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### Not Growin' Up: Poetry for Children

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*Ouachita Baptist University*

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# SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**“Not Growin’ Up: Poetry for Children”**

written by

**Lindsay Chastain**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the Carl Goodson Honors Program meets the criteria for acceptance and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Johnny Wink, Thesis Director

Amy Sonheim, Second Reader

Carrie Sharp, Third Reader

Barbara Pemberton, Honors Program Director

April 15, 2011

# “Not Growin’ Up: Poetry for Children”

Honors Thesis Paper

By Lindsay Chastain

Ouachita Baptist University

April 15, 2011

*Abstract: If adults are the prime reviewers of children's poetry, then children may not give the poetry a good review. After writing my own children's poetry and having it read by Dr. Johnny Wink, I put it to the test of Gifted and Talented fourth-graders. These bright students gave me feedback on my poetry and told me where to improve. At the completion of this project, I submitted a collection of my works to two children's book publishers for review.*

## *Preface*

If adults are the prime reviewers of children's poetry, then children may not give the poetry a good review. No child wants to read or be educated by lackluster words on a page. It takes the input of more than a publisher to create a poetry collection that is of worth to children. "Not Growin' Up: Poetry for Children" is a triadic blend of the imaginings of a witty writer, the contributions of a wise professor, and the remarks of quite gifted and talented fourth-graders.

At the start of this project, I began not only to write poetry, but also to read it. I had to get ideas from the published so that I have might have the chance to be published. I created my poetry based on ideas from my imagination, my experiences, and my poetry reading. Prior to and during the first phase of my project, I perused the following works:

Red Sings from Treetops: A Year in Colors by Joyce Sidman

Please Bury Me in the Library by Patrick J. Lewis

Heartsongs by Mattie J. T. Stepanek

Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic Sung in the Year 1888 by Ernest Lawrence Thayer

The Spider and the Fly by Mary Botham Howitt

A Child's Calendar by John Updike

Harlem: A Poem by Walter Dean Myers

Animals, Animals by Eric Carle

Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices by Paul Fleischman

Honey, I Love: and Other Poems by Eloise Greenfield

Creamed Tuna Fish and Peas on Toast by Philip Christian Stead

If I Were in Charge of the World: and Other Worries by Judith Viorst

Sad Underwear: and Other Complications by Judith Viorst

A Suitcase of Seaweed: and Other Poems by Janet S. Wong

Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea by Joyce Carol Thomas and Floyd Cooper

A Pizza the Size of the Sun by Jack Prelutsky

Beneath a Blue Umbrella by Jack Prelutsky

Candy Corn: Poems by James Stevenson

Each of the works is unique, and I learned something from the tones and styles of each poet. I find myself to be most like Prelutsky, whose works are funny bone ticklers. However, I can learn from the sincerity of Stepanek's Heartsongs, from the uneven meter of Honey, I Love: and Other Poems, and from the steady rhythm of John Updike's poetry.

I started writing about forty-five poems during the summer of 2010. I began some that I have yet to finish, but, thankfully, I was driven to finish thirty-five of them. Every week or two, I submitted my rhymes to Dr. Johnny Wink. He gave helpful feedback on the successes of my work and areas in which I needed to improve—even down to single words. Dr. Wink helped me to whip my poetry into shape. Now it was ready to stand the test of fourth-graders.

In the fall semester of 2010, the Ouachita Baptist University Institutional Review Board read and approved my proposal for the project, and immediately thereafter, I contacted Mrs. Rachel Halaby, the Gifted and Talented coordinator for the Arkadelphia School District. Since my target audience was third to fifth grade, I was allowed to work with a group of Gifted and Talented fourth-graders. I first went to visit the class in order to introduce myself and to distribute a consent form to be signed by their parents. The following week, I had the students complete an interest inventory, indicating their likes and dislikes in the area of reading. Only ten students completed the inventory; however, there were about fifteen students who participated regularly in the project. Fifty percent of the students indicated that they like to read poetry; forty percent wrote that they “sorta” like to read poetry, and one percent of the students do not like to read poetry. Nine out of the ten students who did the inventory prefer poetry that rhymes, while one student indicated that he likes both rhyming and non-rhyming poetry. Most of the students who indicated that their favorite hobby was some type of sport showed the most interest in soccer. This is why I penned the poem “Soccer Blocker.” I knew that I was not reaching out to

the boys as much as I was to the girls. However, the character in “Soccer Blocker” ended up not liking the sport. The original unedited version of the poem showed off a boy who enjoyed playing the game. This was the version that I allowed the students to read. When asked to choose three of their favorite poems, six out of fifteen students wrote down “Soccer Blocker.” If I could go back to the class and ask them to read the new version, I wonder how many of the students would change their minds about the poem.

