BABYCCINO KIDS blog
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HELEN STEPHENS' TOP TEN BOOK LIST

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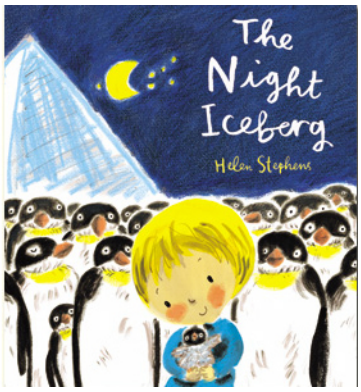

At the recent school book fair, I bought a book for each of my children. I bought Helen Stephens' The Night Iceberg for my daughter because she loves penguins and because I was drawn to the sweet illustrations... and it turned out to be the most successful book we bought. Having read it now numerous times, I have become a huge fan of Helen Stephens. Her illustrations are very endearing, appealing to both kids and adults. And her stories are imaginative and engaging. Helen recently left London after 15 years and now lives on the seaside in Northumberland where she spends her days drawing and dreaming up book ideas. Her next book, The Big Adventure of the Smalls, is due out this summer. And here is her very inspiring book list:

1. ***Richard Scarry's Best Storybook Ever***

This treasure chest of stories and rhymes was always around when I was growing up. I still have my well worn 35-year-old copy, and am still finding new treasures.

2. ***When Martha's Away*** ***by Bruce Ingman***
One day, a couple of years after graduating from art school, I was floating around, still unsure about what I was going to do for a living, when I came across ?When Martha's Away'. I decided there and then that I would become a children's book illustrator. The combination of rich colour and loose, simple and sophisticated line drawings blew me away.

3. ***Momoko's Birthday***
by Chihiro Iwasaki
I found this book in a bargain bookshop where I worked during college holidays. Chihiro Iwasaki's illustrations are beautifully fluid and gentle.

4. ***L'école de Léon***
by Serge Bloch
I can't actually read this book properly, but using my school girl French, and looking at the fantastic pictures, I pick my way through. I love it. It is about a boy, Leon, and his first day at school. The pictures are funny, tender, sad and playful. My favourite page is where the parents say goodbye to their children and the whole class starts to cry while a kindly teacher looks on. But their day soon gets better and they have lots of fun, (between fights which involve some painful looking nose pinching and anxious looking visits to the tiny school toilets).

5. ***Madeline and the Gypsies***
by Ludwig Bemelmans
That cover is wonderful. The green and the red together, and that jet black horse with it's jewel-like circus riders... If it is possible to have a favourite cover of all time, this is it. And inside is gorgeous too. I love the mixture of sophistication and naivety, graphic shapes and painterly marks.

6. ***Comet in Moominland***
by Tove Jansson
I enjoyed the slightly creepy animations as a child, then discovered the books as an adult. They are wonderful. (Tove's books of short stories, The Summer Book and Winter Book are amongst my favourites too)

7. ***All About the Giant Alexander***
by Herrman and Him
I came across this in a charity shop, and have found it so inspiring. There are some lovely pictures of 1950's English farms and towns, it has a real sense of place. The colour illustrations remind me a little of Ravilious, maybe Ravilious mixed with Sempé. (I'm a big Jean-Jacques Sempé fan.)

8. ***Harry The Dirty Dog***
by Gene Zion and Margaret Bloy Graham
I love the minimal colour palette, and those gorgeous 1950's line drawings.

9. ***The Happy Lion***
by Louise Fatia and Roger Duvoisin
I found this gem in a charity shop when I was a student. I find I like it more and more as the years go by. It has a minimal colour palette and lovely scratchy line drawings.

10. ***Sixes and Sevens***
by John Yeoman and Quentin Blake
This is one I was read as a child, and I still know the rhyming text off by heart now. I met Quentin years later and he signed my ancient well loved, well worn copy.

(Have I picked 10 already? On no, can I add Towser and the Water Rats
by Tony Ross? I love those wonderfully animated drawings and the use of the word ?doingnothingmuchedness.')

*To read other book lists, click here.

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