

book reviews . .

**DON'T TELL ME ABOUT GOL-
DILOCKS.** Eva May Illustrated by Nan
McNab. Kilmore: Lowden Publishing
Co., 1974. 24 pp.

"Goldilocks" is a children's book in which an adoptive mother lays aside the usual bedtime stories and tells her adopted child, Tony, his story. Tony hears about his parents, and why they gave him up for adoption; about his adoptive parents' contacts with the adoption agency and the application process; the preparation the adoptive parents went through, and their joy and excitement when Tony actually came to them. Finally the hoped-for arrival of a second adopted child is discussed with him.

Aimed at the early primary school group, the book deals sensitively with the natural parents and their problems, and focuses mainly on the anticipation and happiness of the adoptive parents. The story is told the way young children like their personal stories to be told, with the atmosphere created by lots of intimate detail — from the items of clothing being purchased for Tony, to the way his adoptive mother burned the evening meal in her excitement at the news that Tony was coming.

"Goldilocks" is a children's book, yet it is much more. It is essentially a guide to adoptive parents who are wondering what to tell their adopted children, and how to tell them. By demonstrating the process, it becomes a demonstration also for social workers and others who must counsel adoptive parents in this area. One of the values of the book is that it can so clearly be used by such a range of people and yet, through the simplicity of its text and the warmth of its illustrations, remain a book that children would want to read.

I felt that the book erred in its too-fulsome description of the natural parents. Describing the parents as "wonderful people" for example, may be going too far for some children to understand as their comprehension of the probable limitations of their parents develops. Such descriptions clearly ensure that the book is appropriate only for children who were adopted as babies and would not remember their parents, but still underestimate the ability of such children to draw their own conclusions about what

their parents were really like. Such descriptions, insofar as they are frequently far from reality, run the risk of confusing children.

My ten year old daughter, whom I asked for reactions to the book, said that it was good and would help adopted children to understand what had happened to them, even though it would upset them. The reason for the upset, she said, was that they would never know who their real parents were.

I felt some unease, too, about the sections which dealt with this matter. Not because of the way the book was written, which is excellent, but because this is a book which is clearly written within the limits of current Victorian adoption policies. One sees so many adolescents who are confused and disturbed by their obscure origins, that one wonders whether the current policy of making so sure that adoptive children never see their natural parents again is really wise.

It is not the function of a children's book to challenge such policies. Within the limits of its use with children adopted as babies within current adoption policies, "Goldilocks" is highly recommended. What I would like to see is more books like "Goldilocks" for adopted children who remember their parents; for children in foster care or institutions who may actually have to deal with the reality of current contact with their natural parents; and perhaps, eventually, for the adopted children of the future who might be allowed to relate to their natural parents as real, and not fantasied figures.

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THE CHILD UNDER STRESS —
Edna Oakeshott, O.B.E., B.Sc.,
Ph.D. Priory Press. Ltd. 1973. \$3.75.

The prime concern of community health care with prevention and the concomitant educational task is one that increasingly demands attention. The concept of stress in childhood is of particular importance in this context.

'The Child under Stress' has primarily been written for parents and others involved in the upbringing and education of children and should provide compelling reading for anyone having the permanent or temporary care of a child. In this one slim volume there is a wealth of material sensitively brought together which goes right to the heart of understanding the child. No one reading this book can fail to appreciate the use of lucid, simple language completely devoid of a specialist vocabulary. This together with the use of 'random episodes' gives an almost three dimensional quality to the material so telling are these in their simplicity and truth.

The selection of material reflects well the objectives of the book although one may question the omission of some aspects which seem pertinent in the consideration of children 'at risk'. The importance of play and the handling of relative amounts of stress, as necessary elements in the development of the child are strongly featured. It is therefore unexpected to find no mention of stress in infancy.

The chapter on violence and death should be welcomed by many parents concerned about the effects of mass media or how to deal with a child when a death occurs in the family.

The possible effect on the young child of separation from the mother is simply explained, but it is unfortunate that this has not been extended to include the situation on the child's return home. For parents faced with regression in the child some explanation would have been helpful.

A table of symptoms, as indicators of maladjustment, together with full references to the Robertson films are useful material for teaching purposes and could well form part of an inservice training programme for personnel in day care or residential settings. In addition a useful index is given, but no bibliography, although some brief references for further reading are given.

This book would be a useful introductory text for social workers and would be of particular interest to students entering field work in a child care setting.

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REMEMBER MARIA — John G. Howells, Butterworths 1974, pp 117, 55P, U.K.

Maria Colwell was a 7 year old English child killed in January 1974 by her step-father while she was living at home under the supervision of social workers and other professional helpers.

This book, by the Director of the Institute of Family Psychiatry, Ipswich, England, attempts to review what the author calls the "misconceptions and wrong practices" that contributed to this tragedy. A public inquiry has been held and its findings published, but satisfying few, least of all those whose primary concern is to provide substitute care for children from so-called broken homes.

The main thrust of Howells' argument is that many social workers and other professional helpers pay too much attention to the "blood-tie" and the effects of separation from natural parents. Not enough is done to strengthen the role of substitute forms of care, particularly foster-care and adoption. No-one involved in child care will quarrel thus far, but Dr Howells then goes on to misrepresent some aspects of classical deprivation theory and almost succeeds in relegating the family to some residual role. On the other hand it must be admitted that some social workers have proved singularly blinkered about family situations worthy of Edmund Leach's description as "gas chambers".

Remember Maria was written in the heat of public controversy when the "cause Celebre" clouded many people's judgment. The author to some extent feeds this by his slanted use of press reports and photographs. He also contradicts himself by criticising those who seek to generalise from animal studies to human behaviour and then proceeds to use four pages of animal studies to support his assertions. This detracts from his penetrating and sensitive analysis of the nature of the parent-child bond.

Reading this book I was reminded strongly of an earlier death in England in 1945, when Dennis O'Neill was done to death at Banks Farm. In many ways public care of deprived and damaged children has far to go. How many potential Marias are there in Australia?

FAMILY CRISIS — Robert Neuhaus and Ruby Neuhaus Company, Columbus, Ohio, USA.

In all families difficulties arise from time to time, which create anxiety and malfunction. In the majority of cases the family is able to draw from within its own ranks that which is necessary to cope. However there are those dilemmas of existence which threaten the ability of the family to remain together and deal with their difficulties. That is the family has not the resources among its own members to deal with a particular problem and unless there is constructive input from outside there is the real possibility of family and individual breakdown. Often relatives or close friends provide the needed input, but where problems are severe or of a specialised nature, the professional worker is utilized.

All families are different and the crisis in one family is a minor problem to another. Family crisis is therefore defined by a particular family's ability to cope with a particular problem. The worker involved in resolving family crisis needs to be armed with a great deal of sensitivity and a broad knowledge base, in the areas of family processes and crises precipitating situations.

Robert Neuhaus and Ruby Neuhaus have provided the reader with material on some major crisis provoking situations for the American family. Most of the material presented is relevant to the Australian situation.

The subject matter has been placed under broad headings (eg Mental Retardation, Drug Abuse) and for the most part has been dealt with in overview fashion. There is sufficient information to make this a useful reference book. The authors obvious understanding of family crisis is clearly transmitted to the reader and the brief case studies selected (one for each chapter) successfully add a human dimension.

The chapters covering "Common Crises in the Life Cycle" and "Middle-Age and Later Life Adjustment" are of particular value and have been put together in an impressive manner. Unfortunately the same cannot be said about the material on "Crime and Delinquency" and "Unplanned Pregnancy". It would appear that the authors haven't