

Lollipop power

Carrboro firm fights sexism in children's books

By LINDA ROBERTSON

Dick, Jane, Sally and Spot may never grow up, but those literary companions for generations of grade-schoolers have grown old and out of date. Lollipop Power, a feminist publishing collective based in Carrboro, can take some of the credit for the diminishing presence of stereotyped characters in children's books.

Lollipop's Power's goal since it was incorporated in 1971 has been to "counteract the sex and race stereotyping present in most commercially produced children's books."

The group would like to see children's literature dominated by strong female protagonists, like E.B. White's Charlotte the spider, rather than the typical, dependent Cinderella or Jane figure.

"It used to be that mothers were always mindless idiots—they were always wearing aprons and making cookies. The most challenging thing Mom did was search for a lost mitten," said Kathi Gallagher, a long-time member of Lollipop Power, who is now completing her dissertation in English at UNC. "The mothers never left home and the daughters gladly followed in their footsteps. These books didn't reflect what was going on in the U.S."

Although children's books have improved, many still present a narrow view of society, Gallagher said. Books are a powerful instrument of socialization, and can shape kids' perceptions of themselves and their world. Lollipop Power wants that to be a world of alternative choices and individuality.

"As recently as 1970, Simon and Schuster came out with a book called *I'm Glad I'm a Boy, I'm Glad I'm a Girl*, Gallagher said. "The text read something like: 'Boys play with trucks; girls play with dolls. Boys are strong; girls are graceful. Boys become policemen; girls become meter maids. Boys are football players; girls are cheerleaders. Boys build houses; girls clean houses. Boys fix things; girls need things fixed.' We're trying to offset these predominant stereotypes."

Lollipop seeks stories about minority children, self-sufficient girls and women, emotional and nurturant boys and men, and one-parent or working-parent families that are not all white and middle class.

"We've published 18 books, and 16 titles still in print," said Susan Ballinger, who works in the manuscript department of the UNC library system. "It's not our goal to make big bucks—our income and expenditures run neck and neck. Our goal is to print what traditional publishers won't."

Joshua's Day, by Sandra Lucas Surowiecki, is one of the collective's most popular titles and tells of a youngster's experiences at a daycare center. *Carlotta*



Percy Warren, employee of Lollipops Power, assembles children's books ... the publishing collective tries to counteract sex and race stereotypes.

and *the Scientist* is the tale of a curious female Emperor penguin who meets up with a female Antarctic scientist.

In *Jo, Flo and Yolanda*, by Carol de Poix, three urban sisters have dreams of becoming a world explorer, a baseball player and a restaurant owner. Carmen Good-year wrote and illustrated *The Sheep Book*, the story of a female farmer.

Maria Teresa, by Mary Atkinson, *Crownups Cry Too*, by Nancy Hazen, and *Jo, Flo and Yolanda* are published in Spanish and English. Lollipop Power has also published a *Bibliography of Materials on Sexism and Sex-Role Stereotyping in Children's Books*, compiled by Gallagher and Alice Peery.

Lollipop Power's newest book is *In Christina's Toolbox*, the story of an inventive little girl by Dianne Homan and illustrated by Mary Heine. The book was printed on the collective's Multilith 1250 press, located in their office at 304A Weaver St. The press is run by member Elizabeth Brownrigg, a town bus driver.

"The costs of production have gone up so much that *Christina* is the last book that we have made a commitment to publish," Ballinger said. "We'd like to keep going because we're one of the oldest and most respected small press publishers around. It's sort of unique in that we're a small, children's, multi-racial, feminist publisher."

We've geared ourselves to a fairly small, but important, audience."

The collective's greatest number of sales is to the East coast and California. Its wide geographic distribution includes orders from Canada, Australia and Nepal. Most sales are to bookstores and distributors, with some to schools and libraries.

The group, comprised of 10 members, receives about four manuscripts per week. Submissions are reviewed by the group at their weekly meetings and are either accepted or rejected in accordance with the collective's specific publishing criteria. All manuscripts are returned with comments.

"We get lots of formula stories—another one about the girl who tries out for the Little League team," Gallagher said. "And we get lots of manuscripts that have nothing to do with what we're all about. Books on cute puppies may not be sexist, but they're not an active portrayal of non-traditional roles either. We like books that have something new and important to say about children's lives."

And kids, who are the soul of Lollipop Power, like those books, too.

Linda Robertson is assistant sports editor for *The Daily Tar Heel*.



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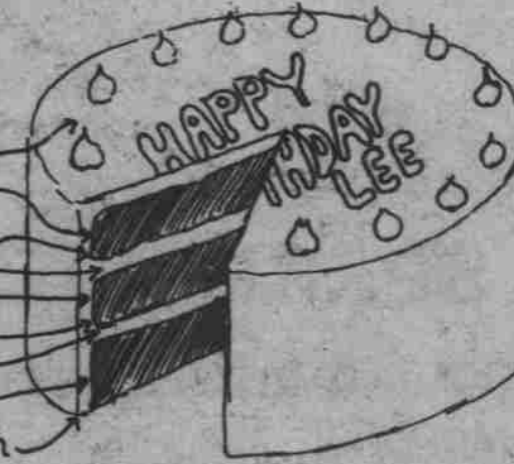
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