

## Johns Hopkins University Press Podcast

### Deborah Stevenson, *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

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#### Mary Alice Yeskey

Welcome to the Johns Hopkins University Press podcast. I'm Mary Alice Yeskey with the JHU Press Journal's division. Joining us today is the editor of the review journal, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, Deborah Stevenson. Deborah has taught children's literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Simmons College, and Indiana University Northwest. She was a senior editor of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* and a contributor to *The Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*. She is a co-editor with Karen Coats and Vivian Yenika-Agbaw of the forthcoming *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Children's Literature*. Her research ranges from the demographics of youth literature to book importation and translation to STEM-based library programming for young people. She joins us today to talk about *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* as the journal prepares to celebrate its 75th year of publication.

Deborah, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

#### Deborah Stevenson

It's a pleasure to be here, thank you for asking me.

#### Mary Alice Yeskey

Can you tell us a little bit about the history of the Center for Children's Books and *The Bulletin*?

#### Deborah Stevenson

Sure. Children's book reviewing is, in America while there was some in the 19th century, the institutional versions that are still with it today are very much a 20<sup>th</sup>-century start. So, *Booklet* started in 1905. In the twenties, *The Horn Book*, which I believe is in Project Muse alongside us began. *Curtis Reviews* started in the thirties, and we began in 1945 as *The Service Bulletin from the Center from Instructional Materials* at the University of Chicago, and it was a little onion skin, hand-typed thing, and of course, we still have that, and then I think people realized that this was actually quite useful, so it expanded. We actually have two volume ones, sort of, we have a volume one and a pre-volume one. So, we're calling this a 75th anniversary for convenience's sake, but you could argue either year. So, we just went, you know, this one will work and then in 1992, *The Bulletin* left the University of Chicago for the University of Illinois and then in 2005, our publishing moved from the University of Illinois to Johns Hopkins. In physical locations from the center standpoint, initially, the center was basically just the physical space and the area where you could examine the collection that came to *The Bulletin* and that was submitted to *The Bulletin*, and that has been in a couple locations at the University of

Chicago. It was at the main Regenstein library when I worked there, and then we floated for a few years, which was sort of stressful and traumatic and weird and entertaining and then finally in 2001, we moved to gorgeous purpose-built space in what we'll call the garden level of the library school. They had a big renovation, and it was a big expanded wing and I just really loved that space.

Mary Alice Yeskey

As you mentioned, this is a banner year for *The Bulletin* which is now entering its 75th year of publication, and I understand that you're getting ready for your retirement after 20 years serving as editor. So, congratulations, first of all.

Deborah Stevenson

Thank you. It's going to be strange.

Mary Alice Yeskey

I was going to say that's a long time for anyone to stay in one position. My question is, as you look back on your time with *The Bulletin*, are there any particular issues or reviews that stand out as especially memorable to you?

Deborah Stevenson

When I was thinking about this question there's a memorable review versus a memorable book, are sort of two different slants, but there tends to be overlap, in that as an editor, I am tasked with being very involved with the craft of the creation of the review. So, I have a more vivid memory often of reviews that I was more involved with the craft of which are often the longer ones. But also, I remember a lot of times book's reviews where just what either, reviews when I wrote them, where I grappled with doing justice to a book I really loved because those are surprisingly some of the harder reviews because often you just want to jump up and down and go, it's so good. It's so good. It's so good. That's not convincing. But I remembered for instance, how much I learned from Betsy Hearne's review of Tom Feeling's *The Middle Passage*, Roger Sutton's review of *The Stinky Cheese Man*, which is an amazing review.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Oh, I'll have to check that one out

