

## BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

# Images send a stark message

Brenda Hoerle



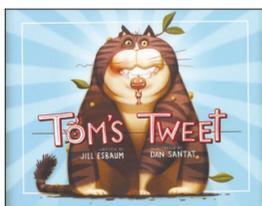
In *Who Will Save My Planet?* (Tundra, \$11.99 hardcover), the Mexican author Maria Cristina Urrutia paints a stark vision of the world we live in.

Provocative photographs are paired up to depict Earth's two realities — what is happening now and what our world once looked like. There's a polluted river in one photo and in another, a clear waterfall, cascading over smooth black stones.

One photo shows a sea lion with a string tightly wound around its neck and another shows a sea lion that is smooth and silky. One shows a caged lion that's on display at a zoo and another shows a lion in the wild, in pursuit of prey.

Urrutia's point resonates even more loudly because of the absence of text. Each image speaks volumes of man's mistreatment of nature and urges children to recognize the importance of taking better care of our planet. For ages seven and up.

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*Tom's Tweet* (Random House, \$18.99 hardcover) isn't what you think.

When Tom the cat goes to investigate a "tweet" in the grass, he discovers that a baby bird has fallen from its nest.

His first thought is, "Hello, breakfast." But Tom takes pity on the frail little thing. He decides to return the baby to its nest, but

with little luck, thanks to its mother's dive-bomb attacks on him.

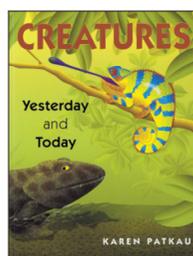
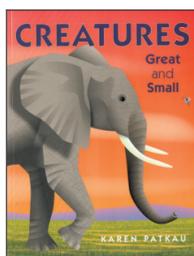
So instead, the caring cat goes to great lengths to build his new-found friend a nest, feed him some regurgitated worms and keep him warm in his armpit. The pair become inseparable and even Mama bird finds a way for them all to remain friends.

Author Jill Esbaum lives in Iowa. Illustrator Dan Santat lives in Southern California. For young readers.

...

Toronto author and illustrator Karen Patkau explores nature in her latest books *Creatures Great and Small* and *Creatures Yesterday and Today* (Tundra, \$9.99 each softcover).

Simple text and Patkau's vivid, computer-generated illustrations will help youngsters



aged six to nine discover the differences and the similarities in everything from mollusks and reptiles, to arachnids and birds.

The book also includes a timeline, a glossary and charts introducing scale and proportion.

**Brenda Hoerle** is a copy editor with the Waterloo Region Record and the Guelph Mercury.

## YOUNG ADULT READERS

**A TINFOIL SKY**  
by Cyndi Sand-Eveland (Tundra Books, 224 pages, \$19.99 softcover)

Cindy Matthews

There are few books for young adult readers about life on the streets. Cyndi Sand-Eveland has created a novel that is somewhat realistic, certainly not all doom-and-gloom, on the topic of homelessness as viewed through the eyes of a preteen named Melody (Mel) Tulley.

When her mom, Cecily, decides to leave her latest boyfriend, Mel is overjoyed. Mother and daughter sneak off together to the home of Grandmother Gladys, who offers them a snarky reception. So instead they end up shacking up in their Pinto.

Then Cecily goes back to her old habits, shoplifting and drinking too much. She ends up in court and is sentenced to a short stint in jail. The judge wants to give Mel something she really wants. Mel chooses a library card. While her mother is in jail, Mel is ordered by social workers to reside with the grandmother who didn't want her. Eventually, she unravels why her grandmother has been chillier than an iceberg.

British Columbia writer Cyndi Sand-Eveland weaves caring individuals throughout her story. A librarian takes Mel under her wing and grooms her for a job reading stories to preschoolers. Rose at the soup

kitchen keeps an eye out for Mel. A shopkeeper, Mr. Frohberger, knew Mel's grandfather and has a soft spot for the girl. And when Mel befriends the son of the librarian, he chooses to hang out with her rather than stay under his mother's watchful eye.

