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I'LL BE SENDING YOU ANGELS: A BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CYNTHIA RYLANT

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library and Information Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Rhonda Kiefer

July, 1993

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This paper is a bio-bibliography of Cynthia Rylant, exploring both her life and writings. The biography examines events in her life which have led to her development as a critically and internationally acclaimed children's author, with special emphasis placed on her childhood, since so many of her works have been inspired by her memories of these early years. Biographical and autobiographical materials published through February 1993 have been used. The bibliography, which includes all of her materials published in the United States through December 1992, is annotated; prominent awards or honors and selective reviews are included. The literature review supports Cynthia Rylant as an author destined to become a classic children's author and well-deserving of this in-depth study.

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PREFACE

In her article "Drawing on the Child Within," published in the May/June 1993 Horn Book Magazine, Natalie Babbit, a writer for children, emphasizes the importance of remembering one's own childhood if one wishes to be a successful children's author. She says:

> I have noticed that an awful lot of people don't seem to remember what it felt like to be a child. This is hard for me to understand. My childhood is very vivid to me. . . . I do know that it's very helpful to remember, if you want to write children's books.

Babbitt also has some additional recommendations for would-be children's authors: "don't preach, don't be dishonest, and don't be earnest" (Babbitt 1993).

If a person is to become a successful children's author, he or she must be able to remember what it is like to be a child and, therefore, be able to empathize with his or her young audience. In order to appreciate some of the reasons for Cynthia Rylant's success as a children's author, it is important to keep Babbitt's recommendations in mind as you read Rylant's works and to know about Cynthia Rylant's life as a child, since so many of her works are based on her own childhood memories. Consequently, the emphasis of this biography is placed on her early years, from birth to age 18.

The researcher would like to thank Dr. Carolyn S. Brodie from the School of Library and Information Science of Kent

State University for her guidance, Petey and Panzudo and Dot and Gene Kiefer for enduring this period of time, and Cynthia Rylant for stirring the heart.

I think the best writing is that which
is most personal, most revealing.
Because we all, I think, long mostly
for the same things and are afraid
mostly of the same things and we all
want someone to write about all of this
so we won't feel too crazy or alone.
-- Cynthia Rylant,
(Holtze 1989)

INTRODUCTION

Today, in a time of broken families and single parent households, many of our children are grappling with feelings of loss, aloneness, separation, abandonment, an incompleteness. Today, we label our children; we call them latchkey children, homeless children, unwanted children, only children, children of working parents, children of single parents, children with learning disabilities, children with low self-esteem. The list could go on. By labeling our children, we distinguish them from others and, in so doing, separate them, isolate them, cut them off from all the similarities that they do share with others, leaving them with a reduced self-image and a feeling of further alienation. Today, we live in an impatient society, driven by selfishness and greed and a money-is-the-bottom-line mentality, and, while we "kindly" place our wise old people in nursing homes, we fill our wonderful children with dreams of comfort, security, and material possessions. Yet, one look at government statistics reveals that we leave many of our children

in poverty--both spiritually and physically.

Cynthia Rylant, through her writing, reaches out to all of these, our children (be they Appalachian, black, disabled, adopted, or white middle-class), and she holds them, and she quietly shows them that, even in the absence of a traditional family, you can still have a family or create a sense of a family by seeking, finding, and holding on tight to the connections you make with other people and living creatures. Her character May, from the 1993 Newbery award-winning Missing May, reveals in a nutshell how it's done: "We wanted a family so bad, all of us. And we just grabbed onto each another and made us one. Simple as that" (p. 87).

Kent State University graduate Cynthia Rylant is "an internationally known author of children's books" (Julian-Goebel 1991). Her style is warm and sensitive, simple yet thought-provoking, and her voice, says Orchard Books editor Richard Jackson, "is a fantastically honest voice" (Umrigar 1989). Extremely versatile, Rylant's works include picture books, easy readers, juvenile and young adult novels, collections of poetry and short stories, nonfiction and autobiographies. Her writings have dealt with such diverse subjects as love of animals and nature, intergenerational relationships, death, religion and God, joy in simple everyday things, angels and the homeless, single parenthood and teen pregnancy, abandonment and unconditional love. Indeed, with such a wide range, is it any wonder that Rylant has such

wide appeal? Speaking of her books, an adult fan explains: "I think they're genuine tales of the heart" (Umrigar 1989); a critic continues: "Rylant has earned a loyal readership as well as positive critical response" (Trosky 1992).

Raised in West Virginia, Cynthia Rylant is highly respected for her portrayals of Appalachian people and culture. "Ms. Rylant challenges us to explore the priceless beauty and richness of a culture seldom recognized for its merits" (Julian-Goebel 1991). Rylant began her career as a writer in 1978. Her debut into the publishing world with When I Was Young in the Mountains in 1982 erupted with its receipt of the Caldecott Honor award. In shortly over a decade, the prolific Cynthia Rylant has risen from complete obscurity to become one of today's best-loved children's authors and to step forward and collect the well-deserved 1993 Newbery Award for Missing May, which can be placed on the shelf next to her Newbery Honor award, Caldecott Honor awards, Boston Globe-Horn Book awards, numerous American Library Association notable awards, and dozens of others.

Beginning with her first book in 1982 through 1992, Rylant has given the world a treasure of 32 books. And they just keep on coming. In 1993, we can expect at least one new Henry and Mudge adventure, a picture book called The Dreamer, a young adult novel entitled I Had Seen Castles, and a brand-new series of picture board-books for little ones, titled The Everyday Books, which will mark Rylant's debut as an illustrator.

"Let us never forget . . . the power
of what a story can do."
(Rylant 1985)

BACKGROUND

Rylant's books are filled with examples which illustrate how feelings of being unloved or unwanted can be overcome by reaching out and making a "family" with others. A young girl, her cousin, and their grandparents create their own "family" in When I Was Young in the Mountains (1982); Gabriel, a lonely boy, reaches out for a homeless kitten and finds a companion in "Spaghetti" from Every Living Thing (1985); a community happily gathers together after Sunday church in Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds (1991); and Garnet Ash loves his Christmas trees as if they were his children in "The Christmas Tree Man" from Children of Christmas: Stories for the Season (1987). "Thematically, she stresses the importance of family and all living things" (Senick 1988). Cynthia Rylant's works promote caring relationships, whether they be with one's immediate family, friends, neighbors, community, strangers, animals, nature, or God.

Especially known and praised for the love and warmth which exudes from the intergenerational relationships she creates, Rylant "focuses on interpersonal relationships between young and old, and is particularly noted for her

unstereotypical portrayals of the elderly" (Senick 1988). A deep love is felt between Summer and Ob, Summer's elderly foster father, in Missing May (1992) and a genuine caring develops between Nat and his elderly neighbor lady, Maggie Ziegler, in Miss Maggie (1983). Great security and belonging also come through the extended families Rylant portrays. We experience joy among members of the large extended family in The Relatives Came (1985) as we witness them hugging and laughing and eating and breathing together. Also "distinctive to Rylant's work are her depictions of adult characters . . . presented in a fully drawn manner" (Chevalier 1989). In the "Henry and Mudge" series, Henry's parents are completely round, human characters; while it is clear to the reader that they love Henry and Mudge deeply, it is also understandable when, in Henry and Mudge and the Bedtime Thumps (1991), big Mudge just can't be himself without knocking things over in Grandma's knickknack-jammed house, and out he goes! By portraying loving relationships between children and adults, Rylant subtly helps her younger readers appreciate these special friendships.

"Despite the inclusion of such themes as loneliness, fear, or betrayal, her works ultimately convey understanding and hope" (Senick 1988); through a wide range of literature, Cynthia Rylant offers examples of practical ways that a child can reach out to others for love and warmth. Kindness to others is a recurring theme in her works. During a thunder-

storm, a girl overlooks her own fear to help a terrified child in "The Rescue" from Waiting to Waltz (1984). In New York City, a cafe waiter makes a lonely old man feel welcome in An Angel for Solomon Singer (1992).

Being responsible to others is yet another recurring theme. In the title story of A Couple of Kooks and Other Stories About Love (1990), Suzy and Dennis, unwed teenage parents, demonstrate responsibility for the future of their unborn baby and, in "Ballerinas and Bears" from the Children of Christmas collection (1987), an Asian man, through a simple caring gesture, helps a homeless woman feel loved. Responsibility for others is a quality Rylant learned from her grandparents: "They lived life with . . . a real sense of what it means to be devoted to and responsible for other people," she says (Commire 1988).

Through her Appalachian childhood, Cynthia Rylant absorbed many other admirable qualities, such as helping others. "The country people in Cool Ridge were good to each other, helpful to all the neighbors, easy with the children" (Nakamura 1992). Helping one another is still one more way we can reach out to others. In All I See (1988), the painter Gregory helps young Charlie overcome shyness, teaching him the techniques involved in art. In A Fine White Dust (1986), Rufus, a confirmed atheist, sticks by his best friend Pete after Pete has been abandoned by a phony preacher. And in A Blue-Eyed Daisy (1985), Ellie helps Harvey overcome feelings of alienation by inviting him to join her for lunch.

Taking pride in one's family and self are further ways a child can help themself overcome feelings of alienation and low self-esteem. In Waiting to Waltz' "PTA" (1984), a teenage daughter learns to be proud of her mother for what she is able to do. In "Slower Than the Rest" from Every Living Thing (1985), a learning disabled boy surprises himself with the recognition he receives after sharing his turtle with his classmates. And even a simple homey touch, like family photographs hanging on the walls in Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds (1991), provokes a feeling of pride. Money and material possessions are not prerequisites to feeling proud any more than they are requirements to living a rich life. Feeling proud and rich and good about one's self must start with the simple things in life.

In revealing a love for nature and an appreciation and joy for the simple things in life, Cynthia Rylant shines. "I like to show the way our lives are beautiful, breathtaking, in the smallest ways," she explains (Commire 1988). In When I Was Young in the Mountains (1982), her characters are revealed to be "poor in material things, but rich in family pleasures" (Senick 1988); further, ". . . we come to know why the main character never dreamed of a world beyond the mountains when she was young. There, love, adventure, and security wrapped her close" (Chevalier 1989). Through Cynthia Rylant's stories and poems, the reader is

presented many opportunities to reach a fuller awareness and appreciation of the ideas that the best things in life may just, indeed, be free and that "sometimes, the most precious and elusive things are found in your own backyard" (Umrigar 1989).

Objectives and Limitations of this Paper

The objective of this paper is to present a bio-bibliography of Cynthia Rylant, exploring both her life and her writings. The biography examines events in her life which have led to her development as a critically and internationally acclaimed children's author, drawing from biographical and autobiographical materials published through February, 1993. The bibliography, which includes all of Rylant's materials published in the United States through December, 1992, is annotated with selected reviews and prominent awards listed. The literature review supports Cynthia Rylant as an author destined to become a classic and well-deserving this in-depth study.

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METHODOLOGY

The research design for this paper is the bio-bibliographic technique, combining historical and bibliographic research models.

The type of data that was collected includes biographical and autobiographical materials about Cynthia Rylant, a complete list of her works published in the United States through 1992, and critical reviews of her works.

The method of collection began with an online search of OCLC and DIALOG FILE 287: BIOGRAPHY MASTER INDEX (1980 - 1992). The collection continued with CD-ROM searches of ERIC (Jan. 1982 - Dec. 1992), LISA (Jan. 1969 - March 1992), LIBRARY LIT (Dec. 1984 - Dec. 31, 1992), READERS GUIDE TO PERIODICAL LITERATURE (Jan. 1983 - Feb. 25, 1993), and CHILDREN'S REFERENCE PLUS (1986 - 1992).

Next came a search of CATALYST at the Kent State University Library and TLM at the Akron-Summit County Public Library. Materials were retrieved through the Kent State University Library, the Akron-Summit County Public Library, and interlibrary loans. Bibliographies in these gathered materials were examined and additional searching for cited materials ensued, including phone calls to the libraries of the Charleston Gazette and Kent-Ravenna Record Courier.