Deborah Stevenson

It's so gorgeous. It's just, yeah, it's beautiful, and I keep going, oh, I could do that. Even we had a reviewer who moved on to other things as they do and she reviewed *Codename Verity*, and I reviewed the sequels and went back to review in reviewing the sequels like, oh my God, this is so good. Ann Kirkwood, one of our reviewers, did Justina Ireland's *Dread Nation*, which is an amazing book, and I read the book after I read her review and I worked with her on the review,

and I went oh, did you get that right. Betty Bush is one of our longtime reviewers and she specializes in non-fiction and her review of Dave Egger's *This Bridge Will Not Be Gray* is so exquisitely tuned to cover creatively, reviewing as a creative task, as well as an informational task, and I love the combination, and Betty Bush is a creative writer about informational books, and *This Bridge Will Not Be Gray* is one of her best works in it's a book that prompts that kind of writing, and she was such a perfect fit for that. So, I just went back, I went, that was just, I've worked with such good people.

Kate Quealy-Gainer did a gorgeous view of Kristin Cashore's *Bitter Blue*, the Kristin Cashore *Graceland Trilogy* and just, it's also, I single out individual reviews, but when you work with people, one of the things that fascinates me about working in this kind of reviewing is that the goal is to have people who are informed write reviews, but also to have people who operate as reasonably close proxies for the ultimate readers, who are the kids, not librarians. Not that we don't love and respect librarians and want them to enjoy it too, but ultimately, it's for the kids. So we don't give me, I'm not as likely to like a fantasy, as we say in our classes where all the characters have names with lots of "y"s in them, that's not my kind of book. I like books about sixth grade girls whose friendship is on the rocks. I mean, I like a lot of kinds of books, but that's my favorite kind of book.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Me too.

Deborah Stevenson

So, I go with those books because I'm already going, oh, I like it, and we talk about when we're assigning books, that the joke is like, there's a whale in the book. Does the whale die? Then it goes to Betty. Is the whale saved? Then it goes to me. So, some of what I think of when I think about memorable reviewing is how you throw cake really makes it sound casual, it's not casual, we're careful about our assigning, but how Kate Quealy rises to the opportunity of a romance book for young adults in a way that is tender and enthusiastic and knowledgeable and encouraging that it is a statement about the value of this genre every time she writes with this kind of care. It is a statement about the value of the readers who like this kind of book, and that is what I really want from a review. I want it to be useful, but I also want it to be a statement about the literature and what it contributes, and I've been very fortunate in working with amazing reviewers who can do just that.

From a personal review standpoint, it's, as I said, it's often a book that I really felt I needed to figure out a way to convey my enthusiasms. So, I was thinking *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming*. That one, it's just, there's so much in that book and to compact it, which is of course the challenge of the review, as reviews go ours are quite short. It's perfectly normal, that one I really felt I got, and I was very pleased. That was one of the early ones. I was like that, that was it. Recently, Thanhha Lai's *Butterfly Yellow*, which is a book that I just loved and it keeps coming back to me because it's a historical fiction about a girl who

at 18 comes from Vietnam to find the younger brother who's all that's left of her family who was adopted out of Vietnam, and it is a story of such incredible resilience in the face of just almost unimaginable loss and 2020 and 2021, obviously that's a book that remains strong in my memory because resilience is something we've all been finding ways to find in ourselves and to return to when we flipped a little bit from that, or just, you know, when we've had losses. So, that one, it's also, this is gonna sound really corny, but I get very grateful for having had the chance to talk about an amazing book like that at reasonable length and to say, I did not make this book, but I can make people know more about this book. So, that is hopefully a service that I can provide for librarians and that means that more kids have seen that book.

### Mary Alice Yeskey

That's wonderful, and I'm not taking notes because I'm just going to furiously write down every book you just said later when I'm listening to this recording again, as I said, I'm a fan and I'm a mother, so all of these suggestions are so wonderful. What would you say sets apart *The Bulletin* from other children's literature journals?

