

what he takes to be witches who meet around this tomb in the dead of night and carry out mysterious and nefarious rituals one of which involves the senseless slaughter of a puppy. One series of mysterious happenings leads to others: a neighbour is poisoned, Lisa's father becomes suddenly and inexplicably ill, pentagrams appear in the house, Saupierre is burgled, a ceiling collapses. Gradually the two children are drawn closer together because of their belief — in the face of parental opposition — in the existence of a coven of witches led by Lisa's own beautiful step-mother Janine. As the parents abandon the children — Mike's father accepts an invitation to take a trip on a friend's sail boat, and Lisa's father, Tony, is too ill to be effective — Mike and Lisa find themselves forced to draw upon their own resources to solve the mystery and finally destroy the coven.

The adult world in this novel is either totally ineffectual, evil or perniciously sceptical. The police will not believe Mike's fantastic claims; Mike's father refuses to believe his son's stories and explains away the mysterious events "logically" and with the use of "common sense". Lisa's hatred of and accusation against her step-mother are written off as the expected reactions of a young daughter who sees her new mother as a rival for the affection of her father. But as is so often the case in children's stories (which seem to borrow a good deal from traditional comic structure) the younger generation with its more vital imaginative powers wins out over the forces of logic and social convention. Finally, totally on his own, Mike works out a solution to the witchcraft problem and, in the process, saves Lisa's life.

A brief summary of the plot does not do justice to the intricacies and drama of this fine novel. Welwyn Wilton Katz is a good story teller who writes in a way that will appeal to teenagers and adults alike. *Witchery Hill* is a skillful and highly exciting rites-of-passage novel which demonstrates both the weaknesses of the adult world's reliance on logic and reason and the value of a vibrant and child-like imagination.

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## A FAMILY OF OWLS

***Granny's gang: life with a most unusual family of owls***, Katherine McKeever. Illus. Olena Kassian. An OWL Magazine Book, 1984. 96 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-919872-96-4.

Katherine McKeever and her husband are founders of the Owl Research and Rehabilitation Foundation in Vineland, Ontario. Owls are both their first love and their life's work. For the past twenty years, the McKeeveres have cared

for scores of owls of different species, rescuing them from certain death in the wild, providing shelter, medical treatment and eventual release. They have bred wild owls in captivity, and have won international recognition for their contribution to bird life.

This book is about a special group of owls, those who for one reason or another could never be returned to the wild and therefore became permanent residents in the McKeever household. Over the years, each of these birds has assumed the role of foster parent to orphaned wild baby owls, thereby creating a nearly normal environment that has enabled the McKeevers to return these wild birds to their natural habitat.

There is Granny, a Spectacled Owl that learns her maternal skills from brooding a chicken, and Pops, a Great Horned Owl who, although never mated, instinctively adopts the role of provider to a whole succession of foster owlets. There is Tiglet, a Screech Owl who likes to snuggle into the author's pillow at night, and Sook, a Saw-Whet whose chief entertainment is tormenting the family cats. Readers who assume that birds lack personality will delight in being wrong. The owls in this book are distinct characters, some shy, some aggressive, some mischievous, but all fascinating and different from one another.

This book offers a wealth of detailed information about owl behaviour. Of particular interest is the phenomenon of "imprinting", whereby young owls identify with the creatures they see most frequently; they must therefore be with their own species as soon as their eyes focus. Imprinting explains why owlets that are to be returned to the wild need owl foster care instead of human care.

It is important for children to realize that caring for wildlife, however rewarding, is neither an easy nor a lightly-assumed task. Without labouring the point, the author manages to convey a sense of the skill, fatigue and drudgery that accompany dedication to this kind of job.

As an avid birder, I was pre-disposed to enjoy this book, but still wary lest *Granny's gang* be another of those anthropomorphic stories that diminishes its subject matter with cuteness. I need not have worried. Katherine McKeever does justice to her beloved owls with tenderness, humour and respect. Olena Kassian's delicately realistic drawings complement the book perfectly. *Granny's gang* will be an attractive and engaging addition to any child's library, and one that will be enjoyed several times over.

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