Further, the researcher attended the "Maggie & Mudge & May: The Books and Manuscripts of Cynthia Rylant" exhibit that had been on display in the Department of Special Collections and Archives at the Kent State University Library during the 1993 spring semester. There, the researcher personally examined the infrequently-edited manuscripts of Cynthia Rylant.

On April 15, 1993, Cynthia Rylant made a personal appearance at Kent State University: following a relaxed and informal question and answer session with future children's librarians of the School of Library and Information Science, Rylant appeared at a formal reception and autograph session held in her honor by the Special Collections and Archives of the Kent State University Library. The researcher was fortunate to be able to use this opportunity to advance the research in progress, asking Cynthia Rylant questions during the question and answer session and, at the end of the formal reception, talking again with the celebrated children's author informally and one on one.

The accumulated data was evaluated and compiled through historical synthesis of the autobiographical and biographical materials, as well as through bibliographic synthesis with annotations of each of her works.

PART ONE:

FROM BIRTH TO COOL RIDGE (INFANCY TO AGE 8)

Cynthia Rylant entered this life on June 6, 1954. She was born on an army base in Hopewell, Virginia. Her parents were John Tune, an army sergeant, and Leatrel Rylant Smith, a future nurse. The young family moved around a lot, living in Japan, South Carolina, and ending up in Illinois.

Cynthia's father suffered from two diseases. First was the hepatitis he contracted as a soldier during the Korean War. The hepatitis nearly killed him. In addition, he also suffered from alcoholism. Together, the two diseases would plague him for the rest of his short life. His marriage with Leatrel was stormy.

Described as a "tiny girl with big blue eyes" (Umrigar 1989), Cynthia recalls feeling "a lot of unhappiness . . . in those very early years. . . . No one ever told me when I was little that my parents' battles were not my fault" (Rylant 1989). Later, she admitted that she "naively blamed herself for their troubles" (Trosky 1992).

John and Leatrel separated when Cynthia was four years old. Leatrel packed Cynthia and herself into a plane and headed for her own parents' home in West Virginia. They couldn't take much with them on the plane and Cynthia had to leave her little dog Sissy and most of her toys in Illinois. But of all the things she had to leave behind, the two things she missed the most were

her father and Jo-Jo, the toy monkey with a big grin, missing button, and white plastic shoes that her father had given to her. She would spend the rest of her childhood constantly on the lookout for both of them.

With a young child to support, Leatrel knew she had to get a decent-paying job. She decided to pursue a career in nursing and, in order to get the education she needed, was forced to leave Cynthia with her own parents while she went away to attend college.

Cynthia's maternal grandparents lived in Cool Ridge. Cool Ridge is a sparsely-populated, rural community located in Raleigh County in southern West Virginia. For the next four years, Elda and Ferrell Rylant would become Cynthia's parents and their small white house in the Appalachian mountains would become Cynthia's home. Some thirty years later, Cynthia would say "my memories of those four years are so keen" (Nakamura 1992). As a children's author, she would later use their last name, Rylant, as her pen name.

Elda and Ferrell Rylant, a coal mining family with six children, were originally from Alabama. As a writer, Cynthia would later say that

> My voice reflects the way my family talks, in that Southern, forthright way, those matter-of-fact pronouncements that [you'd] hear in the kitchen suddenly. Or out in the yard someone [would] say something that [would] be so poetic. I was never aware how poetic my grandparents were when they talked; they were both from Alabama, and I just loved the way they talked. I know I echo them when I write (Silvey 1987).

Her grandmother taught Sunday School classes and ran the daily household while her grandfather worked in the coal mines, a dangerous career that he had begun at age nine. Her grandparents were kind, gentle, and soft-spoken. They provided Cynthia with stability and security and with them she felt safe.

Also living in the house were two of their children: Joe and Sue, who were both in high school at the time. Cynthia's Uncle Joe became one of her heroes; he was "handsome and the best basketball player at Shady Spring High School" (Rylant 1989). He would later go on to serve in the Vietnam War and Cynthia would use his character in a chapter about a soldier uncle in A Blue-Eyed Daisy. Aunt Sue kindly shared her bed with Cynthia, who fondly remembers how Aunt Sue would say "funny things in bed that made me giggle" (Rylant 1989) and would give her a hug when she felt sad.

Later, Peter and Betty, Cynthia's cousins, would also come to live in the little white house that had no running water while their parents spent a year in the Air Force up in Alaska. Peter was a year older than Cynthia and Betty, two years older. The three children played together. They spent a lot of time outside, often playing in the woods. Mischievious and ornery as kids will be, Cynthia remembers that "my cousins and I were always in trouble" (Rylant 1989). While her grandmother was kind, she also believed in discipline and when she found Peter and Cynthia alone together in the outhouse during a game of hide-and-seek, Cynthia remembers that "she came after us with the switch" (Rylant 1989).

Cynthia also found a best friend up in those isolated Appalachian mountains. Her name was Cindy Mills. She was the same age as Cynthia and lived just down the road from the Rylant residence. Later Cynthia would reflect on this good fortune:

> God has sent me many sweet gifts in my life. Cindy Mills was one of those. When the men went off to the mines in the mornings, taking the cars with them, the women were left up those desolate country roads. No way to get out and go anywhere. No TV reception to speak of (which they couldn't have watched anyway, they had too much hard work to do). No store. No library. Nothing. But I had Cindy and she was everything I ever needed. We played dawn to dark (Nakamura 1992).

Cindy Mills would become the inspiration for one of Rylant's strongest characters: Ellie, in A Blue-Eyed Daisy.

Shortly after Cynthia came to live with her grandparents, a slate fall erupted in the coal mine, leaving her grandfather permanently disabled. Fortunately, although they lived in poverty, no one ever went hungry. As Cynthia explains: "We lived on food from the government, the generosity of neighbors, and my grandparents' ingenuity" (Nakamura 1992). Her grandparents tended a big garden, raised their own chickens, bought milk from the neighbors who owned cows, and got pork sausage when Cindy Mills' father slaughtered a pig. Her grandfather went squirrel-hunting and the kids picked cherries and apples that their grandmother canned. Cynthia remembers feasts consisting of "big stacks of pancakes and hot cocoa, hound dogs and chickens, teaberry leaves and honeysuckle" (Rylant 1989).

They rarely ate store-bought food. "A Reese's Cup was a treasure" (Nakamura 1992).

Nearly everyone in Cool Ridge attended the Missionary Baptist Church. It was the only church for miles around. It, too, had an outhouse. In fact, most of the houses in Cool Ridge had neither running water nor electricity. Going to church on Sundays gave the hard-working people of Cool Ridge a chance to dress up and socialize with each other, in addition to enjoying a well-deserved day of rest. Regarding her own faith as a young child, Cynthia later reflected that

> there was an innocence about our faith in Jesus that I can admire now. It is something children seem most capable of, this belief that there's some love up there somewhere (Rylant 1989).

When Cynthia began going to school, her grandfather would walk her part way to the bus stop, then wait from the distance to make sure she got safely on the bus that would carry her over the twisting mountain roads through the pitch-black to her school. Cynthia's elementary school teachers were kind. Looking back, she says:

> I doubt anyone could call my elementary education top-notch for the schools had little money, out-dated books, few supplies. But they gave me something far more important: a feeling of being loved, a feeling of being welcome. It is the best that schools can give, for the theories and charts are soon forgotten by the children, and all they will remember ultimately is how the place made them feel (Nakamura 1992).

Due to the impoverished conditions of Cool Ridge, Cynthia was exposed to very few books. The nearest library

was about a half an hour away. "From birth to age eight," she says, "I don't think I was read to at all, and I read very little" (Silvey 1987). On the other hand, she adds, "the few times that a teacher told me a story, I remembered it. I never forgot it" (Julian-Goebel 1991). Above all, she concludes, "I had an imagination that took the place of books we couldn't buy and television shows we couldn't pick up" (Rylant 1989).

With her mind free to imagine and her body free to wander, Cynthia spent a great deal of her childhood roaming "the country dirt roads . . . where friends like Miss Maggie Ziegler lived in her old log house" (Rylant 1992). Miss Maggie would later co-star in the book titled for her. Cynthia thinks her roaming later helped her as a writer because she got to meet a lot of people and animals, she got to hear what the folks were saying and see what they were doing inside their houses. "And all these things," she says, "I remembered when I became a writer, and I put them into books" (Rylant 1992).

All this roaming and imagining also helped foster an extremely sensitive young girl:

> As a child, Rylant could not listen to "Puff the Magic Dragon" without wanting to cry. She still cannot. [And] when she was little, she cried for lonely old people. For stray animals. For anybody who was in pain (Umrigar 1989).

"This nervous, thin" child, as she describes herself (Nakamura 1992), would, in fact, grow up to be a fine, sensitive children's author.

The hardest part about living with her grandparents during those four years was the absence of her own mother and father. Her mother wrote to her often and always included a stick of gum in each letter. She even came to visit Cynthia a few times but, when it came time to leave again, it tore Cynthia apart. "Deep down," Cynthia remembers, "I felt I just had not been good enough to make her want to stay" (Rylant 1989).

Right after Cynthia moved to Cool Ridge, her father wrote her a few letters. But his letters soon stopped coming. No one ever talked about her father and no one ever explained anything to her. After awhile, Cynthia "simply made things up about him" (Rylant 1989). Later, she would say:

> I am sure that he loved me when I was small. . . . But at age six I could feel only confusion that he was absent and guilt that I wasn't enough to make him want to see me. I looked for him on highways and in the stores in town. I watched for his car. But he never phoned, nor wrote, nor came (Nakamura 1992).

In spite of these painful separations from her parents, Cynthia was surrounded by many good people and they helped heal her heart. Regarding her neighbors, she says

> I was blessed with the company and influence of kind people in my growing up. The country people in Cool Ridge were good to each other, helpful to all the neighbors, easy with the children (Nakamura 1992).

And regarding her grandparents, Cynthia says

> . . . my grandmother was a gentle woman . . . it was in her love and safety, and the kind presence of my grandfather, that I managed to survive the loss of my dear parents (Rylant 1989).

While she did experience some poverty while living with her grandparents in Cool Ridge, Cynthia says they lived "mostly a very rich existence" (Commire 1988). And she was surrounded by so much love that she would later describe those four years in rural Appalachia as the happiest years of her life (Umrigar 1989).

PART TWO:

FROM BEAVER TO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION (AGES 8 TO 18)

When Cynthia was eight and in the third grade, her mother, now a nurse, returned for Cynthia. Together the two moved to the small town of Beaver, where Cynthia would live until she turned eighteen and graduated from high school. In remembering the years she lived there, Cynthia recalls being

> just as content in Beaver as I had been in Cool Ridge but for different reasons. I had needed the quiet isolation of my grandparents' little house when I was younger. I needed the constancy of it and the peace. But by the time I arrived in Beaver, I was ready for what it had to offer me: lots of kids to play with, little grocery stores I could walk to for strawberry pop, and better TV reception (Nakamura 1992).

Beaver is also in Raleigh County and only about a twenty minute drive to Cool Ridge, so Cynthia was still able to see her grandparents and old friends every Sunday.

She describes the three-room apartment that she and her mother shared as having

> old gas heaters you had to light with a match and which threatened to blow you up every time you did. We didn't have carpet. We had old green and brown linoleum with cigarette burns in it. . . . [and] if you looked out our front window you would have seen Todd's warehouse and junkyard (Rylant 1989).

But the apartment <u>did</u> have running water and a bathroom and "I felt rich," says Cynthia (Nakamura 1992).

The apartment was in a house that was split right down the middle and Cynthia became friends with the boy who lived on the other side of that wall. His name was Ronnie Morris. He was two years older than Cynthia. She remembers their friendship fondly:

> We knocked on the walls with certain codes, we played Beatles records in our shared basements, and I had popcorn and Kool-Aid with his family on Friday nights while we watched their black-and-white TV (Commire 1988).

