



## Barbara Josse

### TeachingBooks Original Movie Transcript

Barbara Josse, interviewed in her studio in Cedarburg, Wisconsin on February 26, 2002.

This is a transcript of the movie available on TeachingBooks.net. It is offered here to give you a quick assessment of the program topics, as well as to enable people with auditory disabilities access to the words.

Because this is a transcript of an edited movie, it should not be used as an assessment of Ms. Josse's writing. Many of the sentences found here were edited, and all editing decisions are the sole responsibility of TeachingBooks.net.

(Aside) Arms wrapping. Soft, velvet voice like the night sky. Papa jumps, dances, sings.

I feel myself a steward for children. My job is to give voice to their questions – to the things that they want to know about – and an excellent way to do that is through a book.

Of all the writing I've done – picture books, magazines, radio scripts, everything – the one I love the most, the most powerful to me, is picture books. I have used other art forms – poetry and all those other things I named – to refresh my writing for children. This allows me to walk away and come back with new tools and new muscles to use with picture books.

#### Shades Of Grey

All my books deal with shades of grey, which are unanswered questions; something that can't automatically be written off as good or bad.

In *Mama, Do You Love Me?* the question is whether you love your child no matter what. And that's a pretty scary thing for a kid to ask. Maybe they know that you love them when they're a good boy or girl, but do you love them when they're naughty?

In *I Love You the Purplest*, the question is, "Who do you love best?" That's on every kid's mind. And my way to answer that was how you love that child in a special way because that's really what they're asking.

*Nugget and Darling* is about sibling rivalry; of wanting to love that precious little thing, but finding them very annoying.

I'm really proud of *Lewis and Papa*. I think it really speaks to the gigantic struggle that little boys have in becoming men.

The *Wild Willie* books are sort of mysteries, but the shades of grey are: "How do we be boys and girls who play together?" "What do we do with the neighborhood bully?" "How do you deal with a

three-way friendship?” That’s real scary when you’re best friends to two different people. Those are the issues kids deal with, so that’s the meat of these books.

The unanswered question in *Ghost Wings* is what happens when you die and how you get a dead person back. How do you make a dead person alive? That’s the shade of grey. That’s where the magic is.

I think of magic as that little shimmer and shiver you have when something just is beyond words; it’s beyond reality and it’s just entered into sheer potential. That’s magic. And I want to infuse, in every possible way, my books with magic.

### ***Stars in the Darkness***

I think *Stars in the Darkness* is the most powerful book I’ve written. It’s such a powerful story of love – of love conquering extremely difficult circumstances.

The part I’m going to read is probably the most important page. It’s the moment where the mother and the little brother confront the truth about Richard, where the little brother insists that they not lose the magic.

The next morning I crawl up on Mama’s lap. At first we don’t talk about Richard being hurt, being a banger, but we both know that’s why we’re rocking each other. Finally Mama says, “Remember how we used to pretend about living on the moon?” I nod. “We can’t pretend no more,” she says, “we’ve got to be strong now.” It sure was nice when me and Mama could pretend about the moon. I say, “Richard’s a banger but he’s still good inside. He’s good to us.” “He is,” says Mama, her eyes full of sad. “So maybe the other bangers are like that too. “There’s good and bad in everybody,” Mama says. Then Mama and me, we get us a plan. [Read with permission from Chronicle Books, 2002.]

### **The Reader’s Hug**

I am very mindful of the physical parts of a picture book – of the turning of the page, of the breath, of the heartbeat, of the physical position that children are in when they hear a book – this is what I call the reader’s hug.

A book is read, often with a child in a lap, and you’re hugging them. Their ear is close to your heart, and the thing that closes the hug is a book. Well, what a miracle that is, really.

### **Books by Barbara Joesse**

- GRANDMA CALLS ME BEAUTIFUL (illustrated by Barbara Lavallee), Chronicle Books, date TBA
- IN THE NIGHT GARDEN (illustrated by Elizabeth Sayles), Henry Holt and Company, 2007
- PLEASE IS A GOOD WORD TO SAY (illustrated by Jennifer Plecas), Philomel Books, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2007
- DEAD GUYS TALK: A WILD WILLIE MYSTERY (illustrated by Abby Carter), Clarion Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006

- WIND WILD DOG (illustrated by Kate Kiesler), Henry Holt and Company, 2006
- NIKOLAI, THE ONLY BEAR, Philomel Books, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2005
- PAPA, DO YOU LOVE ME? (illustrated by Barbara Lavalley), Chronicle Books, 2005
- BAD DOG SCHOOL, Clarion Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003
- HOT CITY (illustrated by R. Gregory Christie), Philomel Books, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2003
- STARS IN THE DARKNESS (illustrated by R. Gregory Christie), Chronicle Books, 2002
- GHOST WINGS (illustrated by Giselle Potter), Chronicle Books, 2001
- HOUSEFUL OF CHRISTMAS, A (illustrated by Betsy Lewin), Henry Holt and Company, 2001
- ALIEN BRAIN FRYOUT: A WILD WILLIE MYSTERY (illustrated by Sue Truesdell), Clarion Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000
- GHOST TRAP: A WILD WILLIE MYSTERY (illustrated by Sue Truesdell), Clarion Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998
- LEWIS AND PAPA: ADVENTURE ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL (illustrated by Jon Van Zyle), Chronicle Books, 1998
- I LOVE YOU THE PURPLEST (illustrated by Mary Whyte), Chronicle Books, 1996
- NUGGET AND DARLING (illustrated by Sue Truesdell), Chronicle Books, 1996
- MORNING CHAIR, THE (illustrated by Marcia Sewall), Clarion Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995
- SNOW DAY (illustrated by Jennifer Plecas), Clarion Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995
- LOSERS FIGHT BACK, THE: A WILD WILLIE MYSTERY (illustrated by Sue Truesdell), Clarion Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994
- ANNA AND THE CAT LADY (illustrated by Gretchen Will Mayo), Lippincott, 1992
- NOBODY'S CAT (illustrated by Marcia Sewall), HarperCollins Publishers, 1992
- WILD WILLIE AND KING KYLE (illustrated by Sue Truesdell), Clarion Books / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992
- MAMA, DO YOU LOVE ME? (illustrated by Barbara Lavalley), Chronicle Books, 1991
- PITIFUL LIFE OF SIMON SCHULTZ, THE, HarperCollins Publishers, 1991
- DINAH'S MAD BAD WISHES (illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully), HarperCollins Publishers, 1989
- PIECES OF THE PICTURE, Lippincott, 1989
- ANNA, THE ONE AND ONLY (illustrated by Gretchen Will Mayo), Lippincott, 1988
- BETTER WITH TWO (illustrated by Catherine Stock), HarperCollins Publishers, 1988
- JAM DAY (illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully), HarperCollins Publishers, 1987
- FOURTH OF JULY (illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully), Alfred A. Knopf, 1985
- SPIDERS IN THE FRUIT CELLAR (illustrated by Kay Chora), Alfred A. Knopf, 1983
- THE THINKING PLACE (illustrated by Kay Chora), Alfred A. Knopf, 1982

#### **Additional Writing by Barbara Joesse**

- Featured Artist Interviews in Porcupine Literary Arts Magazine (1995-2001)
- Public Radio Commentary
- Columns and articles in "Milwaukee Magazine" and "The Chicago Tribune"

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