

Loon Chase

Jean Heilprin Diehl

Kathryn Freeman, Illustrator

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A paddle across a lake, time to watch rare birds on the water, a frantic attempt to stop a “bad moment” in the woods—through the pages of this delightful book, [i][b][i]/[b] these events on a summer day are the recipe for a young person’s deepening relationship with nature.

This book tells the story of a child who spends a day on a northern lake with his or her mother, and Miles the dog. The unspecified gender of the narrator allows both girls and boys to empathize completely with the storyteller. Told in the first-person voice of the child, the story allows the reader to enter life on the lake. The combination of vibrant pastel illustrations and lively, direct language are wonderfully evocative; the audience hears Miles panting as he swims and sees the loons as they swim on the northern waters.

The central drama of the story revolves around Miles and his instincts to chase and catch the loons. Readers are drawn into the panic of the narrator as he/she attempts to stop his/her beloved dog from exercising natural instincts: in this case instincts that could harm the endangered and admired birds. The author places no blame while telling of a potentially fatal encounter between wild and domestic animals, and the resolution of the encounter will satisfy young readers and conservationists alike.

Diehl is an award-winning author and critic whose work has appeared in such journals and anthologies as the *Indiana Review*, *Antietam Review*, and *Many Mountains Moving*. The illustrator’s paintings have been exhibited nationally and internationally and she has also done a number of large public commissions, including three story murals for the new public library in Jacksonville, Florida. *Loon Chase* is the first children’s book for both Diehl and Freeman.

Ideal for readers aged six to twelve, this book is both a personal adventure and an introduction to natural history. The protagonist not only saves the loons but also has his/her first moments alone with nature on the lake. Aspects of loon behavior are essential parts of the story; the appendix at the end of the book provides young readers, parents, and teachers with a host of facts about loons in nature and myth, and with fun activities that extend the lessons learned in the story.

A good story, reverence for and understanding of nature, and useful information on which to grow make this book a fine addition to any library. Text and pictures work beautifully together throughout the volume, and readers will continue to find new details in both as they return for many repeat readings.

VICKI HUGHES (August 8, 2006)

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