



COVER TO COVER

In the Native Tradition

Joseph Bruchac's stories have a history of their own.

Fox Song

By Joseph Bruchac G'66
Illustrated by Paul Morin
25 pp. Philomel Books
\$14.95

The First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story

By Joseph Bruchac G'66
Illustrated by Anna Vojtech
28 pp. Dial Books for Children
\$15.99

Telling stories to children has a dual purpose, says writer Joseph Bruchac. One is to entertain them, the other is to engage their imagination and draw them into an experience they can learn from.

Bruchac does just that in his two latest children's books, *Fox Song* and *The First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story*, both published this fall. In each, Bruchac, who earned a master's degree in creative writing from SU in 1966, blends lessons of life and American Indian culture into warmhearted stories that will delight both children and adults.

Fox Song tells the tale of a young girl "seeing pictures in her mind" of things she used to do with her grandmother.

Jamie, the young girl, recalls spring walks to a grove of birch trees, and later making baskets from the bark of the tree.

One of her richest memories, though, takes place in the autumn when the leaves "put on their best colors" and dance in the wind. It was on such a crisp fall day that Jamie's Grandma Bowman taught her a special song.

"When you sing it, you will not be alone," she told her.

Jamie rushes to the place where her grandmother taught her the song. As

she begins to sing, she realizes she has an audience. It's a fox, a sign that "she knew she would never be alone."

Fox Song is a contemporary story drawn from some of Bruchac's own childhood memories. The appearance of the fox was something he experienced shortly after the death of a Native elder who had befriended him.

Although he grew up among several American Indians, Bruchac says he lived a typical American life. Part Abenaki, English, and Slovak, he learned a great deal about nature from his Abenaki grandfather. These lessons became some of Bruchac's recollections in *Fox Song*.

A professional storyteller, poet, and author, Bruchac has written more than 20 books, and his poems and stories have appeared in some 400 magazines and anthologies. He grew up with his



grandparents in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains, where he learned to listen well at an early age. That skill came in handy when he was in graduate school at Syracuse and spent time on the nearby Onondaga Reservation.

"I made friends with elders there who shared lots of information," he says. "You find that contemporary Native life is very pan-tribal. If you're around Indian people, you're going to be around many traditions."

It was, in fact, from Cherokee friends that Bruchac learned the tale of *The First Strawberries*.

"Long ago when the world was new, the Creator made a man and a woman, they married, and for a long time were very happy," the story begins.

But one day they quarrel and the wife walks away upset. Eventually she comes across red strawberries and eats some. The berries are so delicious that she shares their sweetness with her husband and they forgive each other.

"To this day," writes Bruchac, "when the Cherokee people eat strawberries, they are reminded to always be kind to each other; to remember that friendship and respect are as sweet as the taste of ripe, red berries."

Before Bruchac re-creates such Native folklore, he does extensive research to capture the spirit of authenticity.

"I make up a version that draws upon both oral and written tradition, always taking into account the specific details of that tribal nation's life," he says. "It's also important for me to keep the story part of the oral tradition. When I write it down, I make sure it can be read aloud and sound alive."

—ANDREA C. MARSH

OTHER CHILDREN'S BOOKS
BY ALUMNI AUTHORS

Alvin Ailey

By Andrea Davis Pinkney '85
Illustrated by Brian Pinkney
32 pp. Hyperion Books for Children
\$13.95

In this biography, the author and illustrator celebrate the life of dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey. Tracing his childhood back to the gospel choir at True Vine Baptist church in Navasota, Texas, we see how Ailey became mesmerized by music and the feelings it evoked.

Seeing a black dance troupe performing to West Indian drums clinched Ailey's love for music and introduced him to his life's passion and purpose—to dance and create choreography celebrating his cultural roots. He formed his own dance troupe and eventually choreographed the now-famous *Revelations*, based on the music of his childhood church days.

The rich hand-colored scratchboard illustrations show the movement and emotions of the dancer, and are accompanied by factual and lively text that is entertaining for young audiences.

Sophie and Sammy's Library Sleepover

By Judith Caseley '75
26 pp. Greenwillow Books
\$14.00

With wonderful primary color illustrations and a charming text, Judith Caseley brings readers the story of a sibling friendship that encourages the love of books.

Sophie, the older sister, is well-behaved and loves to read. Sammy, her little brother, is a little wild and loves to use books as toys—tossing them around and drawing on them. When Sophie goes to an evening book reading at the library, she thinks how much Sammy would also like it.

So she creates her own "library sleep over" for the two of them, complete with stuffed friends, pajamas, and flashlight. As they establish this tradition at home, complete with milk and cookies, Sammy learns to share Sophie's love for reading.

The Bear Who Loved Puccini

By Arnold Sundgaard
Illustrated by Dominic Catalano G'91
50 pp. Philomel Books
\$14.95

Bears and the opera don't typically mix, but Robert Remsen "Barefoot" Rainfield, a brown bear from the deep dark forests of northern Minnesota, has one goal in life: to sing the music of Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*.

This story, about following your dreams and finding success, is illustrated with delightful pastel watercolors that are certain to capture the hearts of all teddy bear lovers.

Barefoot is encouraged by his friend Shorty John to keep singing. ("Well, if that's what you want to do more than anything in the world, then do it!") He leaves for the big city of St. Paul and ends up as the star attraction at a small cafe. Soon after he is discovered by an Italian agent.

Barefoot is whisked off to Italy to sing in the world's most famous opera house, La Scala. In front of his family and friends, he performs to the adoring applause of the Italian audience, who shower him with roses.

Grandma According to Me

By Karen Magnuson Beil '71
Illustrated by Ted Rand
28 pp. Doubleday Books
\$15.00

Most of us have special memories and visions of our grandmothers—their smile, their smell, their stories. Grandmothers, however, may not always envision themselves in that same wonderful light. In this charming story, we see just how special one grandmother is in the eyes and words of her granddaughter.

"She says she's plump, I say she's comfortable," writes Beil. "Her voice is soft and low, and makes me feel good. She says it's deep, like dark molasses. I say it's sweet like honey. But my favorite part of my grandma is her face. Grandma says they are wrinkles. I say they are her storylines."

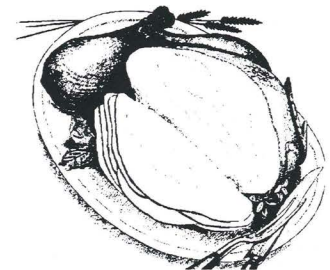
In soft, pretty illustrations, the story is dotted with kittens and happy family scenes—baking cookies, playing with grandma's jewelry, and looking at old family photo albums.



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