



A Frog Thing

Eric Drachman

James Muscarello, Illustrator

Kidwick Books (May 2006)

Hardcover \$18.95 (32pp)

978-0-9703809-3-7

Frank the frog wants to fly. It's not an idle wish or a daydream on the young amphibian's part; it's a dream he works for, suffers for, and truly struggles to attain. But Frank is a frog, and flying isn't a frog thing, right? Well, not quite.

In his whimsical, uplifting story for children ages three to six or thereabouts, the author takes readers into Frank's adventure, which involves hope, perseverance, generosity, and courage. Drachman holds a bachelor's in psychology and a master's in acting, and as in his previous books, *Leo the Lightning Bug* and *Ellison the Elephant* (created with the same illustrator), he explores the process of self-awareness and self-actualization. Yet his stories are anything but dry parables. Frank and his friends are affectionate and engaging characters who come to life through the author's words and through the warm and amusingly expressive illustrations.

In the course of thirty pages, one watches as much as listens to Frank's futile attempts at self-propelled flight, his parents' kind but realistic assessment of his potential as an aviator, his brave rescue of a drowning baby bird, and the ultimate and unexpected fulfillment of his dream. Muscarello studied art at California Institute of the Arts and El Camino College. Here, mixing paint and pastels, he shows all of Frank's moods, from dejection through determination and on to exultation. Readers will know just by looking at him that Frank is a sweet frog with big dreams, and the resolve to make them happen.

It can be difficult to create stories about "self-actualization," especially for children, without surrendering to clichés or preaching. Drachman and Muscarello avoid the pitfalls, telling their tale with humor and grace. Even at the end there are surprises, because for Frank, the attainment of his heart's desire proves to be a beginning rather than an end; his journey through the air leads him home to his pond with a new understanding—and a new dream.

The accompanying CD is an added bonus with this book. For those times when parents are too busy to read the story to their children, the well-acted audio drama, read by the author, is a fine substitute. Drachman brings his stage skills to his storytelling. The "page turn" indicator sounds are present but unobtrusive and will allow young readers to use the book to work on their burgeoning skills.

Despite the quality of the CD, the best way for parents and children to enjoy *A Frog Thing* will be together. Just as young people need to learn that dreams are obtainable, that they require effort and heart, and that they may lead to places and conclusions one doesn't always expect ... older folks also need a reminder. Frank the Frog is a wonderful hero who makes the dreams fly for everyone.

VICKI HUGHES (June 8, 2006)

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