Since the reception was better in Beaver than it ever would be in hilly Cool Ridge, Cynthia and her mother also got a black and white television. "Thank-you-God for that TV reception," exclaims Cynthia, "because in 1964, when I was nine years old, I watched the Beatles on the Sunday night Ed Sullivan Show and it turned me and the rest of the world upside down" (Nakamura 1992). From that point on, she and millions of other teenagers were transformed into Beatle maniacs. Cynthia fell madly in love with Paul McCartney. She dreamed about him, wrote letters to him, and decorated both her bedroom and body in Beatles motif. She even stood in line for two hours to see the Beatles' first movie, A Hard Day's Night, and vividly remembers the experience:

> . . . when I got inside all I did was yell and cry with the rest of the girls who yelled and cried. I was only ten years old, but I might as well have been Juliet crying out for her Romeo, so enormous was my love and so great my pain (Rylant 1989).

To this day, Cynthia still has her Paul McCartney doll, now a great collector's item.

At about the same time that the Beatles burst onto the scene, Leatrel told Cynthia that her husband was now living in Florida and that she was finally filing for a divorce following their five-year separation. Cynthia, then nine, also found out that the reason no one had talked about her father previously was because he had moved and no one knew where he was. Cynthia regrets that no one ever told her the truth:

> It is an unfortunate thing grown-ups do sometimes: if the truth is bad, they don't tell their children anything. And even if they don't know the truth, they still remain silent and their children have to imagine all the things that could be wrong. Children always imagine the worst (Rylant 1989).

Both mother and daughter were impacted by the absence of a father figure. Cynthia remembers her mother, a single working parent, as working hard and putting in long hours at her nursing job. Consequently, Cynthia, or "Lucie Kate" as her mother often called her (Rylant 1989), became what might today be called a latchkey child:

> I had to learn to take care of myself and she had to trust I could do it. I liked the independence. I liked having the house to myself. I liked my privacy, something I still like and need a lot of today. I love an empty quiet house now as much as I did when I was nine (Nakamura 1992).

Nevertheless, there were times when Cynthia wished that her mother could be more involved in her school activities, such as the PTA, and in activities around the house, such as baking cookies. It wasn't until she became an adult herself that

Cynthia understood her mother had just been "too pooped out to do any of those things" (Nakamura 1992).

Cynthia filled the hole that her absent father had left with other people:

> I loved people, being around people, and loved school because I liked being with so many different people. I loved everybody's personality--their faces, their jokes, their secrets. I was exhilarated by their differences (Nakamura 1992).

How did others view Cynthia?

> I don't know what kind of kid people thought I was back then. Probably friendly is a word they would use. . . . My teachers liked me, my classmates liked me, and most of the time my mother liked me (Nakamura 1992).

In the 1960s, drugs were not a problem in Beaver, West Virginia. Nevertheless, Beaver's teenagers, Cynthia included, were faced with other universal teenage issues. These included puberty and the opposite sex, religion, self-esteem and feelings of inferiority, heroes and dreams.

For Cynthia, the issue of puberty hit in the sixth grade and it was traumatic. "Sixth grade," she says, "seemed overall to be the Year of the Body. Not only was my own changing, but it seemed the whole world was suddenly obsessed with the same subject" (Rylant 1989).

Just ask any adult who has one and they will readily confirm that an adolescent can sometimes drive you nuts. When Cynthia's mother refused to let her shave or wear nylons, Cynthia went on what she calls "a one-girl revolt in my home" (Rylant 1989), picketing with signs that read "Nylons Now"

and refusing to talk to her mother until she finally gave in. In describing her own adolescence, Cynthia simply states that:

> In junior high I lost my head. I can only describe who I was then as erratic, like a spring somebody pulled tight and BOIING let go flying across the room. I was completely boy-crazy and can't count the number of boys I had mad crushes on (Nakamura 1992).

As for the issue of the opposite sex, Cynthia seems to have had no problem in attracting boys. In first grade, James Miller fell in love with her. In third grade, it was Jerry Redding. It wasn't until she turned eleven, however, that she got her first kiss. The magic moment occurred during a game of Spin-the-Bottle. The boy was Harold Trail and he became her boyfriend. "For the next several years," she confesses, "I did so much kissing that I barely had time to take a breath" (Rylant 1989). Cynthia would later write about that first kiss in her book A Blue-Eyed Daisy.

With regard to the issue of religion, all of this euphoric kissing coupled with a religious upbringing that preached of an afterlife where sinners burn in eternal Hell produced conflicting feelings in Cynthia. On one hand, she thought, "We saw the forgiveness of Jesus as an incredible opportunity to do whatever we wanted--as long as we could get away with it in earthly terms" (Rylant 1989). On the other hand, she became plagued with guilt and fear:

> As a child I always felt that there was a God. As I became older, I became more afraid of God. As a young child I wasn't afraid at all. But the more I was exposed to the idea of heaven and hell the more scared I became (Silvey 1987).

In fact she began to worry that everything she did might involve some kind of sin:

> From what the preachers were telling me, there wasn't a bone in my body that wasn't soaked full of sin, and if I didn't get myself saved in church, well, tomorrow I could be struck by lightning and it would just be too late (Rylant 1989).

Adolescents, as we know, are terrified of being embarrassed and Cynthia just dreaded, as most teenagers would, "the embarrassment of having to walk down the aisle in church and confess to the preacher and to everyone watching that I was an outright unsaved sinner" (Rylant 1989). So she held out for as long as she could. But finally, she says, at age 14, "a preacher got through to me" (Rylant 1989) and Cynthia Rylant was baptized.

When she looks back to that day she was saved, she says she feels "a sense of having been tricked into something" (Rylant 1989). Her poem "Saved" in Waiting to Waltz: A Childhood deals with this "trickery." Cynthia explains her later reasoning:

> If you had to scare somebody into loving you, would you think you were loved for who you are? For me it's the same thing with God: Why would He think anybody really loved Him if the only thing that could get somebody headed in His direction was the threat of burning up forever? (Rylant 1989).

In some way or another, religion has affected Cynthia Rylant throughout her entire life. In her first autobiography, But I'll Be Back Again: An Album, she explains that "it took me until I was grown up to realize I'd gone about religion

in all the wrong way, and I had to figure God out again." God and religion are common themes in Rylant's writings today and appear in such works as A Fine White Dust (in which a boy is betrayed by a false preacher), Waiting to Waltz (three poems which she admits are not flattering to God), A Blue-Eyed Daisy (in which Ellie turns to God when her father appears to be dying), When I Was Young in the Mountains (which describes her earliest innocent experiences with the church), and Missing May (which presents a brighter, more hopeful side to religion in the theme of angels and a joyful afterlife). "It's pretty clear to me," Cynthia acknowledges, "that God and I are still doing a lot of talking, and probably always will" (Rylant 1989).

Low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority are common among too many of our young people. Cynthia Rylant was no exception. She had several major and unfortunate circumstances working against her: the devastating loss of her father, being relatively poor, and being looked at by everyone else in the United States as a "hillbilly."

The final loss of her father will be discussed later. The impoverished environment Cynthia faced was the result of living in a single-parent home and living in an exploited coal mining region in the United States. Says Cynthia:

> With no wealthier children to compare myself to, I did not feel ashamed of how little I had. But as I grew older, and met more "town" kids and watched more TV, this would change. I would feel secure as long as I stayed in the country among

people who were like me. But leaving it, being among those who lived in nice houses and went water-skiing, I would feel small and unimportant (Nakamura 1992).

In her first autobiography she comes right out and says "I was ashamed of where I lived and felt the world would judge me unworthy because of it" (Rylant 1989). She continues by saying "as soon as I left town to go anywhere else, my sense of being somebody special evaporated into nothing and I became dull and ugly and poor" (Rylant 1989). In fact Cynthia felt so ashamed, she says, that "I wouldn't even go to the library in the nearby city because I felt so unequal to city kids. Consequently, I lived on comic books for most of my childhood, until I moved into drugstore romances as a teenager (Rylant 1989). It wasn't until she became a college student that she finally paid a visit to a library or a museum. But as a young person, Cynthia was afraid "I would be a bumpkin among all those people; they would make fun of me" (Julian-Goebel 1991).

Cynthia Rylant's own personal poverty was directly related to where she lived geographically. For a long time in this country, being from Appalachia equated with being a "hillbilly." The fact is that the Appalachian people worked extremely hard in the miserable, dangerous coal mines in their beautiful mountains to provide the natural resources that the rest of America demanded. In all accounts, it becomes obvious that these people were not justly compensated for their hard, risky work. Exploitation left Appalachians poor in many ways.

Perhaps one of the saddest ways is how Appalachians, in general, have low self-esteem.

Cynthia Rylant told a reporter for the Charleston Gazette that

> when I was growing up in West Virginia, I was embarrassed about where I came from. Not as a child, but the older I got, the media got to me. The whole image of the ignorant hillbilly really affected me (Burnside 1993).

And in an interview for the Ohio Reading Teacher, an educational journal, she says: "Believe me, people in Appalachia have known for many, many decades that we are considered the bad neighborhood of the United States" (Julian-Goebel 1991). As she continues, that her own experience in Appalachia has resulted in her empathy for others in similar plights, is made apparent:

> Talk to any black kid who pulls himself out of the ghetto in Cleveland. He knows what it means to live on a particular street that has a particular reputation and what it takes to try to shake that (Julian-Goebel 1991).

Even the fragile good things about being Appalachian (such as being friendly and trusting) have caused pain. The adult Cynthia explains:

> I cannot tell you how many times I've been shocked and betrayed; I'm just incredibly naive about the ways of the world. . . . I was not taught to be skeptical, nor to wait for someone to prove that they are honest or that they are good or capable. I was so comfortable where I lived that I didn't have to use the part of my brain that asks those questions. I approached everyone as if they were a good person who would not hurt me (Julian-Goebel 1991).

Appalachian people have other fine qualities. In the Ohio Reading Teacher Cynthia Rylant mentions such qualities as feeling accountable for one's actions, being able to immediately trust others, and being able to make conversation with other members of society. When, in early 1993, it was announced that Missing May had won the nationally prestigious Newbery award, Cynthia would say "I'm very proud that a book about West Virginians which draws them as very fine people will receive so much attention (Burnside 1993).

In spite of all the painful issues that a teenager must face, they still have their heroes and their dreams. Cynthia remembers one of her dreams:

> . . . my idea of heaven when I was a kid was Christy Sanders' home. She lived in a new brick house . . . Everything in it was new and it matched and it worked (Rylant 1989).

On reflecting back, Cynthia sees that "wanting Christy Sanders' brick house was just a symptom of the overall desire I had for better things" (Rylant 1989). And in her heroes, we see a desire to live a different life, a desire to be someone else.

Like all kids, Cynthia came to have several childhood heroes:

> First was a pock-faced man named Tom who visited my grandparents. Then my Uncle Joe who went to Vietnam. Then Paul McCartney. Then Bobby Kennedy. And I wanted to be famous. I wanted to be in their worlds (Commire 1988).

In fact when Cynthia was 13, Bobby Kennedy, who was running for the presidency, came to her town on a campaign tour and she actually got to shake his hand.

When the New Orleans Symphony performed at Shady Spring Junior High School in Beaver, Cynthia found another hero--the conductor:

> . . . watching the conductor and his beautiful orchestra, I felt something in me that wanted more than I had. Wanted to walk among musicians and artists and writers. Wanted a life beyond Saturdays at G.C. Murphy's department store and Sundays with the Baptist Youth Fellowship.
>
> I wanted to be someone else, and that turned out to be the worst curse and the best gift of my life. I would finish out my childhood forgetting who I really was and what I really thought, and I would listen to other people and repeat their ideas instead of finding my own. That was the curse. The gift was that I would be willing to write books when I grew up (Rylant 1989).

