

DEAR MR. HENSHAW

written by BEVERLY CLEARY

illustrated by PAUL O. ZELINSKY

published by WILLIAM MORROW AND COMPANY 1983

BOOK NOTE

"Leigh Botts (boy)" writes to Mr. Henshaw, author, after Leigh's second-grade teacher reads *Ways to Amuse a Dog* to the class. In third grade Leigh writes to the author again, reporting that he has now read the book himself and telling about his dog, Bandit. As a fourth-grader, Leigh asks Mr. Henshaw to reply "in his own handwriting" and signs himself, "Your best reader." *Ways to Amuse a Dog* is Leigh's basic book; in fifth grade he gets an A- for a report on it. This leads Mr. Henshaw, in a reply to Leigh which is revealed through Leigh's next letter, to suggest that the boy try reading another book of his, *Moose on Toast*. Leigh, now Mr. Henshaw's "number 1 fan," does. A letter from Leigh, now in sixth grade, to "Dear Mr. Henshaw" reveals that he has moved to a new town, and he includes a class assignment—a long list of questions to the author. Some of Mr. Henshaw's less-than-serious answers are shown in Leigh's next letter as well as the boy's reaction to the author's sending him a long list of questions. Leigh replies that he won't answer them, but his mother finds the list and tells him that he should.

Reluctantly, the boy does, and his situation becomes clear; his mother, Bonnie, has divorced Bill, his father, who is a trucker. Leigh knows a lot about rigs and cross-country hauling. He misses Bandit, who rides with Bill, and wishes his father would keep in touch. He is lonely because his mother works for a catering service days and studies nights to become a Licensed Vocational Nurse. Leigh doesn't have friends at his new school except for Mr. Fridley, the custodian. By the time he answers the tenth question, "What do you wish?" Leigh has dropped the "Dear"

and writes curtly to "Mr. Henshaw." But he admits to two wishes—that somebody would stop stealing the catered goodies out of his lunch bag and that Dad and Bandit would come in the rig to take him for a ride.

Mr. Henshaw acknowledges Leigh's answers with a postcard and suggests the boy keep a diary. Leigh tries but finds he can only do this if he writes his entries as letters—still to Mr. Henshaw, but unsent. He cheers up a little at Christmas when his father has a down jacket delivered to him by a trucker friend, but after vacation he is really plagued by the lunch-bag thief and by his father's forgotten promise to phone. Meanwhile, his teacher urges him to write something for the Young Writers' Yearbook. Besides seeing his piece in mimeograph, he could win lunch with a "Famous Author." During the following weeks Leigh's diary shows how frustrated he is—he can't think of a story to write; his father doesn't call. Finally the boy calls Bill and hears the bad news that his father lost Bandit when he was stopped by a snow-storm in the Sierra Mountains and also discovers that Bill is about to take a boy and his mom out for pizza. Leigh now sees more about his father and the way his father's life as a trucker disrupted his parents' marriage. He feels less bitter about his mother divorcing his father.

Leigh thinks up a way to foil the lunch-bag thief—a metal lunch box with a burglar alarm—and he also thinks up a title for a story: *The Ten-Foot Wax Man*. His father sends him twenty dollars to make up for losing Bandit. When Leigh is stuck on his story, he mails a letter to Mr. Henshaw and asks for help, and the author sends him some tips. He buys an old lunch box, batteries, and wire and makes a burglar alarm. But by lunch hour no one has tried to open the box, and Leigh knows that he can't get his lunch without setting off the alarm—which works just fine. The principal is impressed, and several kids want alarms. He ends up making friends with a boy named Barry. Bill phones and says he's always asking other truckers over the CB if anyone has seen Bandit; he asks if Leigh misses him.

At the last minute Leigh writes a description of a trip he took once in his father's truck—"A Day on Dad's Rig" by Leigh M. Botts. His piece only wins an Honorable Mention, but his teacher manages to get him to lunch with the prize winners and the Fa-

mous Author—a Mrs. Angela Badger, who is, according to Leigh, a plump nice lady with wild hair. To his surprise she has read his piece, and she calls him an author and says he did splendidly for a boy his age: He didn't try to imitate anyone. She tells him to "keep it up." Leigh asks if she has ever met an author named Boyd Henshaw. She has and says that "he's a very nice young man with a wicked twinkle in his eye." Leigh writes to tell Mr. Henshaw about his Honorable Mention.

