

Books for Children

Edith Fowke

My best known children's book is Sally Go Round the Sun: 300 Songs, Rhymes, and Games of Canadian Children (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart; New York: Doubleday, 1969). This is a large-size volume beautifully illustrated by Carlos Marchiori. It won the Canadian Association of Children's Librarians' Award for the best book of the year, and it continues popular. All the items were from oral tradition, collected in 1958-1964 from Canadian children plus a few from adult friends who remembered them from their youth.

I started collecting with some of the children on my own street and then began going to various Toronto schools where I arranged to tape the students in Grade 3 classes, which I found the best age-group for this type of material. I asked them for the games and rhymes they knew, and had no trouble getting a wide variety. Children's lore is probably the easiest kind of folklore to collect today.

When I had assembled a number of tapes, I transcribed them, picked the best versions of the various items, arranged them in categories, and cited the sources and references to other versions. I was lucky in the artist whose delightful color illustrations made the book very attractive. He used two unusual techniques: many of his pictures included fingerprints, others looked like lace.

This book is still in print, still popular, and still representative of the children's lore common in Canada. Students in my introductory folklore classes at York University collected children's rhymes and games as an annual assignment during the seventies and eighties, and found very few that were not in Sally. In 1989 Virginia Caputo, a graduate student in anthropology at York, did her masters' thesis comparing the songs in my collection with those she collected in the same schools some twenty-five years later. An article on her study, which showed a remarkably close parallel, appeared in the Canadian Folk Music Journal for 1990.

Keith MacMillan, who had transcribed the music, brought a group of children into a studio and recorded some of the songs and games. This was not a field recording, as the children had to be rehearsed: They knew the songs, but some of their versions were slightly different from those in Sally, and Keith's piano or guitar accompaniments were used. However, it was children singing children's songs--an

improvement over most children's records which are sung by adults. Later, the record was replaced by a cassette.

Partly because of the lovely illustrations and the record, Sally is much the best known of my books. At various gatherings parents still come up to tell me how much their children enjoy it, and many adults liked being reminded of their childhood. I was pleased to find that it was the only North American book on the reference list in the Opies' The Singing Game (Oxford: New York, 1984) except for Newell's Games and Songs of American Children from 1903.

Jay Rahn, a leading Canadian ethnomusicologist, used my collection as the basis for an analysis of the tunes of children's songs, "Stereotyped Forms in English-Canadian Children's Songs: Historical and Pedagogical Aspects" in the 1981 Canadian Folk Music Journal. It compares the tunes in Sally with those of similar items in Britain and the States. This seems to be the first attempt to analyze English-language children's tunes.

A sequel, Ring Around the Moon: 200 songs, tongue twisters, riddles, and rhymes of Canadian children (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), was designed for a slightly older group and contains some material for children rather than from children. Because of its smaller format and black-and-white illustrations, it proved less popular than Sally and was out of print for several years, but it has recently been reprinted (Toronto: NC Press, 1987).

Both those books gave sources, comparative references, and indexes. A smaller and less scholarly book, Riot of Riddles (Richmond Hill, Ont: Scholastic-TAB, 1982), was published by one of the major companies selling to schools. It contains a wide variety of riddles and puzzles: true riddles, conundrums, riddle jokes, crossword puzzles, guessing games, etc. Of course riddles are tremendously popular among children; any group will gladly produce a number, and some make up their own.

More recently, I assembled a book of children's street games. Red Rover. Red Rover (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1988). The material came largely from my students' assignments over a dozen years supplemented by some from Robert Cosbey, who had collected them from his folklore class at Regina University, Laurel Doucette, who sent some from an Ottawa class and some she remembered from her childhood, and Philip Thomas, who collected some in Vancouver, plus a few from Helen Creighton's collection in the Folklore Archives of the National Museum.

Again I went through a voluminous mass of game descriptions, selected the best versions, organized them in the eleven classes used by Iona and Peter Opie in Children's Games in Street and Playground (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), and added four extra sections: Pretending, Miscellaneous, Marble, and Word Games. When I told Iona what I was planning, she wrote: "I think it would be excellent if you used the analytical arrange

ment of Children' Games in Street and Playground. . . I think Peter would be pleased. He was justifiably proud of his analysis, which caused him many skull-cracking hours."