Years later, Cynthia Rylant would, in fact, rise up from complete obscurity to become a world famous children's author. For other children, she is an excellent living, breathing example that, no matter where you come from or what your background or upbringing may be, you <u>can</u> make something of yourself and that you <u>can</u> be anything you want to be. If you believe in yourself. If you are determined. And if you work very hard.

Two months after shaking hands with Robert Kennedy, Cynthia mourned his assassination with the rest of the nation. That same year, when Cynthia was 13, she lost an even greater hero.

Over the years, Cynthia's memories of her father had grown dim. But about this time, he resumed writing to her.

His letters, she said, "were loving and cheerful, and it was as if he had been away only a few days instead of nine years" (Rylant 1989). He talked about wanting to see Cynthia again, which filled her with hope. She explains that

> Children can forgive their parents almost anything. It is one of those mysteries of life that no matter how badly a parent treats a child, somewhere in that child is a desperate need to forgive, a desperate need to be loved. I accepted my father back into my life without reservation (Rylant 1989).

Tragically, on June 16, 1967, before she ever got to see him again, Cynthia Rylant's father died in a Florida veteran's hospital. He had finally succumbed to his alcoholism and hepatitis. Cynthia never even got a chance to say goodbye to him. The impact of his sudden death was completely devastating:

> It is hard to lose someone, even harder to lose him twice, and beyond description to lose him without a goodbye either time. If I have any wishes for my own life, it is that I will have a chance to say all my goodbyes (Rylant 1989).

As an adult, Cynthia has pondered the idea that, perhaps, people who have died try to communicate with those who are still alive. This idea is one of the themes in Missing May. She wondered if her own father ever tried to communicate with her but unfortunately, she says, "from what I can tell, nothing got through" (Rylant 1989).

Years later, however, she would find an old newspaper article that had been written by her father, who had been a reporter for the army newspaper. What Cynthia found surprised her:

> The story was about army dentists, and that's not a subject you can squeeze a lot of excitement from. But my father wrote a fine, fine article, full of life and color and intelligence, and as I read it, I realized that his voice sounded just like mine. And that he had not completely left this world because the sound of him was still alive in . . . [the] children's books written by the daughter he left behind (Rylant 1989).

It would take years to heal from all the hurt, but eventually Cynthia came to terms with her feelings for her father. She was sure that he had loved her. But, she adds, "he simply had this big hole in him which kept him unfinished, incomplete, and incapable of loving in a responsible way" (Nakamura 1992).

Fortunately, the period following her father's death, when she was in junior high school, was a joyful one. Cynthia was popular, got good grades, and was a majorette who marched with the junior high band and who wore "big white boots . . . [and a] pert little velvet uniform" (Nakamura 1992). "I felt very happy in those three years," she says, "and though I believe I drove my mother out of her mind, I had the time of my life" (Nakamura 1992).

Her high school years, however, were often marked with feelings of sadness, loneliness, even isolation. Twice, her boyfriend, who she had planned to marry after graduation, left her for another girl. Cynthia remembers her pain well:

> I was devastated. Not only was the emotional pain difficult, but there was the accompanying humiliation.

> It was a very small school. Everyone knew the gossip. So I found myself a hot news item. And an isolated one at that, for when my boyfriend went off with the other girl, I didn't have anyone--girl or boy--to rely on for companionship. I had so concentrated on my boyfriend that when he was abruptly gone, I didn't know how to fit in with any other group. I wandered the halls at lunchtime, pretending to be on my way somewhere. I wasn't. And probably no one would have guessed in a million years how lonely I was. I was head majorette, a school queen, always the president of this or that. But those things could not give me what I lacked--one true friend (Nakamura 1992).

At age 18, Cynthia had no idea that she would later become a writer:

> Being creative or going into a creative field was not talked about at all; it wasn't even considered for us. We would either get married straight out of high school, which I think most of us planned on doing, or we would get a college degree and become teachers (Julian-Goebel 1991).

There were also no obvious signs that Cynthia would later become a writer. She had never been to a library and she never even read a children's book until she was 23.

As a child, she read "comics by the hundreds" (Nakamura 1992). Her favorites were Archie and Jughead and the Fantastic Four. She also read Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys books. In high school, she read things like Julius Caesar and Silas Marner in class, and she read Harlequin romances outside of class.

Cynthia says she didn't even write much as a child. "The only stories I ever tried were called 'My Adventures with the Beatles'" (Holtze 1989). That was in the sixth grade. In the ninth grade, she entered a poetry contest.

"I didn't win," she says. "I wasn't even the runner-up" (Julian-Goebel 1991).

Looking back, Cynthia attempts to understand what it was about her childhood that made her become a writer:

> They say that to be a writer you must first have an unhappy childhood. I don't know if unhappiness is necessary, but I think maybe children who have suffered a loss too great for words grow up into writers who are always trying to find those words, trying to find a meaning for the way they lived (Rylant 1989).

Regardless of what caused her to become a writer, Cynthia Rylant's sharp childhood memories would later prove to be the major inspiration for many of her works.

PART THREE: FROM WEST VIRGINIA TO OREGON (AGE 18 TO PRESENT ADULTHOOD)

Cynthia Rylant's plan to get married right out of high school fell through after the final break-up with her high school sweetheart. "I couldn't think of anything better to do," she says, "so I went to college" (Burnside 1993). Because her father had been in the service and because his death was caused, in part, by the hepatitis he contracted while serving in Korea, Rylant was able to get financial aid through the Veterans Administration.

She enrolled in nursing school in Parkersburg, West Virginia with the intention of following her mother's career path. In her mandatory freshman English class, Rylant was charmed by the written word. At the end of the semester, she switched her major to English and transferred to Morris Harvey College in Charleston, West Virginia (now known as the University of Charleston). She specifically chose Morris Harvey College because she was afraid that she might not fit in at a college outside of West Virginia. Rylant says:

> It's ironic that I went to a school in West Virginia, an hour from home, so I wouldn't have to be ashamed of being Appalachian from a modest income. Then I went to Morris Harvey with all these kids from Long Island. I felt completely inferior to them (Burnside 1993).

While she may have been intimidated by the more wordly city kids, she still enjoyed all kinds of people--especially

as a silent observer. She describes her own college friends as "the gentle, semi-hippie types who wore jeans and flannel shirts, made pottery and tie-dye, wrote poems and listened to the Beatles" (Nakamura 1992).

The college experience opened her up to all kinds of new ideas and activities, including vegetarianism, classical music, and editing the campus newspaper. "My mind began to grow and blossom" (Nakamura 1992). Taking that big step into adulthood, Cynthia Rylant began to think for herself. When invited to join a sorority, she declined: "I regarded sororities as unethical and still do" (Nakamura 1992). In 1975, she graduated from Morris Harvey College with a bachelor of arts degree in English.

Because she "had the happiest times sitting in literature classes" (Burnside 1993), she went on to Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia for her master of arts degree in English. Rylant remembers that year at Marshall University as being "without a doubt the happiest year of my life" (Nakamura 1992) and she goes on to describe her existence:

> I had a cozy little apartment in an old house a few blocks from the [campus] . . . I filled the apartment with plants and became a vegetarian. . . . I loved literature so much and every day all I had to do was attend class and listen to it and talk about it and write about it (Nakamura 1992).

Although Cynthia has called herself "shy" (Silvey 1987), Dr. William Sullivan, who was then the head of the English Department at Marshall University, remembers Rylant as

"a very vivid person" (Burnside 1993). He even humorously remembers her as a "sort of challenging student, one who would challenge professors when given an assignment, asking 'What's the purpose of this assignment?'" (Burnside 1993). In 1976, Rylant, age 23, graduated from Marshall University with a master of arts degree in English.

Equipped with a master's degree but unable to find meaningful employment, Rylant felt lost and poor, "living on brown rice and lettuce" (Nakamura 1992), while doing part-time work at the university. As a graduate student, she had met and fallen in love with a young man named Kevin Dolin. He taught classical guitar and read Eastern philosophy while studying the carpentry trade. Rylant recalls that

> He, too, was adrift and wanted a more stable life. We both had old-fashioned yearnings for the house, the picket fence, the two cats in the yard. So we got two cats and we got married (Nakarmura 1992).

That was in 1977.

With a national recession in full swing, Rylant was still unable to find meaningful employment. She worked as a waitress until, as fate would have it, she got hired by the Huntington Public Library. Initially, she worked in the film department, checking out materials. Then she was transferred to the children's room where her job was to shelve books and also to check out materials. Any children's librarian who once worked as a shelver will chuckle at Rylant's confession:

"I started reading the books I was supposed to be shelving and soon I was taking children's books home by the boxful" (Nakamura 1992).

Once again, Cynthia Rylant was charmed by the magic of the written word. "I was enchanted. I read children's books all night long" (Nakamura 1992). She told Horn Book's Anita Silvey how she "started reading them and really loved them. I felt strongly," she said, "that I could write for children. Up until then I'd never tried to write anything." To a reporter for the Sunday Gazette Mail, she said: "I knew within a few months. I may have known within two weeks, that I was a children's book writer" (Burnside 1993). In 1978, Cynthia Rylant would pick up her pen and begin to charm others with the magic of her own written word.

The year of 1978 also heralded a second significant change in Cynthia Rylant's life. She and Kevin Dolin gave birth to a baby boy. They named him Nathaniel (or Nate) after the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. "Having a baby gave me that real confrontation with what's important in life. It really changed me" (Silvey 1987). In the same year, Cynthia Rylant became both a mother and a children's author.

After Nate was born, Rylant, armed with a copy of The Writer's Market, continued to write. She vividly remembers the night she wrote When I Was Young in the Mountains. Nate was just six months old.

> I crawled into my bed with a pen and some yellow notebook paper and I wrote these words: "When I

> was young in the moutains." I don't know where they came from. I guess from the twenty-four years I had lived. From all the fine books I had read. From angels. In an hour's time I wrote the first book I would have published. I wrote it straight through. I didn't revise (Nakamura 1992).

Rylant typed the manuscript and, along with a cover letter that read "Dear Editor, I hope you like this book" (Umrigar 1989), dropped it in the mail. Two months later, she received the acceptance letter from E.P. Dutton in New York. Bursting with excitement and long-deserved pride, Rylant, long a nature lover, "took her son to a nearby park and strolled with him for about five miles" (Umrigar 1989). Two more years would pass before her first book would reach print. The book was based on her memories from the four years spent living with her grandparents in Cool Ridge and it is to them that she dedicated her first book.

In the meantime, she and Kevin Dolin had a son to support. In 1979, the year after Nate was born, Rylant worked as a part-time English instructor at both Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia and across the Ohio River at Ohio University's Ironton campus. In 1980, she and Kevin Dolin were divorced. Rylant explains:

> We had jumped into something we were not ready for. We were not very mature. We barely knew each other. We wanted different things and were unhappy together (Nakamura 1992).

At the time of their separation, Rylant, with a two-year-old child to raise alone, was without work and, therefore, without money. Her family helped her out "as best they could. I lived

in an apartment crawling with cockroaches because I simply couldn't afford to move" (Nakamura 1992). Still, she continued to write.

That same year, Rylant somehow managed a way to get to Kent, Ohio. She and little Nate lived in the Allerton Apartments within walking distance of the Kent State University campus. There, Rylant worked as a graduate assistant in the School of Library and Information Science while she attended classes for her master's degree in library science. In spite of all her education and the fact that she could soon claim to be a published children's author, a feeling of inferiority continued to haunt Rylant:

> I really felt an organic difference between me and people I would meet from Ohio or from anywhere else. Generally I felt inferior; I thought they spoke better than I did and that they went to places I couldn't go (Julian-Goebel 1991).

Still, she liked living in Kent because it was a small town and reminded her, in some ways, of West Virginia. In Kent, she says, she could "walk down a little street and say hello to store owners just like I used to as a child" (Rylant 1992). In 1981, Cynthia Rylant graduated from Kent State University with the master of library science degree.

