ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

JUVENILE FICTION

The Deer and the Pine Trees
Robert L. Heichberger
Erin A. Pattridge, illustrator
AuthorHouse
978-1-4817-3835-4
Three Stars (out of Five)

Sweet story with pleasant illustrations offers a beautiful gift of the heart to author's grandchildren.

Remove from *Bambi* the essential character of the hunter and the comic relief of Thumper, and the beloved children's classic becomes nothing more than the story of a nice deer family. Robert Heichberger's *The Deer and the Pine Trees* is just such a tale—a fictional "Christmastime-all-year-round" story penned for his grandchildren after three deer took up residence in the pine grove near their rural New York community.

The Deer and the Pine Trees begins on Christmas Eve when a lonely fawn named Nestles settles down on a bed of needles shed by an equally forlorn pine tree. The deer and the tree become friends. Over the course of one year, Nestles grows into a doe and with a buck, Gallant, bears twin fawns, Sparkles and Starburst. The deer family lives an idyllic life in the meadows. The following Christmas they are reunited with the pine tree, which has spawned twins of its own.

Erin Pattridge's illustrations in coloring-book style offer bright, Disneyesque depictions that will likely appeal to young children, but Heichberger composes the story like a chapter book and uses language more appropriate for older children. For example, he writes, "The dark brownish winter branches began to take on an appearance of a yellowish hue." Wordy sentences and repeated use of the phrases "you see" and "you know" are distracting, as is the excessive use of adjectives: "The sad little fawn nestled under the little pine tree in the soft, brown pine needles."

In one section, the author uses in excess of one hundred words—more than the entire text of many successful picture books—just to describe the superb parenting skills of mother deer Nestles. Also, several times he instructs readers, "even in nature, all things work in

marvelous ways.”

Heichberger is a retired professor who currently writes a weekly newspaper column and is a storyteller for schools and libraries. He is the author of several books, including a collection of tales he created for his grandchildren, *Tell Me A Story Grandpa*.

When a grandparent creates a storybook for his grandchildren, it is a beautiful gift of the heart, one to be cherished by family members for generations to come. But it is unusual for this type of tale to become a popular hit. Nevertheless, *The Deer and the Pine Trees* is a sweet story with pleasant illustrations.

Nancy Walker