The book's short, snappy chapters will sustain the interest of most young-adult readers. Initially, I found it captivating, but later it felt contrived and sappy, with an ending that was too predictable. The dialogue is understated and is generally unremarkable at best. Still, if you want to read about a child facing adversity and to gain some knowledge about homelessness, *A Tinfoil Sky* is a decent book.

**Cindy Matthews** is a Wilmot Township writer.

## OUTDOORS

**LORDS OF THE LAKE: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO MUSKELLUNGE FISHING IN ONTARIO'S SMALLER LAKES AND RIVERS**

By Mark Forabosco (Self-published, 243 pages, \$19.99 softcover)

The muskie is probably the most eccentric of all fresh water fish, Mark Forabosco writes. He first saw its power on the Bay of Quinte when one of them burst right through a brand new salm-

on net his friend was holding — like it was going through tissue paper.

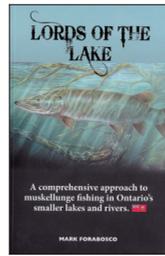
With this folksy but also very practical guide, the author, who grew up fishing along the Grand River in the Bridgeport area of Kitchener, aims to make muskie fishing "less intimidating and less complicated" for those in the early learning stages. There are lots of tips, photos and maps, interviews with experts, stories and anecdotes, plus art by Robert Wonka of Waterloo. Chances are the book will be engrossing for those

who already know quite a bit about the "lords of the lake" — and for those who are simply curious to know more.

It's fascinating to read that the Grand River once had a healthy muskie fishery. A 1928 news report reprinted in the book describes a 36-pound muskie that was caught near Dunnville, Ont.

The book is sold at Natural Sports, 1572 Victoria St. N., Kitchener. Or email the author in Mount Elgin, Ont. at: markforabosco@hotmail.com

— Jon Fear



# A philosopher issues a challenge to atheists



Chuck Erion

Alain de Botton's latest book, *Religion for Atheists* (McClelland & Stewart, \$29.99) is creating a stir — but not as big a stir as its author and publisher might hope for.

Subtitled *A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion*, it challenges modern-day atheists to recant their wholesale rejection of religion and to "borrow" the strengths of religions' teaching and practices.

But de Botton, the author of eight previous books of philosophical essays, is not naïve about how both believers and atheists will react to his book. "The strategy outlined in this book will, of course, annoy participants on both sides of the debate," he writes.

Without naming them, I suspect the author is responding to the all-or-nothing school of "fundamentalist" atheists: the late Christopher Hitchens (*God is Not*

*Great — How Religion Poisons Everything*), Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett. To keep from having to cover all religions, de Botton restricts himself to Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism.

I think this book is useful for both sides — for atheists and for those of faith. I count myself in the latter group and found it a refreshing appreciation of some aspects of church participation and the spiritual life from an outside perspective. I would hope it gives atheists insight into the values that religion brings to secular culture.

The book seems relatively short for such a huge topic (320 pages) and it is laid out with copious photos, making it feel more accessible, less academic. De Botton starts with the eroded sense of community in today's fast-paced culture. He looks at the Roman Catholic Mass as a community-building ritual that cuts across class and family divides. "... Friendship has a chance to grow only when we dare to show what we are afraid of and regret," he writes.

The next chapter examines kindness. Original Sin is a doc-

trine that all atheists and even some Christians find troubling. But the author embraces the notion: "(It) encourages us to inch toward moral improvement by understanding that the faults we despise in ourselves are inevitable features of the species."

The longest chapter is on education. The author wants to redesign the curricula from preschool to university to "turn out better, wiser and happier people," rather than tightly-focused professionals and job-ready tradespeople.

Likewise, he foresees a new generation of travel agents who can direct you on a pilgrimage to a historic and/or natural site that is tailored to your specific emotional or physical malaise.

The penultimate chapter looks at institutions, both corporate and public, for ways in which religion can reform them to meet the needs of the inner self. For example, major art galleries should be arranged by theme rather than historical era.

The book closes with a reverential look at the 18<sup>th</sup>-century French philosopher Auguste Comte, who tried to establish a religionless church.