Shortly after graduation, Rylant was hired to be a librarian for the Cincinnati Public Library. Even though this was about the same time as the release of her first book, for reasons unknown, though perhaps simply because of

financial hardship, this was described as "a bleak period" (Umrigar 1989) for Rylant. She and Nate lived in Cincinnati, Ohio for five months until she was hired to be a children's librarian in Akron, Ohio. "Three days before the Christmas of 1982, she moved back to Kent [outside of Akron] with seven dollars to her name" (Umrigar 1989).

In January of 1983, good fortune smiled with the announcement that When I Was Young in the Mountains, illustrated by Diane Goode, was a recipient of the Caldecott Honor Award. From January to August of that same year, Cynthia Rylant worked as a children's librarian at the Chamberlain Branch of the Akron-Summit County Public Library.

As a children's librarian, what she encountered during her professional library experience bothered and, perhaps, even influenced the writer inside. In the 1985 article for Language Arts magazine, Rylant would discuss "the power of what a story can do to you" and would go on to pointedly say:

> I know children experience that [power] in rare moments. And I think they might experience it more often if reading was not so often run like a marathon in their schools and libraries, with activities like Book Bingo or Summer Reading Club. I was approached by children in the library who said, "Give me a fairy tale, a hobby book, a historical fiction, and a family story." And if I offered a book that was too thick, it was refused, for how could the boy or girl expect to win the Bingo game if the books couldn't be read in time? And seeing members of the Summer Reading Club force-feeding themselves books in order to achieve hamburger coupons . . . It seems impossible to me that any of those children ever loved any of the books they read

under those circumstances (Rylant 1985).

Rylant would go on to conclude that "if children read my books, I hope it is never in order to achieve a prize. Because my books are worth more than gummed stars or hamburgers" (Rylant 1985). Interesting to note is the fact that her "thickest" book, A Kindness, is 117 pages in length.

In August of 1983, Rylant left librarianship and returned to education, teaching English part-time at the University of Akron until 1984. She was still living in Kent. At this point, the available biographical material becomes sketchy. Sometime before her thirtieth birthday in 1984, she ended up getting remarried--this time, to a college professor named Gerard.

By the end of 1985, with seven published books to her name (two of them Caldecott Honor books and five of them dedicated to her husband "Gerry"), Cynthia Rylant had become a full-time writer for children, crisscrossing the United States in a whirlwind of hectic promotional tours.

The literature provides no date for when Rylant's second divorce occurred. However, it must have occurred prior to 1989 since, in her 1989 autobiography But I'll Be Back Again, she talks of two divorces. Regardless of when, her second marriage did not last long. Looking back, Rylant discusses why it didn't work out:

> We had not spent enough time getting to know each other. I married virtually a stranger

> who I hoped would be all I had imagined him to be. But he was not, and I had no wish to live with someone with whom I felt so unhappy (Nakamura 1992).

The sting of her second divorce had a stringent effect on Rylant, who confided:

> [it] shook my confidence in marriage; it weakened the trust I had in myself to make good decisions. I felt embarrassed, ashamed of being twice divorced. Our culture will forgive some mistakes but messing up in marriage--especially more than once--is not one of them. It is an unfortunate stigma (Nakamura 1992).

You will recall Jo-Jo, the toy monkey that she had lost during her own parents' separation. As a child she had looked everywhere for Jo-Jo and, as an adult, she continued her search:

> She looked for him in the toy stores of every town that she visited . . . She searched for him far and wide. And then, one day [during the summer of 1989], she was driving in the neighborhood of her Kent home when she spotted him in her rearview mirror. Sitting on a wooden chair outside an antique store. Waiting for her to find him (Umrigar 1989).

Rylant tenderly reclaimed Jo-Jo and brought him home. Jo-Jo may be seen in a photograph of Rylant's home on page 160 of Volume 13 of the Something About the Author: Autobiography Series. The return of Jo-Jo is almost symbollic: it's as if, with Jo-Jo back, an old wound had been healed and Cynthia Rylant could finally become a whole person who felt deserving of happiness.

Certainly Jo-Jo's return signalled happier days ahead for Cynthia Rylant as she set about restoring order to her life. This must surely have been a time of deep contemplation, for she came to some heavy conclusions:

> I found out that I really had not expected very much happiness for my life. Children who suffer great loss often grow up believing deep inside that life is supposed to be hard for them. They sometimes don't know how to find comfort and a life that doesn't hurt (Rylant 1989).

But, she adds, "once I learned how to do this, I was able to make better decisions in everything because I carefully chose only those people and places which offered me peacefulness and love" (Rylant 1989). In the 1989 Beacon interview, Rylant would state that "I now have a sense of knowing exactly what I want in my life. . . . It's so simple to get it" (Umrigar 1989).

On her own again, Rylant bought a house in Kent, Ohio. She describes it as "a sweet house for my son and me, an old house with lovely old cabinets and oak moulding and a front porch swing and a garden" (Nakamura 1992). She also came to the painful awareness that, in spite of her naturally trusting nature, not everyone was worthy of her trust. And so, she says,

> I chose a few good, faithful friends--people I could trust completely and with whom I felt happy--and these few became my family. All the many others in my life who took so many bits and pieces of me but gave not a whole lot back, I let these fall away (Nakamura 1992).

She continued to write and, in 1991, she worked for a short time as an instructor at Northeast Ohio Universities College of Medicine in Rootstown, Ohio near Kent. As Rylant successfully supported herself and her child, feelings of contentment and peace finally reentered her life.

Like her four years in Cool Ridge, the rest of her years in Kent were quiet ones. In her 1992 autobiography, Best Wishes, Rylant describes a typical day:

> I help Nate fold his papers for his paper route at 5:30 a.m. When he goes off to school, I have a cup of tea and I read or I answer mail from children. Then the dogs and I go for our walk in Towner's Woods. Martha runs ahead, Leia pokes behind, and I'm always somewhere in the middle. This is my best time of day. If it is a day when I feel like writing, I will come home and sit quietly outside with a pen and some paper. I daydream. Then I write.

"I like to stay home," Rylant says, "and I rarely make author appearances. I never go to New York--all my work is done through the mail" (Nakamura 1992).

Throughout her life, Cynthia Rylant has expressed her love for nature and animals. She says she loves "to watch whales, sea otters, and dolphins" (Commire 1988) and at home, she enjoys planting flowers and feeding the birds. She and Nate have two dogs (big white Martha Jane and little black Leia) as well as two cats (Blueberry and Edward Velvetpaws). "We have buried other pets in the backyard, near my garden: my dear cat Tomato, a guinea pig named Spam, a parakeet named Rocky, a baby bat, a baby chipmunk, a baby squirrel, [and] countless birds" (Nakamura 1992).

When she's not working on a new book, Rylant enjoys making quilts, browsing in bookstores, visiting friends, seeing foreign films, and rearranging the furniture in her house, which has become "a never-ending source of amusement

to her friends" (Umrigar 1989). She describes herself as a Christian, a Democrat, and a fan of "Woody Allen, Vincent van Gogh, James Agee, Don McLean, and Calvin and Hobbes" (Commire 1988). Like her mother, Rylant doesn't go to PTA meetings or to church very often. She says she spent most of her life "worrying why I didn't want to do what most other people want or are expected to do. I still worry a little, in weak moments," she confesses. "But age has given me a power and a serenity that gets me through those times of insecurity" (Nakamura 1992).

Several times a year, she and Nate would drive down to Cool Ridge. Her mother lives in a trailer "just up the hill from the Baptist church" (Nakamura 1992). Her grandfather died when she was 21 but, she says,

> my grandmother still lives in the same little house I wrote about in <u>When I Was Young in the Mountains</u>. Those relatives in <u>The Relatives Came</u> still drive up to visit, Uncle Dean still plants this year's garden. And when I sleep in my mother's trailer among the trees, I hear the sounds of the night in the country (Rylant 1992).

While visiting, one of her favorite things to do is sit at her grandmother's kitchen table and talk and catch up on all the news.

When she goes to West Virginia, she takes lots of copies of her latest book(s) to give to her relatives. "They're all very proud of my books" (Rylant 1992). Looking back on her life, Cynthia Rylant says:

> I had no self-esteem growing up because we were low-income Appalachian. It is so degrading when you're held up to the rest of the world and try to keep up with them. You are economically, culturally, and in many other ways deprived. Writing the books has given me a sense of self-worth that I didn't have my whole childhood. I am really proud of them. They have carried me through some troubled times and have made me feel that I am worthy of having a place on this earth (Silvey 1987).

As much as she loves West Virginia, however, "she doubts she will ever live [there] again" (Burnside 1993).

For many years now, Cynthia Rylant has lived in Ohio. When asked how living in Ohio has influenced her, she says that "it's where I've grown up" (Rylant 1993). It's where she established her adult lifestyle, raised Nate by herself, and developed a lot of patience and even wisdom. She says she probably couldn't have written such intense, mature works as Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds, A Couple of Kooks: and Other Stories About Love, or Missing May when she was younger.

In January 1993 when Cynthia Rylant received the phone call telling her that she had won the Newbery Award for Missing May, she says she cried. With the Newbery Honor award for A Fine White Dust, she had come close--but not quite close enough. And so, she says

> The best part about winning the Newbery . . . is that [I'll] never again be faced with the question, "When are you going to win the Newbery?"
> It used to make me feel so bad . . . I'm so grateful I'll never have to answer that question again. It's a big hump that I got over (Umrigar 1993).

Cynthia Rylant recently donated her manuscripts to the special collections of the Kent State University Library. There, on April 15, 1993, a reception was held in her honor and she made what could prove to be her final appearance at Kent State University. She talked about how, in spite of having everything she could possible desire, she had been feeling unhappy for the last couple of years. It finally occurred to her that she needed a major change. She and Dav Pilkey, her boyfriend and fellow children's author and illustrator, decided to move out west to Oregon. Together they flew out to investigate and, as they were driving from the airport into the city of Eugene, Rylant saw a house for sale and fell in love with it. She and Pilkey stopped to look at it. The realtor just happened to be there and Rylant bought the house on the spot.

For someone who's never lived more than five hours from the place she grew up, this is a bold move for Rylant, who says

> I'm calling it my grand adventure. I like Oregon for much of the same reasons I love West Virginia. It has mountains (Burnside 1993).

In June of 1993, after a long cross-country drive with her pets, Cynthia Rylant would begin to call Oregon her home.

Thrity Umrigar, a reporter for the Akron Beacon Journal, has written several stories about Cynthia Rylant and, over the years, she and Rylant have developed a close relationship. In fact, in 1990, Rylant dedicated A Couple of Kooks to

Thrity Umrigar. And so it is interesting to look at Cynthia Rylant's life from the perspective of someone who knows her well:

> In many ways, Cynthia is living out a fairy tale. But the easy, almost magical quality of her life is deceptive. It hides the long years of pain, growth and struggle that have brought her to this place. Like many of her books, Rylant's life is a testimony to one simple message: If you dream long enough and hard enough, dreams do come true (Umrigar 1989).

BOOKS BY CYNTHIA RYLANT

All I See. Pictures by Peter Catalanotto. New York: Orchard Books, 1988. (32 pages)

Dedication: "To Scott Savage, who loves the light."

Gregory is an artist who spends his days by the lake painting. When he gets tired, he and his cat ride in his canoe into the lake, lay down, and drift. Charlie, a shy young boy who spends his summers at the lake, is intrigued by Gregory. While Gregory is drifting in his canoe, Charlie sneaks over to see what he's painting and it's always whales. One day, the canvas is blank so, while Gregory's drifting and dreaming, Charlie leaves a painting for him--it's a picture of Gregory painting and whistling. Gregory is both gracious and dashing, helping Charlie overcome his shyness and teaching him to paint. Peter Catalanotto's paintings are lush with blues and greens, shadows and light that dapple and dazzle with full movement, making this feel like a summertime picture book.

Awards/Honors: Junior Literary Guild selection

Reviews: Booklist, 9/1/88.
Publishers Weekly, 8/12/88.
School Library Journal, 9/88.

An Angel for Solomon Singer. Paintings by Peter Catalanotto. New York: Orchard Books, 1992. (32 pages)

Dedication: "For Scott Rubsman . . . and for Angel."