For five weeks, I brought my poetry for the students to read. I had the students read nine of my poems. After reading each poem, the students filled out a “Feedback Form” that I created to help me understand how to make my poetry better. Each student was assigned a number for their own privacy. They wrote their number on each form they filled out. At the end of the final meeting with the students, I asked them to write down their top three favorite poems of mine.

The results to the study varied. Almost all of the students liked rhymes, and only two of the students indicated that they liked the more minimalistic poem entitled “Spring Break.” Some students wrote the same response for every poem: ‘It was great! I loved it!’ While that was very sweet of them, it was difficult to gain anything from that. I welcomed the criticism because it told me what I needed to repair. My favorite comment from a student was that I should write about my own life. One poem—the one about my cat—was in response to that student’s request. The most notable result of the study was that the students did not understand the titles I had chosen. So I changed some titles to make them more understandable. The poem “Get It Out!” was originally named “spaGhet It Out!” I was attempting to play with the word *spaghetti*, but the students did not understand it. I changed the title of another poem to make it more interesting. “Your Ears” became “HUH?” From the teacher standpoint, a couple of the titles could be used for teachable moments in the classroom, so I left them the same. “Cleanliness is Next to

Sickliness” and “When Pigtails Fly” are based on the idioms, ‘Cleanliness is next to Godliness,’ and ‘When pigs fly.’ Instead of having to choose between teaching idioms and teaching poetry, my students can have the best of both worlds. I want them to use their loaf rather than not play with a full deck.

Completing this project is like finishing a glass of cold milk. It was a refreshing feeling that I hope to experience again soon. It was worthwhile to involve other people in my poetry writing, and I hope to one day have more people join the effort of helping me be a better writer. My next step, besides writing, is to acquire a literary agent. Such a person would link me with more publishing companies and therefore more opportunities to be published. In January I submitted sixteen poems to Clarion Books and Chronicle Books. My greatest hope for this first submission is that my poetry is giving the publishers the wiggly giggles.

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*Not Growin' Up*

All around me growin' up are kids who want to be

Older than what they are.

But me?

No, not me!

I'll be eight plus two forever...

(Until I'm eight plus three.)

*Cleanliness Is Next to Sickliness*

I cleaned the sheets.

I cleaned the floor.

I killed the cobwebs by the door.

I vacuumed mats.

I vacuumed rugs.

I sucked the hair right off of Shrugs.

I sprayed my plants.

I sprayed the mold.

I ate my sandwich (ten days old!).

The spiders bit.

The dog is bald.

My mom and dad are quite appalled.

Now I am sick.

All's gloom and doom.

I'd rather have a messy room.

*When Pigtails Fly*

Spinning like a helicopter, round and round her pigtails go.

Watch out for that long-haired, blue-eyed, spinning girl named Betty Jo.

Stephen Sleeveen found that out the hard way. (That poor guy!)

When will Betty Jo stop spinning? Probably when pigtails fly.

*Get It Out!*

There's a hair in my spaghetti.

I'm glad I didn't eat it.

And now that it has shown itself,

I wish that it would beat it.

*Grandpa's Circus Farm*

A cow on skates,

A chick on crates,

A llama winning in debates;

A pig in skis,

A hen in cheese,

An emu down on bended knees;

A horse with wings,

A goat with strings,

A rooster with enormous rings!

I like to visit Grandpa's farm

With all its wonder and its charm.

A circus act for all to see!

(But mainly just for you and me.)

*HUH?*

Remove all that wax from your ears

That's been in there possibly YEARS.

Set all that gunk free

So that you can see

What it's like for a person who hears.

*New Nose News*

Do you have a wondrous smell  
That only your nose can retell?  
Surely someone else has found  
A scent so pleasing, so profound.  
When you see it's dropping by,  
Won't you let each of us say, "Hi?"  
Certainly we'd love to meet  
Your new aroma, soft and sweet.  
Use your nose to spread the news!  
(But please provide some clean tissues.)

*Ten-Digit Hands*

Look at those strong hands that hold up those fingers.

Feel how the sting of the bee often lingers.

Notice the cool of dog-paddling in summer.

Watch out for Bruno. His bites are a bummer.

Enjoy eating finger foods—cheese, grapes, sliced ham.

Be careful! Don't get yourself caught in a jam.



*The Wiggly Giggles*

It started with snickers.

Then here galloped giggles.

In cha-cha-d the chuckles,

Each tummy with wiggles.