Leigh comes home to find his dad and the huge rig by the house. Bill has found Bandit and brought him to Leigh. When his father comes in for coffee and asks Bonnie if there's still a chance to work things out, she says no. Leigh is sad, but he understands, and as his father leaves, the boy tells him to take Bandit again to keep him company.

Newbery Medal Acceptance

by Beverly Cleary

After the excitement and pleasure of receiving the telephone call telling me that *Dear Mr. Henshaw* was the winner of the 1984 Newbery Medal, my first thought was: I have to give a speech. Over sixty acceptance speeches have preceded mine; for over thirty years I have spoken about my life and works until I feel the subject is frayed beyond repair. So I begin, trying to feel undaunted, by saying thank you to the members of the American Library Association who have wished me well over the years and to the Newbery Committee for honoring a book that can be read by eight-, nine-, and ten-year-old children. These early years, I believe, are the years in which children's imaginations may be captured by the printed word. If books evade young readers during these years, the joys of reading may be lost forever. Although children are not present this evening, I should also like to thank—pass it on!—the thousands who have written to me in the past thirty-four years and who are the inspiration for *Dear Mr. Henshaw*.

I might not be standing here this evening if it were not for a succession of aloof, exacting English teachers in Portland, Oregon, to whom I am indebted for their teaching and for their com-

ments, "Very funny" and "You show talent," on my stories. Such lavish praise was rare and precious, for praise was meager in those days. Hand out an overdose, and the youth of Oregon would be spoiled forever. The most important teacher of all, however, was my mother, whose praise was almost nonexistent. Because I was an only child, she felt I was in dire danger of being spoiled, perhaps even spoiled rotten.

My mother was an independent, determined, vivacious, intense woman, ambivalent about the life she led. She had unshakable faith in the importance of books, reading, and libraries, and in many ways her thinking was ahead of her time. She had both a sense of humor and a sense of drama—and a way of describing, with lively eyes and animated hands, any event exciting to her. I regret that she did not live to experience the eruption of nearby Mount St. Helens.

Around the turn of the century my mother and two of her cousins, armed with classic, liberal high school diplomas and letters of recommendation from a year or two of teaching, boarded a train in Michigan and came out West to teach in the sagebrush country of eastern Washington where they had, as she often said, a high old time. Single women were scarce; single men were plentiful. My mother loved teaching, but marriage ended her career, for at that time married women who lived in small towns were usually prohibited from teaching. Years later, my mother was still able to help neighborhood students with Latin and mathematics. When she was in her seventies, worn down by life and by years of caring for her own mother, she admitted that those years of teaching in one-room schoolhouses were the happiest of her life.

My mother had, however, one pupil—me. She taught me constantly. Her words still play through my mind: "Always sift cake flour before measuring"; "Windows washed when the sun is shining will streak"—advice followed by all excellent housekeepers when I was growing up. Otherwise, what would the neighbors think?

In addition to her homely directions, my mother had more important wisdom to impart to her pupil: "Reading is to the mind as exercise is to the body." (Every time a jogger thumps by our house, I wonder whether he goes home and spends equal time reading.) I was constantly directed to use my imagination and my

ingenuity and to stand on my own two feet. One of her assignments was "Go ahead and be somebody." During the Great Depression her text was "Every woman should have an income of her own." Another assignment was "Always try to make the world a better place." Cleaning up my room was the way to begin.

When a teacher required a composition, my mother said, "Always remember, the best writing is simple writing" and produced her own high school rhetoric book to prove it. Unless I was assigned an essay on William Gorgas clearing the Isthmus of Panama of rats and mosquitoes, or that topic I resented most of all, "Could Beowulf Make the Team?" she added, "Write something funny. People always enjoy reading something that makes them laugh." Her final and mysterious advice, followed by laughter, was "Don't forget you are related to Ring Lardner by divorce." I know this unrelationship is remote but true, for my mother mentioned names. But we can't remember everything our mothers tell us, can we?