Originally from rural Indiana, Solomon Singer lives alone in a hotel in New York City. It has none of the comforts of a real home--he's not allowed to have pets or paint his walls. And he has no one to love him. Since "it is important to love where you live," and since Solomon Singer does not love where he lives, he wanders and imagines fields and stars and crickets. One night he wanders into a cafe. On their menu, it reads "The Westway Cafe--where all your dreams come true." A kindly waiter named Angel makes Solomon Singer feel welcome, so he comes back every night to order his food and his dreams. Over time, Solomon Singer comes to love the home and city where he now lives. Peter Catalanotto's rich, lifelike paintings bring this picture book to life.

Review: Kirkus, 2/1/92.

Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds. Illustrated by Barry Moser. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1991. (32 pages)

Dedication: "For all the Rylants, especially my mother, Leatrel."

Appalachia is a brilliant nonfiction portrayal of the Appalachian people. Through the poignant, poetic text of Cynthia Rylant and the rich, realistic illustrations of Barry Moser, Appalachia completely dispels the myths that Appalachians are "hillbillys." Both author and illustrator grew up in the Appalachian regions of the United States. Through their shared sensitivity, Rylant and Moser bring all the human, universal qualities of their people to life, that the rest of us may better understand. The subtitle, The Voices of Sleeping Birds, comes from the work of another southern writer--James Agee.

When Cynthia Rylant accepted the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for this book, she expressed her deepest gratitude to her family and neighbors of Cool Ridge, West Virginia, "who," she said, "keep the book on their coffee tables and pick it up and read it again every few days and who always knew, deep down, that they were worth writing about."

Awards/Honors: Boston Globe/Horn Book Award for Nonfiction, 1991

Reviews: Booklist, 2/1/91.
Publishers Weekly, 3/1/91.

Best Wishes. ("Meet the Author" series). Photographs by Carlo Ontal. Katonah, New York: Richard C. Owens Publishers, 1992. (32 pages)

This is an exceptional example of an autobiography written expressly for children in the primary grades. The color photographs by Carlo Ontal are thoughtfully composed and visually draw you into Cynthia Rylant's personal life as you meet her son Nate, her dogs Martha Jane and Leia, her cats Blueberry and Edward Velvetpaws, as you follow Cynthia Rylant in a typical day of her life, and travel with her to West Virginia where you get to meet her mom and her grandma. The map included to show you the distance between her Kent, Ohio home and where she was raised in West Virginia is obsolete with her recent move to Oregon.

Birthday Presents. Pictures by Suçie Stevenson. New York: Orchard Books, 1987. (32 pages)

Dedication: "To the Berrigans, celebrating Sarah and Sam and my own Nate."

This is a warm story of a little girl told from her parents' point of view. The fun illustrations were drawn by Suçie Stevenson, illustrator of the "Henry and Mudge" series. The text of this picture book travels through memories of the little girl's birthdays, from the day of her birth (her "real birthday") to her sixth birthday. The young family celebrates her first birthday with a star birthday cake in the park. Her second birthday is celebrated with family friends and a clown cake. On her third birthday, she has the flu--her parents still celebrate--this time with a train cake. She celebrates her fourth birthday with three of her friends and a robot cake. On her fifth birthday, they bake a dinosaur cake and she takes them to the park. Before she turns six, she starts to celebrate her parents' birthdays by picking flowers and making cards for them. In the end they look at the little girl's baby pictures and remember her real birthday.

Awards/Honors: Children's Choice Book.

Reviews: Publishers Weekly, 6/26/87.
School Library Journal, 9/87.

A Blue-Eyed Daisy. New York: Bradbury Press, 1985. (99 pages).

Dedication: "For Gerry."

A juvenile novel divided into four sections (Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer), this is a series of vignettes that take place over the course of a year in Ellie's life. Ellie, the main character, is a kind, sensitive young girl who is twelve by the end of the story. A female audience will sympathize with Ellie's fears and problems, as she tries to win the acceptance of her father, who is both a permanently disabled coal miner and an alcoholic. Readers will also share Ellie's hopes and dreams as she experiences her first kiss and begins to unfurl as a young lady. Throughout this period of her life, Ellie always finds an easy companionship with Bullet, the family dog. A Blue-Eyed Daisy is a heart-warming look at a very lovable character, inspired by Cynthia Rylant's best childhood friend, Cindy Mills.

Awards/Honors: American Library Association Notable Book for Children
Child Study Association of America's Children's Book of the Year, 1985
Children's Choice Book

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
Your Reading: A Booklist for Junior High and Middle School Students.

But I'll Be Back Again: An Album. New York: Orchard Books, 1989. (64 pages)

Dedication: "This is for them all."

This is Cynthia Rylant's first autobiography (Best Wishes is her second). Rylant's story is honest, sensitive, and often emotionally painful due to the separations and losses that she suffered. In detail, she discusses her parents' separation at age 4, life with her grandparents in Cool Ridge while she was separated from her mother who was away studying to be a nurse, and life with her mother in their Beaver apartment. Rylant reveals her childhood loves, the boys and the kissing, and the awe she felt for the Beatles, for an orchestra conductor, and for Robert Kennedy. She provides frank accounts of her experiences with puberty, religion, and her father's death.

Each chapter begins with a quote from a Beatles song. Even the title comes from a Beatles song ("I'll Be Back"). Personal black and white photographs show Cynthia as a little girl, with her Mom and Dad, with her cousins, dancing, and kissing. An article reproduced from a local West Virginia newspaper shows a seven-year-old Rylant waiting her turn to choose a Christmas toy at Mac's Memorial Toy Fund Party. In addition, a letter to her from her father is reproduced.

Reviews: Booklist, 5/15/89.
Publishers Weekly, 2/24/89.
School Library Journal, 7/89.

Children of Christmas: Stories for the Season. Drawings by S.D. Schindler. New York: Orchard Books, 1987. (38 pages)

Dedication: "For my dear family of choice."

Children of Christmas is a collection of six

surprising Christmas stories realistically illustrated in black and white by S.D. Schindler, who also illustrated Rylant's collection of animal stories, Every Living Thing. The first story, "The Christmas Tree Man," was reprinted in the "Read Aloud" feature of the Washington Post's 1990 Christmas Eve edition. It tells the tale of a lonely man and how the Christmas trees he grows become like children to him. "Halfway Home" is the story of a cat who finds a home in a diner on Christmas Eve. The third story, "For Being Good," evolves around the intergenerational relationship between a young boy and his depressed grandfather as they begin to share themselves with each other. "Ballerinas and Bears" is the story of a homeless woman and how a small caring gesture on the part of an Asian man makes her feel loved on Christmas Eve. "Silver Packages" is a story of gifts and how a young boy who never got his doctor's kit for Christmas ends up becoming a doctor as an adult. The final story, "All the Stars in the Sky," is about Mae, a homeless woman who is sick, and how she finds refuge in a library at Christmas time.

Reviews: Booklist, 9/1/87.
Publishers Weekly, 7/10/87.

A Couple of Kooks and Other Stories about Love. New York: Orchard Books, 1990. (104 pages)

Dedication: "To Thrity."

A Couple of Kooks is a collection of eight unconventional love stories. The title story, which is the final story, is, perhaps, the finest, touching deepest of all as we witness a teenaged couple talking and guiding their unborn child that will be put up for adoption. The first story, "A Crush," is about Ernie, a mentally-disabled man, who falls in love with Dolores and courts her from a distance with the flowers he learns to grow. "Checkouts" is the story of a mutual attraction that never ignites because neither character takes the initiative step to express their interest in the other. The story "Certain Rainbows" is the train of thought of a 75-year-old man during his granddaughter's wedding: he knows that life can be very, very long but, at the same time, is able to appreciate beauty in things that are fleeting. "His Just Due" is the story of unemployed Boyd who never comes in as the winner until he finds love in a diner. "Do You Know That Feeling?" is the letter Crystal writes in her journal to her dead mother, discussing her love for a young man she plans to marry after high school. "Clematis" is the touching story of Ruth who finally comes to know what

real love is in her short, third marriage. "On the Brink" is the confession of a young man who is in love with two different women: Mary Anne, "because she thinks I'm safe, and I want to be" and Janice, "because she thinks I'm not and I am so damned grateful for that possibility." This very human collection of stories will move the hearts of grown-ups and young adults alike.

Reviews: Booklist, 9/15/90.
Publishers Weekly, 6/22/90.
School Library Journal, 9/90.

Every Living Thing. Decorations by S.D. Schindler. New York: Bradbury Press, 1985. (81 pages)

Dedication: "For Gerry and all the living things we have loved."

There aren't too many collections of short stories written for intermediate grade students--Every Living Thing is certainly one of the finest. Its stories reveal the joy, hope, and sometimes universal understanding that arise from the relationships between people and animals.

A learning disabled student achieves feelings of success and pride through his turtle in "Slower Than the Rest." A retired schoolteacher who no longer feels needed is drawn back into the world of children through the collie dog she adopts in "Retired." Everyone in Glen Morgan is afraid of the wild boar that lives in the woods in the story "Boar Out There. After her own encounter with the animal, Jenny realizes that the boar with his torn bloody ears, is equally afraid of all of them. "Papa's Parrot" will produce a lump in the reader's throat as they watch Harry stop visiting his father's store after school because his father embarrasses him. Only after his father is hospitalized and Henry must tend the store does he find out, through what his father's parrot says, how very much his father has missed his visits. "A Pet" is about Emma who wants a pet so bad that her parents finally relent and get her a goldfish; we see how much a goldfish can be loved. In "Spaghetti," Gabriel wishes he could live outside instead of in his crumbling building until he finds a tiny gray kitten and takes it home. In "Drying Out," a veteran, hospitalized for his alcoholism, slowly begins to heal when he befriends the squirrels outside his window. In "Stray," Doris finds an abandoned puppy following a terrible blizzard. Her father says she can keep it until the roads are clear and he can take it to the dog pound. In spite of their impoverished household, Doris' father

has a change of heart. "Planting Things" is the story of Mr. Willis, a man who likes to plant things, and a robin who builds her nest in his ivy. In "A Bad Road for Cats," Magda loses her cat and sets out to find him. "Safe" is the story of a young boy named Denny who, with his mother's constant talk, lives with an undercurrent fear of nuclear warfare and how the cows on his uncle's farm with their peaceful brown eyes make him feel safe. In "Shells," Michael, an orphan who is taken in by his wealthy aunt, buys himself a hermit crab and, through his unusual pet, finds a special closeness with his aunt.

An animal lover and on-again-off-again vegetarian, Rylant expresses her keen, perceptive sensitivity about animals.

Awards/Honors: School Library Journal Best Book, 1985

Reviews: Publishers Weekly, 9/20/85.
School Library Journal, 12/85.

A Fine White Dust. New York: Bradbury Press, 1986. (106 pages)

Dedication: "To Dick, for help
To Dawna and Diane, for friendship
To Gerry and Nate, for everything."

A Fine White Dust is the story of Pete, a 13-year-old boy. In spite of his parents who won't go to church and his best friend who is a "confirmed atheist," Pete has a faith in God that is so strong that he is willing to leave his loved ones and run off with a charismatic preacher, just so the man won't be lonely like Jesus was. Told from Pete's point of view, the reader will feel Pete's total devastation when the preacher, James W. Carson (initials J.C.), turns out to be a fake and abandons him. In the 1987 Horn Book interview, Cynthia Rylant says this was the riskiest and most difficult book she had written up to that point. She talks of Pete as being "a child seized with a love of a higher being," adding, "I think there are such children in our world, and no one seems to want to talk about them." Although religion is a major theme in this juvenile book, Rylant states that "the primary theme is that longing for pure love, that longing for total, unconditional love, whether from your parents, your best friend, or God." After some deep soul-searching, Pete realizes how blessed he is to be unconditionally loved by his parents and best friend who never once abandon him through this heart-breaking time of his life.

