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News and comment from the Editor.

'I can't understand people who say they wouldn't have television in the house. It's there; it's with us. What's to be gained by turning our backs on it?' The view of Rosemary Sandberg (editor at Fontana Lions), and one of the people who contributed to our **Tie-in Business** feature (page 4.). Eighty-five per cent of all children watch some television every day. It's an enormous influence on all of us. That's why a large part of this issue of **Books for Keeps** looks at the relationship between books and television. For the most part we are looking at what is, and going behind the scenes. We are left wanting to ask why there are not more programmes about books; why is there not a 'book spot' on programmes like Multi-Coloured Swap Shop which have a huge audience?

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Stay home teenagers - you've been discovered

The experiment of repeating **Grange Hill** in the early evening was so successful (at times 55% of all people between thirteen and sixteen were watching) that BBC television was forced to reconsider its approach to a neglected audience. Casting aside the idea that at thirteen the young lost interest in television, they are trying instead to find the magic ingredient that will keep them watching. The search has led in part to books. **Spine Chillers** is a sort of grown-up Jackanory - straight-to-camera dramatic readings of classic ghost stories. Reaction in the Letters pages of **The Radio Times** has been mainly outrage from mums of younger children accustomed to leaving them 'safely' in front of the box for the whole of 'children's time'. I hope Edward Barnes (BBC television's head of children's programmes) will hold out against this attack. Such expectations are unreasonable - to use his own words: 'eleven to sixteen year olds have been short-changed for too long.' **Maggie**, the serial based on Joan Lingard's novels (see page 6) also hopes to capture this audience.

Going Out?

ITV, too, has 'discovered' teenagers. John Hambley (controller of children's programmes at Thames Television) thinks they should have ten times more time. Lewis Rudd (Southern Television) who also talked to us about tie-ins (page 4) and says he is 'the man who turned down **Grange Hill**', has not turned down Phil Redmond's latest excursion into teenage realism. Will this inspire a book, I wonder? **Going Out** is for sixteen to nineteen year olds and will probably be shown after nine o'clock later this year. Lewis Rudd says it's 'Quite dangerous, but highly moral.' Which I think means that the language will be fairly ripe, the attitudes challenging, but no one will actually get into bed with anyone else. Will its later showing time and slightly older audience mean that it avoids the sort of protest from parents and teachers that met **Grange Hill**? Will it make BBC's **Maggie** look 'square'? Lewis Rudd thinks they might be seen as 'bold little

Southern daring to go where the angels of the BBC feared to tread.'

Ironically Southern Television itself is going out - its franchise removed by the IBA. In its recent report the IBA criticised many ITV companies for the standard of their children's programmes. Southern has not been guilty in this area. Let's hope the new franchise holders build on this good foundation.

Dinner Ladies and Dodgem

Bernard Ashley (see Authorgraph 6, page 14) has three new books coming out this year. **Dinner Ladies Don't Count** is a story for younger children which will appear in Julia Macrae's new Blackbird series, and **I'm Trying to Tell You** is a collection of four short stories, 'told' by four kids, from Kestrel. The one which will give him most pleasure, though, 'for me it's probably the best so far' he says, is **Dodgem** (Julia Macrae), out in April. Tony Bradman says the pace and tension of the story (Simon Leighton coping with his depressive dad) are almost unbearable - and it's got a cliffhanger ending.

Thumbs Down

A Books for Keeps raspberry for titles from two new publishers, Pepper Press and Sparrow Books. The first sentence of **The Amazing Adventures of Chilly Billy** (Pepper Press) is 'Nobody knows this except you and I.' Surely some editor could have given Peter Mayle a quick grammar lesson - that's not his only mistake! As for Sparrow Books? **The Very Big Secret** is stiff with sexist stereotypes and apart from that it's so silly. Mum 'has to go away for a while' but she promises the two quite old children that when she comes back she'll bring 'a big surprise'. It turns out to be a new baby! (No, the very big secret isn't the size of mum's turn which no-one noticed.) It's difficult to believe that anyone could consider publishing such rubbish today, even if it is by Enid Blyton.

Thumbs Up

Congratulations to Kestrel and Jan Mark, though, for **Nothing to be Afraid Of** (0 7226 5677 7, £3.95) a knockout collection of ten stories: odd, eerie, funny, frightening. This is Jan Mark in fine **Thunder and Lightnings** form. Not to be missed.

Now we are One

With this issue of **Books for Keeps** we complete our first year. New subscriptions arrive every day and we know that this is due in no small part to the recommendations of all of you who have joined us during the year and been enthusiastic about the magazine to friends and colleagues. Many thanks, and thanks too to all of you who have written to us. We want **Books for Keeps** to reflect what is happening wherever books and children meet. In this issue, Kevin Jeffrey and David Bennett (pages 17 and 26) write about things that have worked; but confronting difficulties and problems, raising issues, asking questions is equally important. Coombe Down School in Plymouth wrote to us very unhappily after hiring an NBL exhibition. Their 'onward carriage' liability was to Wales, rather more costly than they had expected. 'Devon Library Service' they said, 'would have provided us with the books free of charge.' NBL exhibitions *are* only books - stands would add prohibitively to transport costs. So if you have a co-operative library service, it's a good idea to buy the Book List from the NBL and do-it-yourself.

In May we launched the **Books for Keeps** 'Award' for books that 'worked' (You tell us about how a particular book really broke through with an individual or a group; we give a £5 book token for those we publish.) A few weeks ago a teacher said to me 'I thought about sending my nomination; then I thought you wouldn't want what I wrote.' But we do. Keep sending us 'books that worked', and keep writing. We welcome your reactions and suggestions.

We are full of plans for our second year, and delighted to have you all with us.

Pat

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