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Picture Books

Lily and the Paper Man
Rebecca Upjohn
Renne Benoit, illustrator
Second Story Press
978-1-897187-19-7
(August 31, 2007)

Lily's life changes the day she bumps into the "Paper Man" while walking home from school on a rainy day. She can't help but notice a difference between herself, comfortably skipping through puddles with her umbrella and rubber boots, and the Paper Man who stands outside selling papers for a dollar in a "raggedy coat" with hair that "sticks up higgledy-piggledy all over his head," and with so little protection that "rain runs off his bumpy nose and down into his beard." The difference scares her.

Lily's fear leads her to avoid the Paper Man at all costs, even ducking down in her seat when the bus she is riding passes him. However, he sells his papers on her street, and she eventually bumps into him again, on the first snowy day of winter. Bundled up warmly for the weather, Lily shivers when she notices "a thin shirt through the holes in his coat and bare feet through the holes in his boots." It's too much for a little girl to understand, and her fear turns into curiosity. She asks her mother why the Paper Man isn't wearing socks and learns that not everyone has warm clothes and a place to live. This knowledge inspires Lily to take action to make the Paper Man's life a little warmer.

Lily and the Paper Man is Upjohn's first book and it has been nominated for the 2008 Blue Spruce Award from the Ontario Library Association, a children's choice award for students in kindergarten through second grade. Young readers will find much to discuss as they evaluate this thoughtful story of a small child's initial encounter with the existence of poverty and homelessness.

The realistic and detailed watercolor illustrations capture Lily's emotional journey from fear to confusion to determined resolve to improve the life of the Paper Man, whose name, she learns, is Ray.

There are few quality picture books that deal with homelessness. Like Eve Bunting's

classic *Fly Away Home*, Lily's story makes an excellent starting point for discussions of poverty and helping others, and the age of the main character and the gentle, brightly colored illustrations add to the appeal of this story for the very young, who, like Lily, may need adult help in voicing their concerns about injustices they notice in the world.