The room became rampant with loads of loud laughter,

And heehawing hustled in shortly thereafter.

*Soccer Blocker*

The goalie's job is blocking kicks,  
But I would rather dodge the ball.  
The other team's the enemy,  
But I don't care. I like them all.  
Is it too late to join a band?  
I think I'd fit in with that crowd.  
I love to play Dad's coffee cans,  
But most of all, I just love LOUD.

*Spring Break*

My mattress is dying.

Last night while I was lying

On my bed,

I heard a spring break.

*Al Lee Cat (n):*

<sup>1</sup>A smoky gray male with a fabulous tail  
Who did not bite but purred all night  
And quite a large kitty (far from itty bitty)  
Who could open up doors and could land on all fours  
And made life so sweet when his girl he did greet.

*The Bakery del Fakery*

Banana peel pudding,

Fungus fondue,

Sweaty sock sundae,

And pie á la shoe.

Ah, curdled green sour

Cream de la crème;

Scum-berry cookies,

Each covered with phlegm.

If you haven't sampled

Our sweets, do make haste!

The Bakery del Fakery

Invites you to taste!

*A World without Jelly*

I opened my brown bag at lunchtime today,  
And saw that my mom had fixed PB&J!  
I was so excited I told my best friend,  
But all my excitement soon came to an end.  
A fourth grade bully, Theodore Tatelli,  
Snatched my sandwich away and scraped off the jelly.  
The grape flavored jelly flew on my new watch,  
And on my white shirt was a big purple splotch.  
My sandwich was destroyed, my clothes were all stained.  
The &J was gone; only PB remained.  
But Theodore Tatelli, in doing something so hateful,  
Had made me entirely, incredibly grateful!  
For what would take place if ALL jelly was tossed?  
If we didn't have jelly, I'm sure we'd be lost!  
What would fill holes of the doughnuts I eat?  
Without jelly, they wouldn't be nearly as sweet!  
And what about the jelly in the jelly bean?  
Would I have to start eating beans that are green?  
Would Santa's belly shake like a bowl full of bricks?  
A bowl full of marbles? Of celery sticks?  
And the poor jellyfish—what an innocent creature!

Without jelly, he'd have no distinguishing feature.

Use jam, you might say. You think it would do?

I'd have to disagree with you.

Jam is what happens when toes and floors meet.

Jam is a party, a dance to a beat.

Jam lives between your toes (and it's smelly);

I've never heard anyone call it "toe *jelly*."

Jam is not jelly, and jelly, not jam!

Have I convinced you how certain I am

That a jelly-less world would simply not do?

It'd be as pointless as wearing one shoe!

So give thanks for the jelly that fills up your tummy.

Give thanks that it tastes so incredibly yummy!

And if you should encounter a Theodore Tatelli,

Remember to hold onto your jelly.

*The Honorable, despicable Judge Franny Fay Freeze*

The Honorable, despicable Judge Franny Fay Freeze,  
 With all her judicious perniciousness sat  
 On her bench in her courtroom, while listening to pleas  
 From **criminals** and **crooks** who had chosen to RAT  
 On their cohorts, who, likewise, were down on their knees,  
 Requesting a pardon from tHiS crime and from tHaT.

While she suffered through excuses—BUT tHiS and BUT tHaT,  
 The Honorable, despicable Judge Franny Fay Freeze  
 Felt a *<scurrying, flurrying>* SOMETHING cross her knees!  
 Maintaining her judicious perniciousness, she sat,  
 Looked down at her lap, and there, was a RAT.  
 And, instantly, she forgot about **criminals**, about pleas.

So, then, in the midst of their well-rehearsed pleas,  
 The hard-hearted woman **exclaimed**, “What is that?!”  
 The court officer **yelled**, “Your Honor, a RAT!”  
 The Honorable, despicable Judge Franny Fay Freeze  
 No longer with judicious perniciousness sat,  
 But sat on her bench, on her robe, on her knees.

And while she sat *scared* on the CAPS of her knees,  
 She turned to the lawyers and **begged**, “Won’t you please



Help me?" But they continued to stare. They stared as they sat.  
Not scared of CRIMINALS, LAWSUITS, DEATH ROW—none of that!  
But the Honorable, despicable Judge Franny Fay Freeze  
Was *afraid* of a stunted, small runt of a RAT?

But quickly the crooks sought to **fetch** the poor RAT,  
So they stopped their beseeching and got up from their knees.  
For the Honorable, despicable Judge Franny Fay Freeze  
Held their lives in her hands. So the judge they would please.  
A murderous mob chased tHiS way and tHaT  
After the rat, who ran CIRCLES around where the arbiter sat.