De Botton's prescriptions for change slip into confused wishful thinking. If the ardent atheists threw baby Jesus out with the bathwater, this author wants to reshape the tub and fill it with a tepid mix of humanistic principles without any belief in a Cosmic Plumber.

Like most atheists, he lacks discernment of the varieties of theology. Like them, I don't believe in a theistic being that intervenes in history and favours one denomination against all other "heathens." But I also feel patronized by his assumption that the moral values and institutional practices of religion can be cherry-picked and recast in a totally secular fashion. De Botton's vision feels like an Orwellian society ruled by philosopher kings.

Some nominal Christians will go to church this Easter Sunday having skipped all "the gory bits" of Jesus' crucifixion.

Religion demands more than liberal good feelings; we need more than *Religion for Atheists* to be stirred up.

**Chuck Erion** is a retired bookseller who lives in Waterloo.

## WHAT THEY'RE READING



Elizabeth Stone is dean of the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph and a co-founder of the Society for Veterinary Medicine and Literature. She recently read:

**A FIERCE RADIANCE**  
by Lauren Belfer (Harper Perennial, 532 pages, \$18 softcover)

"The main story of this novel — the research on how to mass produce penicillin following Pearl Harbor — piqued my interest because my mother was a scientist at Cutter Labs during the Second World War, making penicillin. Also, I've been delving into veterinary medical history as our college celebrates its 150 year anniversary.

"We think of Rosie the Riveter as the epitome of women on the home front, but this book tells the tale of scientists, women and men, figuring out how to produce the great quantities of penicillin needed for battlefield infections.

"Although it is a bit melodramatic, as it combines murder (of the main woman scientist!), romance and industrial intrigue, it is well-researched with plenty of interesting historical details — even about the research laboratories.

"And as the author tells us in the afterword, because of their work, on 'D-Day, in June 1944, every medic going ashore in France carried penicillin in his pack.'"

• The Guelph Civic Museum is featuring the exhibit, **Ontario Veterinary College: 150 Years and Counting**, which celebrates the college's ties to the Guelph community and the birth of veterinary medicine in Canada. It runs until June 18.

## Booknotes

**Wednesday, April 11:** 7 p.m. at Words Worth Books, Waterloo. Hear New York educator **Stephen Haff** speak on: *Composing Ourselves Reading, Writing and Peace or How to Hold a Violin*. Free.

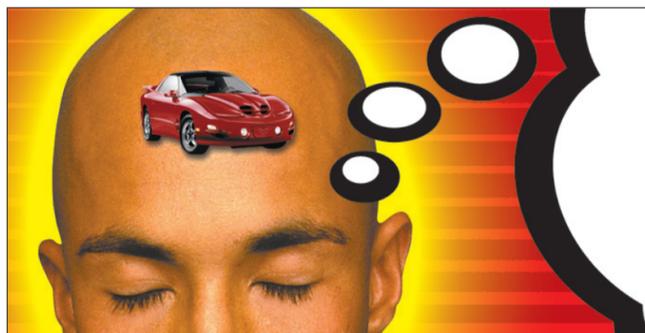
## Bestsellers

Based on sales reported by more than 280 independent Canadian booksellers for the week ending March 31. Bracketed figures indicate number of weeks on the list.

### Children's fiction

- (2) **Big Nate Goes for Broke** - Lincoln Peirce
- (20) **Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever** - Jeff Kinney
- (4) **The 39 Clues - Cahills VS Vespers: Book Three - The Dead of Night** - Peter Lerangis
- (6) **Geronimo Stilton Special Edition: Thea Stilton and the Secret of the Old Castle** - Thea Stilton
- (1) **Warriors - Omen of the Stars: The Last Hope** - Erin Hunter
- (21) **The Invention of Hugo Cabret** - Brian Selznick
- (2) **Geronimo Stilton: The Way of the Samurai** - Geronimo Stilton
- (31) **Ivy + Bean** - Annie Barrows and Sophie Blackall
- (16) **War Horse** - Michael Morpurgo
- (23) **Geronimo Stilton Special Edition: Thea Stilton** - Thea Stilton

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