### Deborah Stevenson

Well, they each have their own recognizable identity and while that can be a little different under each editor, for us and other people, in general with *The Bulletin* it is rooted in academics. It has been tied to an education or for most of it's like a library school. So, it is both for librarians and affecting the thinking of librarians as they are trained, drawing on people who teach librarians to be librarians, drawing on scholars. So, it is always informed by scholarship without necessarily being a scholarly work. We're always on the edge, and because we've been published mostly by scholarly presses, this has often been a bit of a negotiation to say, yes, but these things that you do for, at University of Chicago there's *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* I think, and we were obviously right next to them alphabetically which, okay, but I know that works for them, but that won't work for us. Practicing librarians are not atomic scientists.

But we also have, I think, a stronger cohesive identity and character within the reviewers because we are very focused on having ongoing collaboration within our writers. We had, prior to COVID, in-person meetings once a week, and those were opportunities for sharing. What we do is we bring in the books we were reviewing and pass them around and we comment on the reviews and comment on the books, and that was great because you get input from people who were seeing books from different aspects. So maybe I knew something about the book and I wrote the review, but the school librarian was like, no, but you don't realize that if this were fifth grade, that would mean that that's all the people who are teaching this curriculum, which everybody in Illinois is doing. Oh, that's great. That's really useful. Or we'd have somebody go, wait, hang on. What she's saying on page five? I don't think it's true. It just, it's always been, we've called it the peer-reviewed reviews, which is probably slightly overstating the formality, but it means that people who review for *The Bulletin* have a sense of everyone else who reviews for *The Bulletin* and how they work and what kind of books they review and what they

contribute. We've gone to Zoom meetings and well, because of the nature of both Zoom meetings and the nature of books, we don't share the books around in the same way, but we do still share the reviews and it means also we're creating collaborative relationships that often spin off and into other tasks. We have people who've gone and created conferences and worked together on grants and created events and stuff like that. I've worked together on books. It's forging all kinds of professional connections, professional identity, as well as the review corpus, we'll go with that.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Yeah, no, that makes sense. Cause I think, I mean, for someone who, like you said, is coming from a completely different, you know, academic area, they might not, you know, they might just assume it's scholarly essays about children's literature, and so I think it's important for our listeners to know the difference and that this really is kind of a different, not necessarily apples and oranges, but a different kind of apple.

Deborah Stevenson

I think it's worth thinking also about, just the kind of numbers we're talking about here because we review, our main customers in reviewing are people who are developing a collection. We talk about it as a collection development tool. So, this is not a *New York Times* reviewer Michiko Kakutani is writing for you, whether you might like this book, we are writing for whether a brand who is buying 500 books this year might want to include this book. That is a different approach. It's also, we deal in large numbers, we get roughly 500 reviewable titles per year, which in an ordinary year, the amount of actual physical materials we handle is sort of staggering, which we found when we tried to shove it behind a cell phone (laughs). It's because we get paper location, physical galleys, again, we're talking 2019 at this point of most of those and often dupes. So, we're getting, we talk about getting, plus we get reprints and so, we get over 10,000 individual pieces of book one way or another a year and of those 5,000, all the ones that are eligible for review we look at to assign. We do not assign all of them. We assign probably about 1,200, 1,500 out of that and then we expect reviewers to review a portion of what they reviewed and kick back the books that when they've looked at them more carefully say, we get a lot of books like that. This isn't anything special, or I really, really, really hated this. Could somebody else do that? Which is something we regularly allow for. We don't want you to hate it. You know, if you can say I hate it and I should be the one to say why it's bad, that's another argument. But, so ultimately, we end up reviewing approximately 900 books a year. The reviews are between 150 and 300 words. And the longer ones, our big picture based on the cover each year, between 500-700. I did some career math earlier this year when I was talking to Sarah Shavel, the director of the CCB, and in January, I decided it was 6,220 reviews to date which would be 415 linear feet of books. So, there's a quantity thing going on here.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Are there any changes or trends in children's literature that you see happening that you would say are really positive, that are really bringing you hope and excitement?