When teachers began to inspire me with their comments, my mother encouraged me to become a writer but cautioned me that writing was an unreliable livelihood. "Every woman must be able to support herself and, if necessary, her children," was one of her favorite precepts.

And so, with some hardship to my parents, I was sent off to college, not to catch a husband, as was the custom for young women of that time and place, but to become independent. I became a children's librarian, the next best thing to a writer, married the man I had met in college, and when the right moment came thirty-five years ago, I wrote simply a funny book about a boy named Henry Huggins and set it in the neighborhood in which I had lived when I was his age. The children's editor at Morrow, the first to whom I submitted my manuscript, accepted it. My mother's teaching was sound.

This brings me, as my English teachers would have said, to the body of my talk: *children*, that beautiful word so often today replaced by *kids*. We talk about excellence in children's books and of their place in the mainstream of literature but say little about readers. There are those who feel that children need not be considered when evaluating their books. I am not one of them. Nei-

ther do I believe that children have natural good taste and that any book they are willing to read is therefore worthwhile.

Soon after the publication of *Henry Huggins* in 1950, children began to write to me, many for school assignments, letters carefully or carelessly written, almost all conforming to a teacher's instructions because my books are read at the age children are taught letter-writing. I now receive thousands of letters every year, more than I can answer. I am haunted by disappointed children. Most letters say the writer has read and enjoyed my books. Some say they have read them over and over. A few express resentment at being required to write—I am on their side! Many children manage an original sentence or two. One girl interrupted her proper school letter with the words "Growl growl growl SHUT UP TUMMY!" Another closed with "Well, this is one thing in the mailbox that is not a bill." Last sentences often reveal what is on the child's mind; and rare children write long, spontaneous letters that are a joy to read.

The diversity of the lives of children amazes me: a crop-duster's son in South Dakota; children who dislike living in mobile homes; a lonely little girl whose father is stationed in the Philippines and who has brought her friends with her in books; a child whose family built a log cabin in the woods and who lives without electricity; children of all races—I know from the pictures they enclose—who write as children, with no mention of color; blind children whose teachers translate their braille letters; brain-damaged children whose brave letters are barely intelligible; wealthy children who write of horses, swimming pools, and the latest video equipment; poor children—one girl wrote a happy letter listing her Christmas presents: pajamas, a sweater, and a toothbrush; inner-city children who wish they could live in Henry Huggins's neighborhood; boys and girls who live in children's homes—one girl wrote, "I used to have a father. My grandma says he loved to read so naturally I take after him"; farm children, who almost always write interesting letters; a girl who wrote that she read my books in cars, trucks, and jeeps; refugee children, who write meticulous letters and whose teachers enclosed notes describing the terrors the children have survived to reach the United States or Canada; children who live on streets named Bunny Run, Sodom, or Enchanted Freeway; children who hate

reading; children who say they can't get enough of reading; happy children, grieving children, exuberant children, sick children. The saddest letter I have received came from a boy with a Spanish name who wrote, "I am a cancer victim. Life is as short as the wind."

Adults often ask me whether, over the years of receiving letters from young readers, I have noticed changes in children. Yes and no. Their deepest feelings remain the same. Letters reveal that children want to love and to be loved by two parents in a united family. Many children describe their families and say, I love them all. Children want pets and if they have them, often list them ahead of brothers and sisters. They want to get along with their siblings but express a need for improvement, especially in their brothers. An amazing number have little brothers or sisters exactly like Ramona. They want teachers who like them. Some want many friends, while others are comfortable with one or two best friends. Most appear to be resilient and, like the girl who was happy to receive the toothbrush for Christmas, accept without complaint whatever circumstances life hands them. They want books they can understand, books in which they do not "get lost in the first chapter and can't tell what the author is talking about."

In the past seven or eight years, however, letters have begun to reflect changes in society that affect children. As parents grow critical of public education, an increasing number of children write from private schools—expensive private schools in New York, country day schools, religious schools, and academies. Some children now ask whether I have been saved.

