. In the chapter "Little Bear Goes To The Moon," Little Bear ventures outside to try and fly to the moon. He climbs a little tree on top of a little hill and then jumps. When he lands on the ground, he pretends he has landed on the moon. As he explores his surroundings he notes the similarities between the Earth and the moon. He does this all the way back to his home and mother. When Mother Bear tries to play along, Little Bear says, "Mother Bear, stop fooling. You are my Mother Bear and I am your Little Bear and we are on Earth, and you know it" (p. 48). Little Bear's drive for independence takes him on small adventures in his immediate environment, but they always end back in the care of his mother. Little Bear differs from Chanterelle in this way.

Madeline (1939) by Ludwig Bemelmans demonstrates a child's drive for independence beyond the adult care she receives. Madeline is identified as "the smallest one," but she is also the one who is not afraid of mice, who stands bravely in front of the tiger at the zoo, and enjoys frightening her caregiver, Miss Clavel, by performing daredevil tricks like walking on the railing of a bridge. Similar to

Chanterelle, Madeline enjoys adventures of her own making. However, Madeline always has adult nurturing to fall back upon. When Madeline is in situations where she cannot care for herself, such as when she needs her appendix removed, her wish for adult care is immediately filled. By the end of *Chanterelle Finds a Family*, Chanterelle is very much like Madeline. Chanterelle is adopted so she now has the adult nurturing she needs and can depend on, but she also maintains her independence within the family. The family chooses to keep Chanterelle and Chanterelle chooses to stay.

*Peer relationships take on a new importance
as they offer camaraderie and a way to identify with a group*

It seems that peer relationships in children's literature ultimately demonstrate the power of trust. Chanterelle's friendships are based upon similar interests and attributes. She is a friend to Porcupine and the Beaver family because they like to play the same games. They are also animals that live in the same forest. Because of these commonalities Chanterelle feels safe and secure and she trusts her friendships. *Amos and Boris* (1971) by William Steig emphasize the idea of friendships formed on similarities as well. When Amos, a mouse, and Boris, a whale, first meet one another they establish that they are both mammals. Amos is stranded in the ocean and helpless, but this knowledge of a common bond makes them fast friends and Amos trusts Boris to take him safely home to shore. Although Amos and Boris are very different mammals they enjoy each other's company and admire each other's experiences on land and in the water. They develop a trust in one another through the shared experience of traveling together in the ocean. Chanterelle uses

her knowledge of friendship with Porcupine and the Beaver family to dictate her feelings about the family she finds in the woods. Similarly to Amos, when Chanterelle ends up in a situation where she cannot help herself, she is able to trust this new relationship with the family and know that they will help her.

Another children's book that emphasizes trust in peer relationships is *Fish is Fish* (1970) by Leo Lionni. This also is a friendship between two very different animals. However, in this story the differences in the animals are emphasized. The tadpole that grows into a frog is able to move about the land, but the minnow that grows into a fish must stay below the water. As a tadpole and minnow the two friends were inseparable because they both lived in the water. As a frog and fish they lead different lives. These differences are forgotten when the fish tries to go on land. Helpless and fighting for air, the frog is nearby to save his friend. Although they no longer live in the same place, nor see each other regularly, they have a bond that is unbreakable because of their shared experiences as a tadpole and minnow. Chanterelle's peer relationships with Porcupine and the Beaver family enable her to begin a similar bond with the family. She trusts the family because they remind her of the Beaver family. Furthermore, the family helps her when she is accidentally quilled. That shared experience becomes the catalyst for Chanterelle's eventual adoption.