Deborah Stevenson

Diversity is obviously the big topic, and it is so much better, and the handling is so much better. It's also kind of a comparison that t gainer, because it's been so terrible. So, it needs to be so much better. So, I like the directions that we are aiming. It's kind of like vaccination rates. It's a good direction, it needs to be better. I think that underlying it, what I'm hoping for and what I'm seeing evidence of is a shift between, from adulation to the past, which sounds slightly more pejorative than I mean it to be, but I'll leave it there, towards the importance of the future. It is interesting children's literature, one of the reasons I got into it is because it's fascinating and it is on the one hand geared for the people who are going to be most in touch with the future. And yet it is one of the most past-looking literatures, especially because so many authors are writing for their own imagined childhood. That's especially true with newer authors. So, for a while, there was, you still see the occasional one, but there was this whole genre of books. It wasn't an official genre, but where it seems to be set in a contemporary time, but nobody had computers or cell phones and you'd be like, this feels like a normal reality to the person writing it because it's been a good portion of their life. It's not a normal reality for the 10-year-old kid reading it, and this is the friendly argument you get into, what's historical fiction and I stand for historical fiction is any fiction that is set earlier than the birth of the kids the age who are reading it, and I don't mean things to become historical fiction.

I mean, I have a book this week that is set in 1999. I'm calling it historical fiction, fight me if you disagree, I'm happy to get into that. It's just, I want the frame of the child who's reading it. We're just coming off of the Dr. Seuss kerfuffle and the thing is people upset about that publishing focus aren't generally people in the field, people in the field are more inclined to say there have been, I think I did a real back of the envelope calculation, approximately 60 million books since Dr. Seuss published *If I Ran the Zoo*. I think we can find better books. I think it's just we can get into the political issues, but also it ties to people's childhoods, and when I say people, I mean grown up people and I mean sometimes people who have grown up a long time ago, and I see this when I see nonprofessional forums. They're like, hey, does anybody have a book for my five-year-old grandchild? People are like, *Treasure Island*. No! Number one, they're five! And two, do you know how many good books there are for five-year-olds that have come out in the last 10 years even! So, diversity is getting better and that's a challengeable term in its own right, which I think is a good thing. I think we're also getting accustomed to the notion of change being a constant, which I think is important when you're always writing for new and those new people are all going to have new and different needs.

That also means that awareness of representation is really, I think, has permeated the field and I think that's really good because speaking as a lovely well-meaning white person I need checks on myself and policies where I'm like, let me make sure that I am giving people, that I am making space for different kinds of voices is really important. This is something even in

reviewers since we're focused in Champaign, that's been harder to draw on. So, we've gone back and forth on that, on representation of reviewers. We've had some really diverse groups of reviewers, it's ebb and flow and I think at this point, the remote function, if we had any money to hire, which of course we don't right now because no one has any money due to covid, that would allow us, I think, to extend further in a way that would probably keep further. But the reckoning with the sins of the past, I would say also diversity is one of those things that part of why it's contested phrases is that it sounds so nice and it's also really very sort of hegemonically centered. It's like not like me all the time. It's like, okay, but it's still, you are, you're still right in the middle of that. But I even, there's a lot of fantasy about slavery and African roots and magic realism dealing with immigration and Latino oppression and of course there's been historical fiction dealing with this and nonfiction dealing with this. So, I mean, there's books about how people are processing all these oppressive genocidal aspects of the past, as well as those aspects of the present. It's still a literature I would like to see have more non-happy endings. It's a literature that really, you know, people feel bad and everybody dies in the end. Yay. But it doesn't have to be every book.