Awards/Honors: Newbery Honor Book, 1987
Horn Book honor list
Parents' Choice selection, 1986
Best Books for Young Adults, 1986

Reviews: Booklist, 9/86.
Publishers Weekly, 6/27/87.
School Library Journal, 9/86.

Henry and Mudge: The First Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1987. (40 pages).

Dedication: "For Nate and his dog."

Henry is based on Cynthia Rylant's son, Nate, and Mudge is based on a 180-pound English Mastiff they once had. The "Henry and Mudge" series is for beginning readers. "Henry and Mudge" books are chapter books.

In the first book, Henry, an only child, is lonely and wants a brother, wants to live on another street, and he wants a dog. His parents give in. They choose the puppy Mudge, who grows out of seven collars, finally weighing in at 180 pounds and 3 feet tall. Henry used to have to walk to school alone and would worry about "tornadoes, ghosts, biting dogs, and bullies." Now he walks to school with Mudge and has happy thoughts during his walk. Mudge loves Henry's room, especially his bed because that's where Henry sleeps. One day Mudge takes a walk alone and gets lost. Henry misses Mudge and calls for him. Henry realizes Mudge must be lost so he goes out looking for him and finds him. Afterwards, Mudge dreams about being lost and alone and Henry dreams about Mudge being lost and alone and they both know that Mudge will always stay close by Henry now.

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
School Library Journal, 5/87.

Henry and Mudge in Puddle Trouble: The Second Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1987. (48 pages)

Dedication: "For the Halems: Sandy, Henry, and Jess."

Winter is over, Spring is here. Henry and Mudge find a blue flower, a snow glory. Henry wants to pick it but his mother tells him to let it grow. Finally Henry

can stand it no longer and goes to pick it. Henry says to Mudge, "I need it," but Mudge misunderstands, thinking Henry said to "eat it." So he does. Henry is mad but when he looks at Mudge's big brown eyes, he just can't stay mad. April brings lots of rain. Henry and Mudge are bored indoors. So they go outside without asking for permission. Mudge gets wet and shakes all over Henry. They find a giant puddle, an "ocean puddle." Unable to resist it, they both jump in. Henry's father finds them, scolds them for not asking permission, Mudge shakes water all over Henry and his father. Unable to resist, Henry's father jumps in to the puddle, too. In May, the cat next door has kittens. Henry and Mudge love them and visit them whenever they're in their box outside. One day while Henry is at school, a new dog arrives, puts his teeth into the box, and tries to get the kittens. Mudge comes to protect the kittens and scares the strange dog away, lays down by the box, and goes to sleep until Henry gets home.

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
School Library Journal, 5/87.

Henry and Mudge in the Green Time: The Third Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1987. (48 pages)

Dedication: "For Evan Harper and his folks."

In the summer, Henry and Mudge go on lots of picnics. On one of them, Henry gets stung by a bee, cries, and Mudge licks away all the tears until Henry is smiling again. On hot days, Henry gives Mudge a bath. Henry likes it because the water from the hose cools him off, but Mudge doesn't like it and hides. Henry always finds him, hoses him down, and scrubs him up. But Mudge always gets Henry back by shaking water all over him. When he's done, he's almost dry but Henry is all wet. There's a big green hill next to Henry's house and in the late summer afternoon, that's where Henry and Mudge go. At the top of the hill, Henry is king and Mudge is his dragon. They chase all the other kings and dragons away, march and conquer monsters. And fall asleep under the magic tree.

Awards/Honors: Junior Literary Guild Selection

Reviews: Booklist, 12/1/87.
Publishers Weekly, 9/25/87.
School Library Journal, 11/87.

Henry and Mudge Under the Yellow Moon: The Fourth Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Suçie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1987. (48 pages)

Dedication: "For Tony Manna and Rebecca Cross."

In the fall, Henry and Mudge enjoy long walks in the woods, the colorful leaves, counting the birds flying south, and being together. Henry loves everything about Halloween except the ghost stories, which his mother just loves to tell. So on Halloween, Henry and Mudge and Henry's friends gather for the ghost stories. They're all scared as Henry's mother tells a tale of a pair of shoes that go walking at night, looking for something unexplained. They all hear a clicking sound like shoes. Even Henry's mother is frightened. The clicking sound turns out to be Mudge's teeth chattering as he is the most frightened of them all. Henry's Aunt Sally always visits for two weeks in November. Henry doesn't like her: she eats too much, talks too much, and hogs the TV. She hasn't met Mudge yet, either, and Henry just bets Aunt Sally hates dogs. But it turns out that Aunt Sally does love dogs. Mudge is now all she talks about as she feeds him lots of crackers. This year Henry has something new to be thankful for.

Reviews: Booklist, 12/1/87.
Booklist, 3/15/88.
School Library Journal, 4/88.

Henry and Mudge in the Sparkle Days: The Fifth Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Suçie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1988. (48 pages)

Dedication: "To Casey and Jane Rehm."

Winter has arrived. Henry and Mudge love snow and wait for it to come. Finally it does and they enjoy a day in it. On December 24th, Henry's parents cook and bake. On Christmas Eve they all get dressed up for a fancy homecooked meal in the dining room instead of the kitchen. Mudge has to stay in his room, though, and he cries. Henry's parents make up a plate for Mudge and let him into the dining room for his first fancy dinner. The family takes walks in the beautiful winter nights, then come home and snuggle together by the fireplace, with Henry and Mudge on the floor and Henry's parents hugging on the couch.

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
Booklist, 10/1/88.
School Library Journal, 10/88.

Henry and Mudge and the Forever Sea: The Sixth Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1989. (48 pages)

Dedication: "To Cheryl and Marc."

Henry and Mudge and Henry's father pack up for their trip to the beach. Mudge has never been to the beach before. During the drive, Henry's father says "Yo-ho-ho" about a hundred times, Henry acts like a shark, and Mudge just wags his tail. Finally they arrive. The three run to the beach, jump into the water, and play. They go to a hotdog stand for lunch, then build a castle. A wave knocks it down and pulls Henry's father's red rubber lobster out to sea. Mudge rescues the lobster and they celebrate with cherry sno-cones. Before leaving, they take a walk along the beach as the sun sets. Mudge chases a sand crab into a hole and then stops to check every hole as Henry and his father enjoy one more cherry sno-cone.

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
Booklist, 3/1/89.
School Library Journal, 7/89.

Henry and Mudge Get the Cold Shivers: The Seventh Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1989. (48 pages)

Dedication: "To Jennifer and Karen Stone."

Mudge loves it when Henry gets sick because Henry gets to stay home from school, plus his mother and father buy him goodies, including crackers which Henry always feeds to Mudge. One day, Mudge gets sick. Henry and his mother load Mudge into the car and take him to the vet. Mudge is so nervous that he shivers until he sheds. Henry is worried. The veterinarian examines Mudge. She tells Henry that Mudge has a cold, that Henry musn't kiss Mudge but that he must give Mudge his medicine and let him rest. When they get home, Henry and his mother fix Mudge a sickbed with all of Mudge's favorite toys and crackers. Mudge won't eat the crackers so Henry does. But the next day, Mudge is better, eats all the crackers, and gives Henry a big kiss.

Reviews: Booklist, 9/15/89.
School Library Journal, 9/89.

Henry and Mudge and the Happy Cat: The Eighth Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1990. (48 pages)

Dedication: "To the Peacocks: Nancy, Larry, Aaron, and Natalie."

A shabby cat shows up at Henry and Mudge's house. Henry's father brings it inside. The cat drinks three bowls of milk. Mudge licks its face. Henry's father says the cat can stay until they find a home for it. Within a week, the shabby cat becomes a happy cat. He loves Henry and Mudge's house and he especially loves Mudge. He becomes Mudge's "mother," washing Mudge all over with his tongue. Mudge doesn't mind--he loves the cat. Henry's mother and father like the cat but they don't want another pet so they make posters to help find a home for the cat. Henry and Mudge distribute the posters throughout town. When they come home, they find the cat sitting with Henry's parents on the couch. A lot of people come to see the shabby-looking cat but nobody wants it. One day a policeman comes to the door. He wants to see the cat. It turns out to be his cat, Dave! The cat is happy to see his owner. After they leave, Henry and Mudge are very sad. The next day they find a big box on their porch. Inside are 30 huge dog bones and a gold police badge.

Awards/Honors: 1993 Garden State Children's Award.

Reviews: Booklist, 6/1/90.

Henry and Mudge and the Bedtime Thumps: The Ninth Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1991. (40 pages)

Dedication: "To Patrick Perkowski, our good family friend."

Henry and Mudge and Henry's parents are going to visit their Grandmother in the country. Henry's grandmother has never met Mudge and Henry is worried that Mudge might be a problem. If Mudge has to sleep outside, Henry will have to sleep inside a strange house--all alone. They arrive at Grandmother's house and she finally meets Mudge. She greets him just as she greets Henry: with a "Hello, Sweetie" and a tight hug. Inside, the house is small with lots of tables and lots of things on the tables. Mudge is too big and soon he is knocking things over. Sure enough, out he goes! Night time comes. Mudge must sleep outside.

Henry feels bad for Mudge and scared for himself. A moth scares Henry and he runs outside for Mudge who is sleeping on the porch. Mudge is glad to see Henry. Together, they sleep outside on the porch.

Reviews: Booklist, 1/1/91.
School Library Journal, 4/91.

Henry and Mudge Take the Big Test: The Tenth Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1991. (40 pages)

Dedication: "To Jack and Sally Papp, and all the good dogs they've trained."

Henry, Mudge, and Henry's mother see a well-behaved collie and decide maybe Mudge should go to school. Henry goes shopping for Mudge's first day of school and buys a leash, a collar, liver treats, and a paddle-ball for himself because he is nervous and when he is nervous, he likes to play paddle-ball. When they get to dog school, Mudge jumps up on the teacher who dances around with Mudge until Mudge won't jump up on him anymore. For eight weeks, Henry and Mudge go to school and practice at home. The big test takes place on the last day of school. Mudge passes his test and is awarded a certificate, a gold ribbon, and a giant dog biscuit.

Reviews: Booklist, 10/15/91.
Kirkus, 8/15/91.
School Library Journal, 9/91.

Henry and Mudge and the Long Weekend: The Eleventh Book of Their Adventure. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1992. (40 pages)

Dedication: "For Stephanie, the newest Rylant."

One Saturday in February it is cold and wet and gray outside. Henry and Mudge have to stay indoors and wonder what they're going to do all weekend. The whole morning is boring. Mudge keeps falling asleep. Soon, Henry and his father are asleep, too. But Henry's mother gets an idea. Why not make a castle out of the refrigerator and stove boxes? They all head down to the basement. They gather their supplies and begin the transformation of the boxes. They have a pizza delivered. Each imagines how the castle will look when it's finished. They work

the rest of the afternoon. Sunday, the dreary weather continues but Henry doesn't mind. He's excited to finish the castle. Together, he and his father finish the work, become "knights," dub Mudge "king," and show their castle to Henry's mother.

Reviews: Kirkus, 3/1/92.

Henry and Mudge and the Wild Wind: The Twelfth Book of Their Adventures. Pictures by Sucie Stevenson. New York: Bradbury Press, 1993. (40 pages)

Dedication: "To Cousin Pete."

Henry and Mudge are outside playing and a wind whips up. Thunderstorms make both of them nervous and they hurry home. The rain begins, followed by thunder and lightning. Mudge hides in the bathroom. Henry urges him to come out. The lights go out. Mudge puts his head in the couch. Henry is just as nervous. His father suggests he play a game: free Mudge, who is a prisoner in the enemy camp. Henry frees Mudge who then retreats to the bathroom. During the rest of the storm, Henry and his parents play cards in the kitchen. The storm stops. The lights come back on. And Henry and Mudge go back outside. Above them, a giant rainbow glows.

Throughout the "Henry and Mudge" series, Sucie Stevenson's colorful watercolor illustrations are cheerful and humorous.

