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Picture Books

Daniel and His Walking Stick
Wendy McCormick
Constance R. Bergum, illustrator
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Walking sticks are useful to “pull up” hills and “lead down,” to measure the depth of a creek, to point out bird eggs and woodchuck holes. Daniel Stockton’s stick is also a sweet metaphor for a grandfather relationship and treasured memories.

The young female narrator has no living grandfathers. All she knows about either is what her parents have told her. She longs for one living grandfather. Sensing her needs, her parents take her to the country to visit the bearded Daniel, a friend of her maternal grandfather. The girl asks where he found his walking stick. He says he will tell her when the time is right.

First, the two walk in the countryside. He uses his stick to point out nature’s wonders. She tells him what she knows about her grandfathers: that Grandpa Ray “gave me a bath and tickled my earlobes / And sang me songs about the sea.” Daniel affirms that that sounds like the friend he knew.

In a delicious moment of their companionship, “Daniel tapped a raspberry branch / Some of the berries fell right into my hands.” The girl then wonders if she could have three grandfathers. Daniel says, “Why not?” He takes her to the lake where he explains where he found his birch walking stick, in a spot where he fished with her grandfather. He reaches into the bushes near a great tree and pulls out a walking stick for her.

In a parallel to how Daniel uses his stick, once the girl returns to the city, she uses her new treasure to pull up the steps of a bus, and lead down an escalator. She points out things she sees to her parents, and measures the depth of puddles in the street.

The distraction in this otherwise heartwarming story is an ungrammatical refrain, perhaps intended to be cute, but it is not: “Daniel and me and his walking stick went walking.” The narrator is old enough to speak properly.

Bergum’s watercolor illustrations capture the essence of the country experience, as well

as the relationships and memories that are being made. Water shimmers, the raspberries look good enough to eat, and the expressions on the characters' faces have an almost photographic quality. She has illustrated nine other children's books, including *The Sunsets of Miss Olivia Wiggins* and *Grandma Buffalo, May, and Me*.

McCormick has two other children's books to her credit: *Daddy, Will You Miss Me?* and *The Night You Were Born*. With so many children living at a distance from grandparents, and others without them, this book helps families see that they can develop substitutes with close family friends and their special "walking sticks."