We tend to be bright sided in children's literature and I don't think we need to turn it into a gloom fest, but there was a picture book I liked a few years ago and I, you know, there are many good books that have a really resolute ending. I'm not saying nothing should, but we get a lot of books about death for kids that are like, oh, Fido, the golden retriever is getting gray and he's not moving so fast, and now he's in his basket and he won't get up again, and Kylie is sad and then they go out and there's a butterfly, and trust me, you do see the butterfly a lot. Those books absolutely have a purpose. So, there's a book a couple of years ago called *Death is Stupid*. It was a non-fiction book for kids about death. I just loved it. It's like it's, and it was also about all the things adults tell you that the kids like that's moronic like, oh, she's in a better place. Really, she didn't want to stay with me? Thanks, that was helpful. So, I really enjoy a book like that. I'm underselling how children's literature has gotten more truthful about, like, adult frailties and things like that over the years. There's a lot more candor about ways in which many adults suck. And some adults are just actively toxic and dangerous to their children and other people.

So, there has definitely been movement on that that I greatly appreciate, but I would like there's a scholar, Ann Hau Matos, who talks about the validity for instance of sadness and narratives about LGBTQ teens, and he says, because if they're relentlessly happy, they're not reflecting our reality and I think that's an important point. I think there's value. We've talked about this in house too, that there's the tragic queer trope you have, oh, they're going to die in a car wreck, and they have sad eyes as a former director of the CCB who did a lot of, is one of the leading scholars of LGBTQ literature for kids said, yeah, they would have sad eyes, but there's also that time between saying we want to offer kids hope, but we want to recognize what they're actually experiencing.

On another note, I'd say certainly the rise of graphic novels which has been a wonderful thing. It's interesting because I'm very text-based, so it takes me much longer to read a graphic novel, but it's so nice to have, we know this, right, people, including children, experience literature, experience everything in different ways. Not everybody comes in with the same valence. That's why, for instance, we keep pushing nonfiction because a lot of times people talk about children's literature and like, well, that can't be nonfiction. Yes, yes. It can. Many children love reading nonfiction and there's amazing non-fiction. Also, a thing that's happening is you're starting to see both the reflection of social media as a norm and thematic force and the interrogation of social media.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Oh, nice.

Deborah Stevenson

So that's something I find really fascinating is you have, especially for teenagers, some exploration of the ways social media can batter young people. That you take the, we know that social media can distill some of the worst characteristics of humanity, and did we think 16-year-olds were going to be immune to that? No, of course not. So basically, ways in which social media can make a kid's life hell and just in small ways, in the way, anything in that kind of close community will hit and everybody picks up and runs with it. So, I'm really appreciating seeing that because I think that's a challenging negotiation for everybody in 2021 and I'm all for anything in literature that can give young people some assistance, some perspective, some support in dealing with that.

Mary Alice Yeskey

How did you end up studying children's literature? What was your sort of academic journey to get to where you are now?

Deborah Stevenson

My note on that is I still wonder about that sometimes (laughs).

Mary Alice Yeskey

(laughs) We all do, really.

Deborah Stevenson

I knew I wanted to study children's literature after undergraduate and for a variety of reasons I ended up at the University of Chicago in the English department where they didn't really do that. Children's literature scholarship still treats itself a bit as a newbie. It's interesting in that one of the characteristics of a lot of children's literature scholarship is a defensiveness about doing children's literature scholarship in a way that was true in a lot of feminist criticism in, like,

the seventies and eighties. So, I trotted through my little University of Chicago English program, but in the library school was one of the great children's literature scholars at the time, Betsy Hearne. So, I sat in on Betsy's classes and then started working at *The Bulletin* as a student because Betsy was somebody who I was like, yeah, man. Yeah. Do you want this job? And I was like well, I have finish this other job. So, she was like yeah, no, we'll work it out, come on and I came and went, this is amazing, and I started writing reviews and went this is amazing and then I just kind of stayed when *The Bulletin* moved to the University of Illinois. Betsy became a professor at the University of Illinois after the library school at the University of Chicago closed. And I was like, sure, I can move to Champaign. Why not? Somewhere in there I finished my PhD, which was on children's literature and Betsy was my main supervisor and has been doing research and scholarship as well. But the consistent pulse of reviewing has been running through there the entire time. So, it was one of those jobs where I would have aspired to it if I knew it existed earlier on. So, it's just, I mean, it's just immense good fortune. So, every now and then how do I plan to do this job? It's like, I have no idea.

