ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Dear Mr. Leprechaun: Letters From My First Friendship
Martin Nelson Burton
Clint Hansen, illustrator
London Town Press
978-0-9666490-0-0
(March 2003)

Young Marty writes: "Dear Mr. Leprechaun. What do you look like. Draw it on the back. Thank you, and tis the best of the year. Good luck, Martin."

This simple note begins Dear Mr. Leprechaun. Burton, a writer for professional publications and author of *The Whale Comedian*, relates the true story of his childhood correspondence with a friendly, if occasionally testy, "leprechaun" and his father's role in keeping it alive. Accompanying "paper sculpture" illustrations recreate the original letters, and depict an unusual childhood world in which magical creatures might well exist.

"(The leprechaun) would write back to me while I slept," Burton writes in the afterword. "In the morning I would find the answer. Marty looked to the leprechaun to fix toys and answer questions such as 'What do you look like?' and 'By the way, are you (a) man? I'll try to do my best in everything, but I'll need a little luck from you.'"

From the time Marty was five until he was eleven, his father would sit outside with him at night, scanning the trees for a sighting of his pen pal, and only occasionally discouraging the boy from writing notes.

"Dear Marty," the leprechaun wrote. "Your father loves you very much—he did not mean that he don't have time for you." He means that he does not have time to help me. Bye. Mr. L."

Burton communicates the love of a parent without losing the special mystery of an imaginary friend. He does not overdo the sentiment, focusing instead on the innocent belief of a child and the realization at adulthood of the sacrifices a parent made to preserve it.

Hansen, a fourth generation artist, works with clients nationwide in the mediums of scratch board, oils, and paper sculpture. His distinctive and often humorous illustrations in Dear Mr. Leprechaun were originally created in paper sculpture. Construction paper was cut, shaped and then glued together in layers to form three-dimensional figures. Each piece was then placed on an illuminated studio set, and photographed. Hansen has "recreated each original message by

hand, making only small cosmetic changes as necessary. Thus restored, the notes appear exactly as Mr. Leprechaun and I wrote them to each other so many years ago.” This book should charm young people and the leprechauns who love them, as well.