The most noticeable change is the increase in the demands that children feel free, and are even encouraged, to make on authors. Has the "me" generation, I wonder, produced a "gimme" generation? Today every mail brings demands for books, something unheard of a few years ago, when a child might wish he had a book but never asked outright for it. Children demand answers in an author's own handwriting by a certain date and say they get extra credit for an answer. They expect authors to participate in a variety of school projects; one project requires children to ask for something from my wastebasket, along with an explanation as to how the discarded item relates to my life.

Hundreds of children now begin by saying, "I am in a Gifted and Talented Program. We are studying authors. Please answer the following questions. . . ." Their lists of five to thirty questions sometimes include "What are your books about?" and almost always end with "Give me some tips on writing." The ghost of my mother whispers over my shoulder, "Stand on your own two feet. Go to the library. Read," while I wonder what would happen if I sent long lists of questions for children to answer. The temptation is great. I compose a few questions.

Children have grown more sophisticated, at least on the surface. Letters written on computers are beginning to arrive. A boy inquires about my stock portfolio. A girl asks, "Could you tell me about your love life, if it is not a secret?" Several boys have expressed a love of guns. Mothers who stay home to care for their families are dismissed with "My mother just stays home and works around the house," even though that mother may have a family of six.

Recently, children have begun to refer to writing as a business and want to know whether I make a lot of money and get a lot of publicity. They have no idea of the meaning of plagiarism. They tell me they plan to write books about my characters when they grow up. A new and frequent question is "Don't you just take parts of different books and sort of mix them around?" They ask whether I get my ideas from TV shows or movies. Boys tell me they want to be comedians, cartoonists, or professional athletes; many girls, influenced by the Olympics on television, are working at gymnastics and ice skating. Others tell me they want to be stars or they want to be famous "and get a lot of publicity"—but for doing what, they do not say. Many children seem to feel that anything that requires effort to master, including reading, is a bore and not worthwhile. A sixth-grade girl tells me, "I am one of those people who don't think a lot."

The last sentences of letters are often a revelation of the dark and lonely side of childhood, as if the writer is reaching out for help but has no one to turn to. A ten-year-old girl writes, "My hobbies are collecting stickers, riding boys' ten-speed bikes, doing nothing in school and having no friends, listening to the radio all day long. That's my whole life." A boy confesses, "Everyone at school thinks I'm a clutz! [sic] It can really get on your nerves af-

terwhile." Another child tells me, "My parents are devvorst. My dad is the kind of person who never wants to be around kids." Many children say they remain with their mother, but their pets live with their father. A girl confides, "I wish I could sue my parents for malpractice but I know I can't so I just try to forget what they do." A boy refuses to capitalize the name of his school because he doesn't like it. My book *Runaway Ralph* brings forth the comment "I had a father named Ralph once, but he ran away." Another boy writes, "Ralph wants to run away. This is how I feel about my father. My father gets me mad. I want to get custody of my mother but I am not sure. My mother is better." The letters from almost every child in one class contained such statements as "Mr. Quimby should have kicked Mrs. Quimby in the butt" or "Mr. Quimby should have given Mrs. Quimby a bloody nose." Many children tell me Ramona should be spanked. Recently, two boys from different parts of the United States wrote asking why I live in this country. I wonder if this is the start of a new trend.

On the positive side, an increasing number of children write of turning to books for comfort. A girl with four brothers goes to her room and reads whenever she "gets mad." Children write of reading when they are lonely, sad, or afraid. Many read after bedtime by a flashlight hidden underneath the blankets, as I did when I was their age. The past few months have made me think books may be gaining on the temptations of television. One girl wrote, "There are five people in my family so you know how hard it is to get the TV set. I just go to my room and read." Another said that reading was better than television because the pictures were in her head, and still another, "Reading is like having your own little television set in your head." A New York City child tells me, "My father says the library is my best friend." The library was my best friend, too, and still is.

Readers often suggest books for me to write about Henry or Ramona or books featuring themselves as central characters. The suggestion that stayed with me came in 1982 from several boys unknown to one another: "Please write a book about a boy whose parents are divorced."