Mary Alice Yeskey

So, my last question, I'll just sort of combine my last two questions into one, because you sort of touched on this the last one a couple of times, but what were your favorite books when you were a kid and what are some of your favorite books right now?

Deborah Stevenson

Yeah, and I'm separating those out because they're very different. I was a big-time horse book reader as a kid. So, I have very strong opinions about horse books, despite the fact that the genre is nowhere what it was, but I also, there's some interesting scholarship on the importance of horse books as books for young girls in a time before title nine and this was one of the few really physical sports where one, they could compete on the same playing field, literally as men and also it just was an acceptable way to be really physically active and really powerful, plus they're furry and they're fun. I also really liked fantasies and witty fantasies, especially domestic fantasy, like I was in, we had an Edward Eager book at home and I went and found the rest of the Edward Eager books, but I also overdid the Celtic fantasies at one point and then couldn't read anymore. Same as like once, my dad is Greek, and his family sent us baklava and then I ate too much baklava and now I can't look at it. So, that's where I am with a lot of fantasy.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Fantasy, baklava.

Deborah Stevenson

Yeah, exactly.

Mary Alice Yeskey

You don't want too much (laughs).

Deborah Stevenson

Yeah, everybody knows it's the same. Favorite children's books now, it does change every week to some extent, because I've been so lucky to read so many amazing books. *Brown Girl Dreaming* is obviously up there I've already mentioned it. Last year, I was just talking to colleagues about how we cry all the time over books. Meg Medina's *Evelyn Del Rey Is Moving Away*. One of my favorites of last year, and when I was talking about books being bright sided, that's a really good example of how you can have just this beautiful, brilliant book and that things are okay, but it's really super respectful of, I'm such an advocate for the crucialness of children's friendships of volitional relationships that are every bit as important for them as marriages for adults. That's why, when I talk about the friendship drift in sixth grade, that is the divorce novel for pre-teens and *Evelyn Del Rey Is Moving Away* is just this gorgeous picture book about, and I might cry a little and just we'll carry on, about the narrator whose best friend who lives in the apartment next door and their apartments are very similar. Evelyn is moving away and they're going through what they do every day together. She goes that we play like this all the time. Here, we stop at this apartment and they always give us cookies, but things are getting packed in boxes all around them and then Evelyn gets into the car and they're looking at each other and they're crying, and you know, the parents are like, oh, you'll see each other. And they're like, sure, we will but the fact is this is a change. Even if they see each other, it's not the same as having your friend next door and they know that and the book knows that and I love that the book knows that. We've, you know, we have nice books about friends moving away and they're good too. They're often really good, but this one, I just feel really got the kind of loss that is a real loss.

There's a series, there's a British author called Hilary McKay, who I just adore, and she's written some of the funniest books ever, *The Exiles*, which are about a group of four sisters which I called the March sisters from hell at one point. But she also has a sequence of books about the Caston family and it's treating people of different age than the family. There's an older sister and older brother, one younger sister, two younger sisters, and they're all named after paints, and Permanent Rose is the youngest sister, and the Permanent Rose book is one of the most exquisite child-friendly explorations of when a child's understanding of their family shifts. Permanent Rose is dealing with loss. She just adores her brother's friend Tom who's moved away and it's when she finally realizes, and I'm so not doing the book justice, the way in a family things don't often get stated in, oftentimes in novels, things are made more explicit than they are in real life because that's something narrative requires. This is a book that's like, nope, this is not a family that says your daddy lives in London now. So, we're not going to do that. Daddy's just going to kind of be in London and he's going to come back, and it's Rose dealing with loss she doesn't realize she's undergoing before she finally clicks it together consciously.

