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Tall In The Saddle

Anne Carter
David McPhail, illustrator
Orca Book Publishers (September 1999)
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In her first picture book for children, Carter's personal childhood memories of "dressing-up as a cowgirl" are revisited in this wonderful tall tale tribute to the adventurous imagination of a child. Carter's fast-paced, "virtual" wild-west adventure begins when the main character of the story becomes curious about where his father goes everyday when he leaves the house for work.

After an early morning rumpus of playing cowboys, dad dons his suit and tie and leaves the house for work, but he's still wearing his cowboy boots. It is this piece of evidence, which sparks the main character's interest in wondering where his father was actually going—so he decides to follow him. While riding his tricycle, he maintains a safe distance behind as his father walks to the end of their street and hops onto Mrs. Fusspot's bike, which was left out overnight. That's when everything changes.

The asphalt paved city streets become dusty trails, and his father's borrowed bike becomes a big, wild, cattle chasing horse "ready to fly." With a traditional "Yeehaw," his father takes off riding high in the saddle. He watches as a large herd of "hungry, mooing cows" ramble on the sun-baked open plains and knew immediately that this was a job for a cowboy. He watches as his father's tie becomes a red bandana for protection against the raging dust clouds. With a series of "giddyup" yells, his father successfully leads the herd to cool water and greener pastures while simultaneously chasing away the cattle stealing posse, better known as the "Rotten Rustler Gang." With the cattle safe and the thieves gone, his father turns his horse around and heads home. The dusty trails once again return to city streets and Dad's wild bronco once again becomes Mrs. Fusspot's tamed bike.

Tall in the Saddle is a humorous, inventive and action filled rendition of a child's curiosity gone haywire. The bright, bold illustrations of
McPhail serve as visual manifestations of the imagination of a child at play.
VERONICA L. C. STEVENSON-MOUDAMANE (August 16, 1999)

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