A Kindness. New York: Orchard Books, 1988. (117 pages)

The introduction to the book is part of a poem by William Dickey, called "A Kindness." This is a young adult novel about 15-year-old Chip. Chip lives with his mother, a creative but flighty artist. It is Chip who handles the practical household matters, such as repairing the vacuum cleaner and comparing prices at the grocery store. Chip also has a girlfriend, Jeannie, who he plans to marry. His world is suddenly turned upside down when Jeannie leaves him and his single-parent mother announces she's pregnant and plans on keeping the baby. A Kindness, says Cynthia Rylant in The Sixth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators, is "about people who are learning to let go of each other, learning not to try to control each other." And that is exactly the painful and difficult challenge that Chip must face.

Awards/Honors: Best Book for Young Adults, 1988

Reviews: Booklist, 9/15/88.
Publishers Weekly, 8/12/88.

Missing May. New York: Orchard Books, 1992. (90 pages).

Dedication: "For Marvin O. Mitchell, my most extraordinary teacher."

As reported by USA Today on January 26, 1993, "the inspiration for Missing May occurred when Rylant, 38, was driving through the mountains and saw a girl and an old man in a trailer." What Rylant imagined was that the girl had previously been an unwanted orphan in Ohio until her West Virginia relatives May and Ob adopted her and took her home. As May would say: "We wanted a family so bad, all of us. And we just grabbed onto each another and made us one. Simple as that." In their trailer home, 12-year-old Summer experiences a divine love and paradise like she never knew. When Aunt May dies, Summer, a survivor, recognizes that Ob has lost his will to live and is dying of a broken heart. Summer and Ob are joined by Cletus, an eccentric boy who collects "anything with a story to it." Wanting to believe unconditionally that there is an afterlife where, as May said, "when we were finished being people we'd go back to being angels," the three struggle to hear May talking to them from beyond the grave. After they set out to find the Reverend Miriam B. Young, "a Small Medium at Large," who they believe can put them directly in touch with May, Ob and Summer finally come to accept May's death and to understand that May is, indeed, with them and that she will always be with them because, as Ob concludes, "People don't ever leave us for good."

This 1993 Newbery Award winner is guaranteed to move hearts and bring tears to anyone of any age. It is a genuine masterpiece.

Awards/Honors: Newbery Award, 1993
Boston Globe/Horn Book award for Fiction, 1992

Reviews: Adventuring with Books.
Kirkus, 1/15/92.
Publishers Weekly, 2/3/92.

Miss Maggie. Illustrated by Thomas DiGrazia. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983. (32 pages)

Dedication: "For Nathaniel and his Nana."

Set in rural Appalachia, Miss Maggie is the tender story of the intergenerational friendship that evolves between Young Nat and his neighbor Old Miss Maggie. Miss Maggie lives in a rotting log cabin and legend has it that a black snake lives inside up in the rafters. As a result, the young people are afraid to enter her home. Young Nat is often sent there by his grandmother to deliver food and, while he never goes inside, he sometimes peeps into her windows but he never sees the snake in the rafters. One winter day when all the folks are holed up inside their homes, Nat doesn't see the usual smoke rising from Miss Maggie's chimney. He runs to her delapitated home and, ignoring his fear, goes inside the dark, cold room. There, he finds poor Old Miss Maggie huddled in a corner cradling a bundle of rags. Inside the bundle is Henry, a dead bird. Nat takes Miss Maggie by the hand and leads her to his own home where his grandfather will know what to do. From that day on, the two become friends. Thomas DiGrazia's black and white illustrations effectively support the text of this heart-warming picture book.

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
Booklist, 9/86.

Mr. Griggs' Work. Illustrated by Julie Downing. New York: Orchard Books, 1989. (32 pages)

Dedication: "For Bill and George, two great guys at the Kent P.O."

Conducting most of her work by mail, Cynthia Rylant is completely familiar with the U.S. Postal system and it is, perhaps, out of gratitude to the postal workers she has come to know, that she pays this tribute. In fact she has dedicated this book to "Bill and George, two great guys at the Kent P.O."

In this picture book, cheerfully illustrated by Julie Downing, Old Mr. Griggs works at the post office in a small rural community. He loves his job, in which he takes great pride, and he loves his customers, with whom he is on a first-name basis. When Mr. Griggs becomes sick, all he thinks about is his job. Recuperated, he happily returns to his satisfying work.

While the plot is simplistic, this would be an excellent picture book to use in a primary classroom

studying about the community post office. Vocabulary words and phrases used in the text include: Post office, first class, parcel post, express mail, special delivery, scale, meters, punchers, weighing, ounce, pound, boxes, parcel, package, and dead letter.

Reviews: Booklist, 2/1/89.
Publishers Weekly, 12/23/88.
School Library Journal, 4/89.

Night in the Country. Pictures by Mary Szilagyi. New York: Bradbury Press, 1986. (32 pages)

Dedication: "For Bob Verrone."

Anyone who has ever lived out in the country can attest to the opening line of this highly-acclaimed picture book: "There is no night so dark, so black as night in the country." And if you lay awake in your bed late at night "you will hear the sounds of night in the country all around you." Night in the Country takes its readers through a passage of time between sunset and sunrise into a black world where owls swoop and frogs sing, where a dog's chain clinks and a screen door creaks. It is a world in which you hear "pump!," an apple fall and the rabbits pattering into your yard to eat that apple. Mary Szilagyi's color-pencil illustrations artfully depict the way light fades and reemerges during this portion of our 24-hour day. A good text for teaching onomatopoeia.

Awards/Honors: Junior Literary Guild selection

Reviews: Publishers Weekly, 4/25/86.
Best Books for Children.
School Library Journal, 5/86.

The Relatives Came. Illustrated by Stephen Gammell. New York: Bradbury Press, 1985.

Dedication: "For Aunt Agnes Little and her brood,
Dick Jackson and his, Gerry and ours."

A Caldecott Honor Book and critically-acclaimed, The Relatives Came is based on Cynthia Rylant's memories of her life with her grandparents in Cool Ridge, West Virginia. Every summer, the Virginia relatives would load up their station wagon and drive all day for their long summer visit with the young girl and her grandparents. The large extended family

depicted in this romping picture book is filled with love and affection. Hugging and crying and laughing and eating and breathing and more hugging abound. Stephen Gammell's color-pencil illustrations are delightfully human. This is a picture book that inspires joy.

Awards/Honors: Caldecott Honor book, 1986
New York Times Choice of Best Illustrated Children's Book of the Year, 1985
American Library Association Notable Book
Child Study Association of America's Children's Book of the Year, 1985
Horn Book Honor book, 1985
Notable Children's Trade Book in the field of Social Studies, 1985

Reviews: Booklist, 12/15/89.
School Library Journal, 10/85.
New York Times Book Review, 11/10/85.

Soda Jerk. Paintings by Peter Catalanotto. New York: Orchard Books, 1990. (48 pages)

Dedication: "For Dav Pilkey, in friendship and admiration."

Dedicated to fellow children's author, animal lover, and boyfriend Dav Pilkey, Soda Jerk is a collection of 28 young adult poems written from the point of view of a soda jerk, who works the soda fountain counter at Maywell's Drugstore in Cheston, Virginia. Through "his" poetry, the soda jerk discusses such personal issues as his life with his dad since his mom got remarried, his crush on an older woman, his dreams of becoming an actor and having "man-arms" instead of "these skinny-smooth white arms." He talks about such customers as the rich kids, the hippies, the jocks, and the popular girl and says their "tips are okay" but their "secrets are better." The soda jerk observes his employer, Mr. Maywell, as well as the old ladies who come in to cure their ailments, and the "sexual aids" sold in the drugstore. At times the soda jerk is extremely sensitive, as in the poem "Pansies." At other times he speaks cynically of things like the "Great American Family" and the "mighty hunters" with their "dead deer strapped to the cars." Five double-page paintings

by Peter Catalanotto, inspired by a soda fountain in Hudson, Ohio, bring the soda jerk's world to life.

Reviews: Booklist, 2/15/90.
Publishers Weekly, 1/19/90.
School Library Journal, 4/90.

This Year's Garden. Pictures by Mary Szilagyi. Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1984. (32 pages)

Dedication: "For Karen and Jennifer; Joe and Leeanne; Shannon, Kevin, and Jenny; and especially Megan and Nate."

Filled with warm colorful pencil illustrations, this picture book progresses through the seasons of a garden. The reader experiences the hard work of an extended family as they work the large garden together. This would be an excellent book to use in a primary classroom studying plants. Vocabulary words and phrases include: garden, dirt, soil, ground, plant, seeds, weed, stalks, vines, vegetables, potatoes, beans, tomatoes, eggplant, carrots, corn, straw hats, hoe, rain, frost, black birds, crows, blight, mole holes, beetles, grass spiders, rabbit, possum, picking, shucking, stewing, canning, and cellar.

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
Publishers Weekly, 1/23/87.
Science and Technology in Fact and Fiction: Child.

Waiting to Waltz: A Childhood. Drawings by Stephen Gammell. Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1984. (48 pages)

Dedication: "To Gerry and our life on Hawthorne."

This collection of thirty poems is autobiographical of Cynthia Rylant's life growing up with her mother in Beaver, West Virginia. Stephen Gammell's black and white drawings are simple and focused. The poems, appropriate for the intermediate grades, are told from an adolescent girl's point of view. She writes about the town (a "little strip of street called Beaver") and about Todd's Hardware, Henry's Market, and Sam the Shoe Shop Man. She discusses her neighbor Mr. Dill, the town drunks, and the landlord Mr. Lafon. She relates getting their mail through General Delivery, going to the Kool-Kup for lunch, and almost drowning in a real swimming pool. She talks

about a babysitter taking her to a Pentecostal Church, helping a younger girl home during a frightening thunderstorm, and goofing up in a spelling bee. Swearing and getting saved in church are dealt with as are becoming a majorette and wanting to be Catholic like some of the rich kids. In several poems she mourns the loss of animals who have been hit and killed by cars and how one time her mom buried what they thought was their own cat--until Cassius meows at the front door. Cynthia Rylant shares her own feelings as a young girl about her single working mother not being able to serve on the PTA and in the poem, "Forgotten," her readers will share in her grief over her father's sudden death: "Nobody else's dad had been so loved/by a four-year-old./And so forgotten by one/now/thirteen." In the end, the "young" poet dreams of a world beyond Beaver.

Awards/Honors: American Library Association Notable Book
School Library Journal Best Book, 1984
National Council for Social Studies Best Book, 1984
Society of Midland Authors Best Children's Book, 1985

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
Books Kids Will Sit Still For.

When I Was Young in the Mountains. Illustrated by Diane Goode. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982. (32 pages)

Dedication: "For my grandparents, Elda and Ferrell Rylant."

When I Was Young in the Mountains is, perhaps, the most well-known and best-loved of Cynthia Rylant's works. It is Cynthia Rylant's first book and artist Diane Goode won the Caldecott Honor Award for her honest inspired illustrations. It is autobiographical of those four years Cynthia Rylant spent living with her grandparents in the breathtaking Appalachia mountains. The text is direct yet poetic as it portrays the simple moments that make up a child's life: a kiss from her grandfather, a night trip to the outhouse with her grandmother, a meal of cornbread and pinto beans and fried okra, a dip in the swimming hole, a visit to Mr. Crawford's little general store, a chore of pumping pails of water for baths, a baptism at the Baptist Church, an encounter with a black snake, and a quiet, gentle evening sitting on the porch together. When I Was Young in the Mountains is a classic.

Awards/Honors: Caldecott Honor book, 1983
Teachers' Choice
American Library Association
Notable Book
Booklist Reviewer's Choice, 1982
American Book Award from the Association of American Publishers
1982 finalist
Ambassador of Honor Book Award from Books-Across-the-Sea Library, 1983
Horn Book Honor book, 1982
Reading Rainbow selection, 1983
Recognized by the National Council for Social Studies

Reviews: Best Books for Children.
Booklist, 3/87.
Books Kids Will Sit Still For.

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