On a more, what adjective do I even want, on a more harrowing note, Anne Fine, also very funny British author, author of *Alias Madam Doubtfire*, the source book for *Mrs. Doubtfire* has,

yeah, this is not a funny book, and it is still the best book I've seen for, what do you do about a young kid who is clearly in serious trouble in a way that is going to lead to stuff down the line. But then also how involved you get, and it's called *The Tulip Touch* and Tulip is the friend of the narrator and the narrator lives with her parents. Her parents run this hotel and Tulip is just besotted with his golden life in this hotel and the hints of what Tulip's life are like are just horrific and Fine is a master so all you get are these hints, and there is involvement from child services, but there's clearly not successful like extrication or anything, and there's this, Tulip does these just, she goes up to the house of this woman whose son drowned and like taunts her with her son. And she's like 11, Tulip is. It's really, something is really wrong with this child and the narrator's parents are trying to both keep their daughter safe, and I keep talking about the parents cause I do tend to go what you do as a grownup. But of course, the narrator she's besotted with her friend and her parents, are like on the one hand we're going to take Tulip in on the other hand we are a little worried about you spending time with her and the teachers are intervening with things like that and there's a great sentence from her mother who says something like, to I think it's child services, you want to know if Tulip is bad or if she's sick, and like, we don't know, we just know we can't fix her and she's going to hurt our daughter. But there's also just the tragedy of this kid. So it is, I think it's a very hard read, but it's also very accessible and it's also, I mean, we had a lovely little one this week.

This one was a picture book and it's called *Jenny Mei Is Sad* and it's not getting into the details, but it's clear something's going on at Jenny Mei's house and it's pretty clear from the way the narrator and the girl's teacher is dealing with it that this is a known thing. So, like the narrator's parents have already talked to her about Jenny Mei, and it's what do you do when you're a kid and your friend is in deeper than you can do anything for, and this is an experience. We have lots of books legitimately that do a great job of focusing on the kid who is in the mire, but what do you do when you're the kid next to them? What do you do when you love them? When you don't want to go down with them, but you don't necessarily even see that's the problem? So, I think that *The Tulip Touch* was just an amazing book for that.

Mary Alice Yeskey

That sounds incredible. Yeah, I'm gonna, like, now my, my brain is spinning with all of the books I'm going to read. If nothing else, I appreciate this conversation because you have sent me up for the reading for the next, like, three to six months. I'm struck by so many things that you said talking about different titles, just today, about how some of the best stuff that's happening and some of the books that you've recommended, they all kind of have a way of showing how two things can be simultaneously true. Do you know what I mean? How, like, things can be terrible, your friend moves away. You're still going to probably be, you know, it's like, it's kind of just the way life is and I think with children's literature, like you said, a lot of times things in the past things have been, so everything's fine at the end, like you said, happy ending, everything is tied up in a bow. But I'm really struck by how a lot of these titles that have impressed you so much

seem to be doing that successfully kind of showing that you can hold two differing thoughts in your heart or in your head at the same time and that's totally possible.

Deborah Stevenson

Yeah. That's a really interesting idea. I liked that idea and getting people to think about it a little more, but I think you're onto something.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Let me just say thank you so much. This has been such a delightful conversation. Like I said, you've given me so much good reading for the next few weeks, so I just, and congratulations on both your retirement and *The Bulletin* 75 years. I just can't tell you enough how much we appreciate everything you do.

Deborah Stevenson

Thank you, it was delightful to talk about, and once you start me listing books, I just, I still have so many books that I feel this way but wait I didn't mention these and it's to have a job where you get to romp in these creative realms, these amazing creative realms where I'm thinking of Stephen Sondheim, look, I made a hat. People make hats all the time, and I get to see those hats and wear those hats and go, you did make a hat. You made an amazing hat. Let me go tell people about this amazing hat and why they need this hat.

Mary Alice Yeskey

That's wonderful. And the joy and passion you have for your work is so obvious, both in *The Bulletin* itself and just talking to you today. So just thank you so much. This has been a wonderful conversation.