The main theme of *Frog and Toad are Friends* (1970) by Arnold Lobel is the importance of a trusting and reliable friendship. Frog and Toad depend on one another for play, advice and care. They spend everyday with each other and in this way support one another when they are happy or sad, playing or fighting. Similarly,

Chanterelle's friendship with Porcupine and the Beaver family grows out of being together daily. They share similar interests and shared experiences. An important aspect of Frog and Toad's relationship is that it is not always perfect, which often is true of friendships. In the chapter, "The Swim", Toad is self-conscious of his bathing suit and does not want Frog to look at him until he gets into the water. However, once in the water a number of other animals gather around the river. Toad asks Frog to get the other animals to leave but they will not. Eventually, Toad has to get out of the river in front of Frog and all of the other animals. Everyone laughs at Toad in his funny bathing suit, even Frog. Chanterelle and Porcupine have a comparable, although more serious, experience in their friendship. Porcupine does not want to intentionally hurt Chanterelle, however when the boy scares Porcupine, her natural instinct is unavoidable and she accidentally quills Chanterelle. Neither Frog's laughing at Toad nor Porcupine's quilling of Chanterelle damage their friendships because both sets of friends trust one another and know that they would never intentionally hurt each other.

Similarly, *Hey, Al* (1986) by Arthur Yorinks portrays a long-term friendship that endures ups and downs. Al, a custodian, and his dog, Eddie live together in New York City. Like Frog and Toad, Al and Eddie do everything together. But life isn't easy for them, "they were always working, always struggling" (p. 4). Everything changes when Al and Eddie embark on an adventure together to an island in the sky. The island is populated by all kinds of tropical birds. Life on the island is paradise and Al and Eddie begin to believe they have found heaven. Until, one morning Al and Eddie discover they are starting to turn into birds themselves! With their new

wings they manage to flap their way back to New York City. Al and Eddie learn that paradise isn't always what it seems and that it doesn't matter what struggles they face as long as they face them together. *Hey, Al* differs from *Chanterelle Finds a Family*, in that Al and Eddie are friends who are always together, and they embark and conclude an adventure together from start to finish. Chanterelle has adventures and plays with her friends Porcupine and the Beaver family every day. They are a part of her daily routine and she trusts and cares for her friends. But those friendships shift when she is quilled and taken to the vet by the family. Chanterelle then begins new peer relationships with the children of the family and they conclude their adventure together by becoming a family.

*Children have a natural desire to
extend their environment beyond home and family*

The capacity for children's literature to provide a safe way to vicariously experience new environments and relationships is significant. There are some experiences that children would have difficulty encountering beyond the home, and books provide that space. The distinctive feature of children's literature is that these explorations can be experienced while still feeling safe. One book that exemplifies taking risks beyond home is the widely popular *Curious George* (1941) by H. A. Rey. Similar to Chanterelle, one of George's most prominent characteristics is his curiosity. It is this insatiable inquisitiveness that brings him on one adventure after another and often into some trouble. He is every bit the mischievous "child in fur" (Oppenheim, 1986, p.110). Through George, young children experience what it is like to get into trouble when curiosity gets the better of you. George is taken to

jail after using the telephone and flies up into the air when he accidentally takes all of the balloons from the balloon man. All of these experiences could be scary but through George they are safe, especially when he finds the man with the yellow hat. Chanterelle's curiosity leads her to follow the family hiking through the woods. Her quest seems innocent enough until she bumps into her friend Porcupine, who is hiding from the family. Quickly, Chanterelle's adventure turns to calamity once Porcupine accidentally quills her. This misadventure could also seem scary, but the parents assume responsibility and soon enough Chanterelle is safe and sound.

In the story *Petunia, Beware!* (1987) by Roger Duvoisin, Petunia suffers from the common affliction of the "grass is always greener on the other side." Literally, she believes the grass on the other side of the fence would taste better and so she embarks on a trip to the next field with a farewell warning from the farm dog to beware of wild animals. As Petunia explores, she quickly discovers that the grass in the neighboring meadow tastes just the same as the grass in her meadow. She wanders further and further tasting the grass, until she is a great distance from her home. Petunia decides to return to her meadow, because it now looks greener, but she encounters weasel, fox, raccoon and bobcat. She manages to narrowly escape and once back in her own meadow she finds she has never tasted better grass. A big difference between *Petunia, Beware!* and *Chanterelle Finds a Family* is that Petunia is actively seeking a new environment. She sees the neighboring meadow and believes it is better. In contrast, Chanterelle is not looking for a better home. She stumbles upon the family hiking and it is an accident that Porcupine quills Chanterelle instead of the boy. It is through this sequence of events that Chanterelle is taken care of and

adopted. A similarity, however, is that both Petunia and Chanterelle are safe at the end of their adventures.