Stopping for a *breath*, the small rodent sat,  
And the murderous mob **apprehended** the RAT.  
One member of the group held the rat so that  
It could not escape. He got **down** on his knees,  
Gavel in hand, ready to **STRIKE**... "Don't! Please!"  
Yelled the Honorable, despicable Judge Franny Fay Freeze.

And so startling was that, that in *silence* they sat.  
Judge Franny Fay Freeze had a heart for the RAT!  
And then, with wobbLiNg knees, she pardoned all the prisoner's pleas.

*Loop Nincompoop*

Nincompoop in the Loop

Ate his vegetable soup

In a huge hula hoop

With his scarf-knitting group.

But the hoop flew the coop

And the soup was pure gloop.

So the group (that poor troupe)

Healed the Loop Nincompoop.

## Informed Consent Agreement

Project Title: Not Growin' Up: Poetry for Children

Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to allow your child to participate in the study.

The purpose of the study is to determine what children want to read and their level of understanding of poetry in order to compile a book of poetry based on their wants.

What your child will do in the study: Your child will complete an interest inventory about his or her likes and dislikes. He or she will also read poetry and write down answers to a few questions about the poetry. The questions simply have to do with their opinions about the poetry.

Your child will spend about ten minutes in each session. The total experiment will require about fifty minutes.

There are no risks to your child as a participant in this study.

The study may help us understand how to write poetry that interests children.

The information your child provides in the study will be handled confidentially and may be assigned a code number. Any list connecting your child's name to this number will be secure. Regardless, your child's name will not be used in any report.

Your child's participation in the study is completely voluntary, and he or she has the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your child will receive no payment for participating in the study.

If you have questions or concerns about the study, please contact

Lindsay Hay  
Early Childhood Education Major  
OBU Box 3506  
410 Ouachita Street  
Ouachita Baptist University  
Arkadelphia, AR 71998-0001.  
Telephone: (870) 740-8749

Faculty Advisor:  
Dr. Johnny Wink  
English Professor  
OBU Box 3667  
410 Ouachita Street  
Ouachita Baptist University  
Arkadelphia, AR 71998-0001  
Telephone: (870) 245-5556

You may contact the following person regarding your child's rights in this study:

Randall Wight, Chair  
Institutional Review Board  
OBU Box 3773  
410 Ouachita Street  
Ouachita Baptist University  
Arkadelphia, AR 71998-0001  
Telephone: (870) 245-5106

I have read and understand this document and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered. I agree to allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like a copy of the aggregate results of this study, please contact Lindsay Hay.

Please DO NOT write your name on this paper. Circle one answer for each question. If you circle 'OTHER,' write your answer in the blank.

Do you like to read poetry?

YES

NO

SORTA

Do you like poetry that rhymes or poetry that does not rhyme?

RHYME

NO RHYME

What is your favorite hobby?



BASKETBALL



DANCE



WRITING

OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

If you could choose the subject of a poem (what it's about), what subject would you choose?



SCHOOL



PEOPLE



SPORTS

OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please DO NOT write your name on this paper. Circle one answer for each question. If you circle 'OTHER,' write your answer in the blank.

Do you like to read poetry?

YES

NO

SORTA

Do you like poetry that rhymes or poetry that does not rhyme?

RHYME

NO RHYME

What is your favorite hobby?



BASKETBALL



DANCE



WRITING

OTHER: Soccer

If you could choose the subject of a poem (what it's about), what subject would you choose?



SCHOOL



PEOPLE



SPORTS

OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Number: 10

## Feedback Form

Please answer the following questions after you read each poem.

Do you like the title of the poem?

Does the title of the poem make sense?

What did you like about the poem?

What did you NOT like about the poem?

How could the poet (the person who wrote this poem) make this poem better?

Other comments:

Poem #

Feedback Form

Please answer the following questions after you read each poem.

Do you like the title of the poem?

Yes

Does the title of the poem make sense?

Yes

What did you like about the poem?

it was almost like a Jack Prelutsky poem

What did you NOT like about the poem?

Nothing

How could the poet (the person who wrote this poem) make this poem better?

I think it's fine the way it is.

Other comments:

Your number: 18

Poem ~~18~~

Feedback Form

Please answer the following questions after you read each poem.

Do you like the title of the poem?

Yes  
I thought it should make me to think it will be good

Does the title of the poem make sense?

Yes

What did you like about the poem?

the subject of it

What did you NOT like about the poem?

it was a little childish

How could the poet (the person who wrote this poem) make this poem better?

Nothing

Other comments:

Your number: 5