

THE GIFTS WE REMEMBER

This past February, I breakfasted with Jane Yolen at New York's Grand Hyatt Hotel. Jane introduced me to Lin Oliver, the executive director of the Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), and the renowned children's author and illustrator Tomie dePaola as they passed through the restaurant on the way to their own meal. Just a day or so before, a thousand members of the SCBWI had serenaded Jane with a rendition of "Happy Birthday" in celebration of her turning seventy-five. The society also announced that it would be making a "generous donation to the Dickinson Memorial Library in Hatfield, Massachusetts, toward building a collection in Jane's name." Jane has written over three hundred books for children and teens, which includes the best selling "How do Dinosaurs. . . ?" series. In 2012, she founded a three thousand dollar SCBWI grant program to encourage mid-list authors.

In addition to being a generous patron, Jane has given generously of her time. She is on the board of advisors of the SCBWI and has served as a past president of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA). Included among her many awards and accolades is a 1998 Nebula for her short story "Sister Emily's Lightship" and a 1999 Nebula for her novelette "Lost Girls." She was also a Nebula finalist for her 1992 novel, *The Devil's Arithmetic*. Jane is a poet, too, and her work has made frequent appearances in the pages of this magazine. Her December 1991 poem, "Angels Fly Because They Take Themselves Lightly," was the winner of our own Readers' Award poll.

My own connection to Jane goes back forty years to another generous gift of time, and more, during my senior year in high school. I was a very shy student with a very strict English teacher. Dr. Eaton did not think much of science fiction or fantasy. She told us that Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut, and, for some reason, Herman Hesse, couldn't even be considered third-rate writers. No, they were "eighth-rate." There were to be no book reports on *Siddhartha* and certainly no reports on any contemporary works of speculative fiction. I did manage to sneak *Alice in Wonderland* by her, but that was it for fantastic literature. I was a pretty consistent B- student in Dr. Eaton's class, although she seemed to warm up to me a little when she discovered that my aunt's children's book had recently been published.

Longmeadow High School held an annual Career Night, which I dutifully attended in the spring of 1974. I remember a bewildering array of realtors and doctors, plumbers and lawyers, and many others. Most of the tables were crowded with students, but at one relatively quiet table sat the person I most wanted to meet—the author. Naturally, being terrified at the thought of speaking to her, she was the person I'd be least likely to approach. Yet at some point in the evening, Dr. Eaton took my elbow and ushered me over to where Jane Yolen sat amidst a small stack of her own books. My teacher introduced me as, "This is Sheila, she's *our* author." This comment came as a surprise to me, since I didn't think of myself as an author and I certainly didn't think Dr. Eaton thought of me as an author, but I was delighted to meet Jane.

Apparently, either most of the other students were as intimidated as I or, more likely, didn't foresee a career in publishing on their horizons. No crowd formed at her table and Jane let me tarry as long as I wanted. We talked about writing and science fiction, and her current projects. One of these was an anthology of short stories called *Zoo 2000* that Jane had recently edited for Seabury Press. It's subtitled *Twelve Stories*

of Science Fiction and Fantasy Beasts and includes tales by Arthur C. Clarke, Philip José Farmer, Andre Norton, James Thurber, and Larry Niven. Like any author with a garage full of comp copies, Jane had hoped to sell a few of her books, but the inventory wasn't moving very fast. I hadn't brought any money, so the best I could do was look through her work with awe. Jane, a mother of three young children, had graciously given up her evening to attend career night, but as the event drew to a close she surprised me with an additional gift. It was a copy of *Zoo 2000*. She inscribed it to me and added, "With thanks for a timely rescue from one SF fan to another."

Jane's gift of time and conversation encouraged me to continue in my quest to carve out a profession in the science fiction field. Her inscription showed me that the world didn't just revolve around an anxious teenager. This published author was not only happy to talk to a reader, but looked forward to it. This knowledge put one of the first cracks in my shield of diffidence. Nowadays, I am delighted to have a career in which I interact with new people all the time. I'd barely recognize my teenage self, and Jane is one person I can thank for that metamorphosis.

It's always been a pleasure and an honor to work with Jane. Our friendship has been a great gift, too. Alas, authors have not gifted us with winter holiday tales this year, but we do have an issue full of intriguing stories and poems. Feel free to brew yourself a pot of tea (or prepare any beverage of your choice), and take some moments to relax with these works. "Call of the Wild," a new poem by Jane Yolen, may be the perfect place to start.