Harold and the Purple Crayon (1955) by Crockett Johnson is a unique adventure beyond the home because Harold's travels are at the whim of his imagination and his purple crayon. Like Chanterelle, Harold likes to explore, but Chanterelle is limited to her immediate surroundings as she explores. It is only when Chanterelle is quilled and cared for by the family that she finds herself in an environment other than the forest. Harold, on the other hand, creates his environment. As he embarks on his moonlight walk, he draws a moon and a path. When the path becomes dull, Harold draws a shortcut that leads him to a forest of one apple tree. He loses some control over his adventure when he creates a dragon so frightening that his hands shake and without meaning to draws an ocean. But Harold is a smart and composed child, and knows immediately to draw himself a boat so that he can sail the ocean waters. And so Harold continues on his adventures with his purple crayon until he is tired and eventually draws his bedroom so he can finally sleep. Harold and Chanterelle share an adventurous spirit and like George and Petunia find a safe and happy ending at the conclusion of their journeys.

Pippi Longstocking (1945) by Astrid Lindgren is one of the most extreme examples of children's natural desire to extend their environment beyond home and family. Pippi Longstocking is a nine-year-old girl whose mother died when Pippi was a baby and her father is lost at sea. Pippi lives by herself in a house her father bought. She is waiting for her father's return because she is sure that he "washed

ashore on an island that was inhabited by natives and her father became king of them all” (p. 8). Her companions are Mr. Nilsson, the monkey, and her next-door neighbors, Tommy and Annika. Pippi is content with her life and she is very capable of taking care of herself. Her adventures always involve mischief and fun. Pippi and Chanterelle are similar in that both characters take pride in being able to take care of themselves. In *Chanterelle Finds a Family*, the text states, “she (Chanterelle) did not need help from anybody.” For Pippi the reader learns, “she had no mother or father, which was actually quite nice, because it meant that no one could tell her that she had to go to bed just when she was having the most fun” (p. 7). However, there is a difference between the two characters in that Chanterelle thinks about having a family. She does not actively seek out adult nurturing because she has friends like the Beaver family, but when she finds herself in the situation where she can be adopted she chooses home and family over her complete autonomy. Though Pippi appears completely independent, she lives with the belief that as soon as her “pappa builds himself a ship, he’ll come back to get me, and then I’ll be a native princess” (p. 9). This seems to offer her the security to be on her own. Until that time, Pippi concerns herself only with playing and having fun. While *Pippi Longstocking* ends cheerfully, as she waves goodnight to her good friends Tommy and Annika, Pippi is still alone at the end of the story. Unlike any of the other children’s books analyzed in this section, *Pippi Longstocking* does not return to home and family at the conclusion of the book. Pippi is the extreme example of a child who is fearless, independent, original, and lives exactly how she chooses – however, similar to other

characters, her sense of security is supported by the belief that an adult would ultimately be there for her.

A story that ties together several themes – children’s drive for independence while at the same time needing adult nurturing, and the natural desire to extend beyond home and family is *The Boxcar Children* (1942) by Gertrude Chandler Warner. Similar to Chanterelle, the Boxcar Children do not have a family. Both of their parents are dead and instead of living with their grandfather the four children would rather live independently. Under the assumption that their grandfather is mean, the children seek out a new home and find an abandoned boxcar in the woods. Here at the boxcar, the children have an idyllic existence. The oldest boy works in town mowing the lawn for a kind doctor and this is how the children have money for food. The oldest girl assumes the role of the matriarch and cooks, cleans and takes care of the two younger children. While the characters of *The Boxcar Children* and *Chanterelle Finds a Family* embark on adventures, Chanterelle’s aim in her travels is play. The Boxcar Children’s adventures grow from their efforts to care for themselves. When a younger sibling becomes ill, it is adults who come to the Boxcar Children’s aid, which is similar to how the adults care for Chanterelle. Here lies the greatest similarity between Chanterelle and the Boxcar Children – both characters endure a situation in which adult care is necessary and given. Having that shared experience with adults; Chanterelle and the Boxcar Children make the decision to be a part of a family knowing that ultimately they need the safety and security of adult nurturing.