For some time I had been thinking about writing a different sort of book because I find change refreshing and because I had noticed that, although I have written a variety of books, I was

being stereotyped as always writing a certain kind of book. The new one would be about a boy. Girls, it appeared to me, had taken over children's literature. A story began to fall into place. Leigh Botts, child of divorce, living with his mother, longing for his father. Those thoughts that are jumbled in an author's mind began to separate themselves and cling to this nucleus. An overheard sentence spoken in grief by a strange woman: "It's so terrible when his father promises to call and doesn't." A remark by a teacher: "This kid in my class rigged up a burglar alarm for his lunch box. It made a terrible racket." These were joined by boys' pride in fathers who drive tractor-trailer rigs, grief at the loss of a pet, loneliness in a new school. My own idle thoughts about sending children lists of questions were no longer idle. Letters to an author who sends questions and demands answers followed by a diary seemed right; let the boy reveal his own feelings, for I believe children who want to write should look within themselves, not within the books of others.

One problem was the author Leigh was to write to. He must be a young foot-loose male whose books did not resemble mine. Creating Mr. Henshaw, from a name plucked from an obituary column (I read names anyplace I can find them!) was great fun, for he writes the books I have wanted to write but could not. His *Ways to Amuse a Dog* goes back to the 1940s, when I first heard that booksellers' legend of a woman who misunderstood the title of a book called *Forty Days of Musa Dagh* and asked for *Forty Ways to Amuse a Dog*. This struck me as a splendid idea for a book because most of the dogs I knew were bored. *Moose on Toast* came out of a visit to Alaska, where a librarian asked, with a touch of desperation in her voice, whether I would like to take home some moose sausage. Her husband had shot a moose, and the family of three was faced with eating a thousand pounds of moose meat from their freezer. When I mentioned this to other librarians as having humorous possibilities for a story, no one was amused. All had a moose or part of a moose in their freezers. This discouraged me but would not discourage Mr. Henshaw, who would spend his time in Alaska climbing mountains instead of speaking at banquets and would be hungry enough to eat moose, even though I was told it is dry and stringy. Mr. Henshaw's third and more serious book *Beggar Bears*, about bear cubs in Yellow-

stone National Park, who are taught to beg instead of forage and whose mothers die from eating plastic bags, is another book I could not write because I lack a naturalist's knowledge. Foot-loose Mr. Henshaw was free to travel and research bears.

When *Dear Mr. Henshaw* was published, almost every note on the Christmas cards we received asked, "How come *you* know so much about trucks?" Fortunately, our son had been able to answer my questions. When he was in college, he worked summers in produce warehouses and packing sheds, where he came to know the ways of truckers. I also visited a truck repair yard in Salinas—not an easy experience, for the dusty truckers found my asking questions amusing and I had to be wary of having my leg pulled. Our son also rigged for me a lunch box with an alarm that does indeed go off with a racket. I was tempted to bring it along tonight, but was deterred by the thought of the panic that wires and a battery would incite at the airport.

Dear Mr. Henshaw was a most satisfying book to write. It seemed almost to write itself. Because I find life humorous, sorrowful, and filled with problems that have no solutions, my intent was to write about the feelings of a lonely boy and to avoid the genre of the problem novel. David Reuther, my third-generation editor, understood and was enthusiastic. As soon as the book was published, more letters—the first, from adults—arrived. Some said it was the best book I had ever written; others expressed disappointment, even indignation, that I had not written a book as funny as the *Ramona* books. This surprised me. Writers of humor for children often hear that they "just write funny stories" and are made aware, even though they know it is wrong, that serious books are considered superior. A couple of people said they liked the book themselves but expressed doubts about giving it to children because it wasn't funny and because Leigh's parents were not reconciled at the end—a conclusion that I felt would be sentimental, dishonest, and a source of false hope to many children. Teachers wrote that the book would be valuable for classroom discussion because so many pupils came from single-parent homes. Mothers struggling to rear sons without help from fathers wrote moving letters of appreciation.

Then letters from children began to arrive. The first came from a boy with two parents, whose father owns a gas station in Leigh's

town. He said he read *Dear Mr. Henshaw* straight through the day he bought it and five times the next week. Others said it was my best book. Children found more of the humor in the story than adults and expressed interest in Leigh's lunch-box alarm, although one girl wrote a wistful letter saying she never had anything good in *her* lunch. Another girl said she was *so* glad Leigh's parents didn't get together at the end. Many told me how hard life is in a new school, that their lives were very much like Leigh's, or that there were "lots of kids like Leigh" in their school. Several letters ended "Please don't send *me* a list of questions." One boy wrote, "I was really moved by the book. I felt as though I was gona [going to] wake up from a dream state and find myself in Leigh's body."

