



Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

Benny Takes a Walk

Howard Sherman

978-1-4259-0107-3

One Star (out of Five)

Until now seven-year-old Benny has never wandered very far from home. In this story to inspire confidence and problem-solving skills in preschool thru 4th graders he encounters several challenges during a three-block stroll in his neighborhood. The first is a fallen tree. Benny at first feels overwhelmed but he quickly thinks his way to a solution. "Maybe I'll climb it. While climbing I'll sing me a song" he says to himself. After successfully working his way past the tree Benny must come to terms with a stack of bricks and a sand dune. When he finally arrives home he is greeted by a loving and attentive father. At dinner his dad listens as Benny tells him all about his travels. At then end of the day his dad tucks the exhausted boy into bed.

Howard Sherman's cartoon format with basic color breakups and solid black outlining leaves little to distract readers from his tale of Benny's walk. Benny and not his environment is the focus here. Colors are inviting if detail and shading are rather flat. Text is in a clear bold Helvetica font and the rhythmic language gets kids involved and animated as in this couplet: "Benny continued walking this day / until a sand dune blocked his way." Word and verse repetition as with the line "Up up I go and further up" also promotes emphasis and retention. But the words on the page and the graphics are sometimes out of agreement — for example when the "sand dune" blocking Benny's path appears as a non-formidable sand pile. And diction is sometimes too sophisticated ("frustrated" "shinny" "distraught") for the intended reader unless Mr. Sherman's intent is for an older reader to read and help expand children's vocabularies. The story does illustrate the idea of "sequencing" for children helping them to see events as happening in order and with consequences. On his last page the author explains his purpose (to help children "deal with adversity") adding "Our choices are to grind to a standstill or to find a way to overcome obstacles placed in our paths." Clearly this book shows the way to the latter choice.

A Brooklyn native Howard Sherman describes himself as a pharmacist a herpetologist (a

student of reptiles and amphibians) and a naturalist. He and his son Benny live in Virginia Beach VA. "Benny Takes a Walk" provides a choice for the growing number of custodial father households.