Children's Responses to the Story

I read *Chanterelle Finds a Family* to a selection of Kindergarten, first and second grades. The schools were public and private, rural and urban. In three rural public schools I read to four Kindergarten classes, two first grade classes and one second grade class. In an urban private all boys' school, I read to one Kindergarten class, one first grade class and one second grade class. I audiotape recorded my readings to capture the children's responses. For each reading I used one open-ended question, "What parts of the story stood out to you?" to get a sense of the important elements of the story for this age group.

A general observation across the schools and for all three grades was the attentiveness of the children. For each reading, the children settled in and maintained their attention and engagement throughout the book. I observed little squirming while reading the story. Typically children sat still, eyes riveted on the pictures. The children's general attentiveness seemed to hold true regardless of the time of day it was read to them. For example, one Kindergarten from a rural public school had their reading at the last period of the day. Despite the late time of day, the children settled right down on the rug and were attentive for the whole reading and provided thoughtful comments at the conclusion of the story. One child did note however, "That was a long story."

Another general observation was the participation from the children during the reading of the book. Specific parts of the book seemed to resonate with all three grades, public and private. One of these parts was when the puppy follows the family. During this part of the story it was common for children to point or call out

that they could see the puppy hiding. Another part was when the family is deciding whether or not they should keep the puppy. On this page, included with the illustration, are the words, “Yes!” “Yes!” and “Yes!” It was typical for children to excitedly yell out those words as I read the text.

There were other aspects of the story to which the children had common responses. For instance, in the beginning of the book, one of the activities the puppy likes to do is splash in the stream “trying to catch a dog that looked just like her.” On this page, I would always check in to make sure the children understood what the puppy was doing. Kindergarteners through second graders could typically identify that the puppy was trying to catch her reflection, although some Kindergartners at first had difficulty producing the word. In one Kindergarten class, a child said the puppy was trying to catch her shadow. In another Kindergarten class, a child said she was trying to catch fish. When asked to think of a specific word that would fit, the class together was able to come to the conclusion that the puppy was trying to catch her *reflection*.

The parts of the story that stood out most to the Kindergartners related primarily to the puppy getting a family. When I asked the open-ended question many of the responses included, “the puppy got a family”; “the puppy didn’t have a family”; and “the family helped her get the quills out.” One little boy at the urban all boys’ school responded with, “The car.” I asked when in the car and he answered, “When the dog was riding in the car with the family at the end home.” There seemed to be a sense of relief that from now on the puppy had someone to take care of her. One child commented, “I liked how... when the dog thought that they left her

but they didn't and also in that story their love light was shining really bright." I inquired about a "love light" and the child responded it is when you do things to show your love to another person. Some children identified the other animals as parts of the story that stood out. One child said the porcupine, and when I asked why, he replied, "it poked the doggy." Several other children mentioned the beaver family.

These parts of the story that resonated most with the Kindergartners are what one might expect of the age. Children of this age find animal stories particularly appealing. Furthermore, there is a happy ending, which reassures children. As Oppenheim (1986) remarked, "while the young schoolchild is ready for limited journeys into the bigger world, a safe return to home and family remains the center post of security" (p. 116). This statement reinforces one of the main themes of *Chanterelle Finds a Family*, which is that children have a drive for independence and at the same time a need for safety and security through adult nurturing. One boy said, "She has lots of friends." I responded that he was right, and then asked who are the puppy's friends. He immediately replied, "Um, the beaver family, the porcupine and of course, the family!"