Other children wrote that they liked Leigh, but they liked *Ramona* better. And why shouldn't they? The rallying cry of my library training was "the right book for the right child." In a world in which children's lives vary so widely, there is no reason why every child should like every book, even Newbery books. I recall my own sixth-grade teacher, who held her forty restless pupils engrossed by reading *Smoky* (Scribner), the Newbery winner of 1927. Here at last was a book about the West which used dialect familiar to young Oregonians and was not a pioneer story. We read every word written by Will James, played cowboy, and tried to learn to lasso with clothesline rope. In 1928, however, none of us cared to read a Newbery winner about a pigeon in India.

No, when I wrote *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, I did not expect every reader to like Leigh as much as *Ramona*. Although I am deeply touched that my books have reached two generations of children, popularity has never been my goal. If it had been, I would have written *Ramona Solves the Mystery of the Haunted House and Finds a Baby Brother* or followed trends and written something like *Henry and Beezus Play Doctor*, instead of a book about the feelings of a lonely child of divorce.

"Who is Leigh Botts?" adults now ask. "Is there really a Leigh Botts?" children want to know. "Is he a friend of yours?" There is not one Leigh Botts; there are many. Leigh Botts is all the brave and lonely children I have ever known who have found books and libraries to be their best friends.



Sandra Hansen

Beverly Cleary

by David Reuther

"It is a rare thing to be hailed by audience and critics alike," wrote Natalie Babbitt in *The New York Times Book Review*. "In our field, children do occasionally take up a writer critics have spurned. . . . More often, children spurn writers that critics have taken up. But in Mrs. Cleary's case, everyone seems delighted."

For two generations, Beverly Cleary has captivated children and their parents with her unique ability to re-create the everyday joys and sorrows of childhood. Where does this gift come from? The author herself provides a clue: "I write books for children to read for pleasure," she says. "Reading meant so much to me when I was growing up. It made all the difference in the quality of my childhood."

Like her characters Henry Huggins, Ellen Tebbits, Otis Spoford, and the remarkable Quimby family, Beverly Cleary grew up in Oregon. Born in McMinnville, she spent her first six years in Yamhill, a tiny farming community in the Willamette Valley. "I loved living on the farm," she says. "I didn't have any brothers or sisters, so I had to amuse myself. I rarely played with other children until I was six and we moved to Portland. That was the most traumatic year of my life."

Her first-grade classroom with forty pupils seemed dark, crowded, and stuffy after her life in Yamhill. And her teacher was

a terrifying woman who whipped the pupils' hands with a metal-tipped bamboo pointer as punishment for minor transgressions. "I became a very quiet child," recalls Beverly, "and I think observant, because I didn't want to do anything wrong in school." Second grade was easier, but it wasn't until the following year that Beverly made the miraculous discovery that reading could be fun. "From then on I was the library's best customer."

In the 1920s, however, Beverly found that most American children's books were pioneer stories or moralistic tales about boys and girls who lived in foreign countries. She says, "I wanted to read stories about ordinary children who lived in a medium-sized town and had to walk to school, just like me. I didn't want them to solve mysteries or have adventures that would never happen to anyone I knew. Most of all, I wanted the stories to be funny."

Such books were scarce, and a sympathetic teacher-librarian suggested that when Beverly grew up, she ought to write the kind of books she wanted most to read when she was a girl. The idea appealed to Beverly, but her mother, a practical woman, suggested she should also have a way of earning a living. So, after graduating from college Beverly entered the library school of the University of Washington, where she specialized in work with children. Later, she became a children's librarian and storyteller in Yakima, Washington, until she married Clarence T. Cleary and moved to California.

During the fall of 1948 Beverly worked in the children's book department of a store in Berkeley. Surrounded by books, she was sure she could write a better book than some she saw there, and after the Christmas rush was over, she says, "I decided if I was ever going to write, I'd better get started." She expected to produce the usual novel about the maturing of a sensitive female who wanted to write. What came out instead was a story of an ordinary little boy named Henry Huggins.