In addition to those books designed specifically for children, some of my others are also useful for children. One, published originally as Canada's Story in Song (Toronto: Gage, 1965), and long out of print, came out later in a new edition as Singing Our History (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1984). This began as a series of radio programs for which I wrote the scripts and Canadian folksinger Alan Mills narrated and sang the songs. All the songs are related to events and periods in our history, and we hoped it would be used in history and social studies classes. Alan recorded a two record set of the songs (Folkways 4000), and the New York Times listed it as one of the hundred best records of 1956. Singing Our History is a revised and enlarged edition, containing eighteen additional songs found since 1965.

Another book that came out of a radio series, John D. Robins' Logging with Paul Bunvan, originally published in 1967 (Toronto: Ryerson), was reissued in a somewhat different format designed to appeal to children as Paul Bunvan. Superhero of the Lumberjacks (Toronto: NC Press, 1980). Dr. Robins, a professor at the University of Toronto, had worked in the northern woods where he heard many lumbering songs and stories. (Incidentally, he was instrumental in getting me interested in folklore, and my first book was dedicated to him.) We had collaborated on a radio series about Paul Bunyan in which Dr. Robins, impersonating an old lumberjack, told the stories and I supplied songs from records. After Dr. Robins died, Mrs. Robins turned his manuscripts over to me; I edited them, adding an introduction and notes. When it had been out of print for several years, NC Press issued the revised version aiming at a children's market

Folktales of Canada (Toronto: NC Press, 1979) has also been used with children, although it is not primarily for children. It is translations of varied French-Canadian tales (mostly from Marius Barbeau's collection) illustrating the different types of folktales. I did this book because most French-Canadian tales available in English had been rewritten, and I kept my translations as close as possible to the original texts.

My folksong anthologies, Folk Songs of Canada I and II (Waterloo: Waterloo Music, 1954, 1967), and The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk-Songs (Harrnsworth, England, 1973; rpt. Markham, Ont., 1986), while not designed for children, have been used in school music programs and at summer camps.

Folk Songs of Canada, produced with a musician, Richard Johnston, was my first book. I began to realize the need for such a book as a result of my radio series, "Folk Song Time," which was then being aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. When I played records of Canadian

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songs, listeners would inquire where they could find them, but no general Canadian collection of folk songs existed, only regional collections from Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland.

We also produced a small volume of French-Canadian songs, Chansons de Ouebec/Folk Songs of Ouebec (Waterloo: Waterloo Music, 1957) with the original French and singable English translations, hoping to make the beautiful French-Canadian songs better known among Anglo-Canadians. Also, as singing French is much easier than speaking it, the book would be useful in teaching French to English-speaking children.

Then in Canada's Centennial Year, 1967, we added the second volume, originally published as More Folk Song-s of Canada. It gave some less familiar songs and some from Ontario and Western Canada collected since 1954. When working on the first book, we found practically no songs from west of Quebec, which led me to begin my own collecting.

My other general anthology, The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs, was prepared with the hope of making Canadian songs better known in Britain and the United States, and allowed me to present a substantial number of Ontario songs I had collected.

Later I scripted The Audio-Visual History of Canadian Folk Music, issued by Mead Sound Filmstrips as a combined filmstrip and cassette for sale to schools. The Canadian singer Stan Rogers (tragically killed in a plane crash a few years later) narrated the script which was illustrated by short excerpts from songs and some well-chosen paintings and photographs. One delightful book I edited came from my friend Alice Kane, a children's librarian who supplied some of the items for Sally and Ring Around the Moon. She is a founder of The Storytellers' School of Toronto and the best storyteller in Canada. She has a phenomenal memory, and every time I saw her she would be quoting a song or a poem or a saying she remembered from her childhood. I kept telling her to write these down, they were folklore; eventually she did, but instead of simply writing the songs and rhymes, she quoted them as part of the story of her childhood years in Belfast, and gave me the manuscript as a Christmas present! I was so charmed by it that I arranged to have it printed as Songs and Savings of an Ulster Childhood (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983). This is a beautifully written narrative incorporating an astonishing wealth of folklore drawn from Alice's amazingly complete memory of her first twelve years in Ireland. I added an introduction, notes, comparative references, and bibliography.

In 1985 I received the Vicky Metcalf Award of \$2,000 "for a body of work inspirational to Canadian youth," a prize administered by the Canadian Authors Association.

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