The first and second graders' responses to the book were similar to the Kindergartners, but the children were able to make more connections and expand further upon their thinking. When I asked the first graders what stood out for them, some of the responses included, "the dog has a family"; "the dog was asleep and the vet took all the quills off her and she waked up and the dog was home and had children and parents"; and "the vet took all the quills off." The parts of the story that

resonated the most for the second graders included, “the family when they talk about whether they should keep the puppy”; “when the puppy is following the family but doesn’t show herself”; and “the part where the family helps the puppy once she is quilled and take her to the vet.” Similar to Kindergarten, the first and second graders loved the puppy’s carefree life, but felt palpably relieved and comforted that she would have the safety and security of adult nurturing.

Other first and second graders responded more to the puppy’s relationship with her animal friends and her playful nature. When I asked the open-ended question, these children commented, “the puppy playing hide and seek with the porcupine”; “she kept on hiding... she loved hide and seek”; “she really liked hide and seek and at the end she said, I’m going to teach them to play hide and seek”; and “the part that stuck out at me was the beaver part because a few words in that stood out to me like kisses and stuff... they were my favorite characters and I like the part where they were playing hide and seek and the brother and sister dived down deep.” Six and seven year old children are beginning to develop “a new kind of dependence on their peers” (Oppenheim, 1986). These children seemed to love the playfulness of the characters and delighted in the relationships that formed because of play.

In addition to the responses to the open-ended question, the first and second graders clearly empathized with the puppy. In the first grade classes there were visible winces when the porcupine quills the puppy and one child cried out, “Yowch!” Some of the children made yowling sounds as I read about the puppy “howling” and jumping about to get to the quills on her neck and back. Another first

grader remarked, “she has to be careful,” when I read that the puppy liked to “hike a steep mountain peak and find her friend Porcupine.” It was as though this child knew that the porcupine could hurt the puppy at some point in the book. One first grader chuckled out loud when I read, “The puppy wondered what it would be like if she was part of this family, she was after all an animal too.” The child then murmured, “We are all animals.”

In both second grades there was a collective concern for the puppy’s well being. There was a shared intake of breath when the puppy is quilled and some of the children called out, “Oh no!” and “Nooo!” When the puppy is alone in the vet’s office and curls up “into a tight ball,” a child remarked how sad she must feel. And when the puppy follows the vet, unsure of what is to happen next, one child physically sat up on his knees, pointed excitedly with his finger, and exclaimed, “She is going home with the family!” Another child wondered why the puppy was abandoned in the first place and how she got to live on her own in the woods. First and second graders are at an age where they are beginning to understand other people’s feelings and experiences (Oppenheim, 1986). It was clear that they demonstrated greater empathy than the Kindergartners. They also had more questions about the experience of being quilled, why the porcupine would quill the puppy, and what happened to the porcupine after she quilled the puppy.

A difference I observed in the second grade classrooms was the children’s ability to relate to *Chanterelle Finds a Family*, and they wanted to know more about her. Clearly, the story was real for them. In the rural, public school particularly, children commented on their own experiences with various wild animals and their

pets. The second graders also wanted more information, especially when they found out that Chanterelle was a real dog. I was asked, what parts of the story are true; did she really have friends who were beavers; did she really like playing in the stream? Furthermore, I was given the recommendation that I should start a Chanterelle series – Chanterelle’s First Birthday and Chanterelle’s First Wedding were two suggested titles.

I had wondered if the book would resonate more with the rural, public schools because the environment was familiar. Though they did relate more intimately to the setting and shared their own encounters with wild animals, the boys in the private, urban school demonstrated a strong knowledge of and interest in the woodland environment. Many spend their summers in the country.

Ultimately, it was gratifying to see that the children across the ages and settings readily engaged with the story, enjoyed it, thought about it seriously and were excited and satisfied with the ending.

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