When I was in Yakima, I worked with a group of little boys. They weren't exactly poor readers—they just didn't care about reading. I soon discovered that they had the same problem I'd had as a child. There weren't any books in the library they wanted to read. They wanted to read books about "kids like us." I really wrote *Henry Huggins* for them.

Beverly sent her manuscript off to William Morrow and Com-

pany because of Morrow's reputation in the field and, she confesses, because she had heard Elisabeth Hamilton, the editor in chief, speak at a conference and she wanted to know what the person who would read her manuscript looked like. Six weeks later, there came a letter from the publisher saying, "Several of us here have read your story, *Spareribs and Henry*, and we are very much interested in it as a possibility for the Morrow list." The letter also asked if the author would be willing to make minor revisions in the last chapter of the manuscript. These were gladly agreed to; *Henry Huggins* was published in September 1950 and immediately became a bestseller. Children were delighted to find a book about ordinary boys and girls, and reviewers said such things as, "We defy anyone under seventy not to chuckle over it. . . . It is hard to decide which of these incidents is the funniest."

The next year saw the publication of *Ellen Tebbits*, and since then there have been over two dozen wonderfully funny books for children, each of them filled with a warmth and a humor which are Beverly's hallmarks. And over the years, Beverly Cleary has been honored with an impressive number of awards (starting at age ten with a two-dollar prize for an essay about the beaver, "because no one else entered the contest"), including the prestigious Laura Ingalls Wilder Award in 1975 for her "substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children" as well as the 1980 Regina Medal, the 1982 University of Southern Mississippi Medallion, and two Newbery Honor Books—*Ramona and Her Father* and *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*. In addition, she was the United States nominee for the 1984 Hans Christian Andersen Award presented biennially by the International Board on Books for Young People. But perhaps the finest tributes to Beverly Cleary are the more than two dozen awards she has won, based on the votes of her enthusiastic readers.

Beverly begins work on most of her books on the second of January, the date she started *Henry Huggins*. She works in a cozy book-lined study off the living room of her comfortably elegant house in Carmel. When she is working on a manuscript, she spends each weekday morning writing in longhand on a legal pad. After the first draft is complete, she types it herself and then revises the manuscript until she feels it is exactly right. It then goes to a professional typist before being sent to the publisher.

A book usually takes Beverly about six months to a year to

write, but often she will think about a story for several years before putting pencil to paper. "I thought about Ramona for fifteen years before I started writing a book about her," she says. Her books are inspired by memories of her own childhood and by events in the lives of her own two children—the twins Malcolm and Marianne—or by the world around her; or they are simply plucked from her imagination. She hardly ever uses a story line, preferring to begin with a character and several incidents and then working out whatever her character did before or afterward. "Part of the fun of writing," she says, "is discovering how the story is going to turn out."

Beverly Cleary has been writing for more than three decades, and her books are just as popular today as they were in the fifties and sixties.

Fundamentally, I don't think children have changed through the years. Maybe they have acquired a certain sophistication from watching television, but it's only on the surface. Childhood is universal, and I write about childhood feelings as I knew them growing up in Portland, Oregon.

A modest, soft-spoken woman, Beverly Cleary masks a delicious wit. I always look forward to my frequent conversations with her, and her fine eye for the inevitable absurdities of life often has me roaring with laughter. To work with Beverly is a constant delight, and as I've begun to know her, these last two years have been a special privilege and a pleasure.

What next for Beverly Cleary? This fall will see the publication of the seventh—and perhaps final—novel about the Quimby family, *Ramona Forever*. And recently, Beverly has turned to writing short stories for adults, the first of which, "Papa's Pistol," will be published soon in *Woman's Day*. A surprising tale of premeditated murder, it reveals the same wit and insights into humanity that highlight her work for children.

Asked what she finds most rewarding about her career, Beverly responded,

The number of people who tell me of a child who didn't enjoy reading until my books came along. I remember the great feeling of release I got when I discovered I was reading—and enjoying what I read. And today I receive letters from adults who say my books helped to make their childhoods bearable.