

Toad Hall Children's Bookstore in Austin, Texas, celebrates its twentieth birthday in 1998! As co-event coordinators, Tiffany Durham and I are proud to represent such an outstanding institution. Our events exhibit a common purpose: to bring children and quality literature together in creative ways to encourage a love of reading. If we did not have support from an imaginative and energetic staff, Tiffany and I would not be able to coordinate events almost every Saturday of the year, along with storytimes three times a week, numerous autographings, and Late Night at Toad Hall every month. Our successful events depend on an enthusiastic staff who works tirelessly at such jobs as donning the huge character costumes, starring in Books Come Alive performances, assisting during large field trips to the store, contributing craft ideas, baking special treats, sewing costumes, and handselling featured titles. The staff's diverse backgrounds and creative talents are Toad Hall's greatest resources.

Since becoming co-event coordinators in August 1996, we have established popular annual events, like our **American Girl Parties**. Last August we had customers postpone their Labor Day plans just so their daughters could attend our American Girl Fall County Fair and Boxed Lunch Auction. What fun to see the girls making candles, leaf printing, learning cooking tips, and bidding on creative lunches with tokens they earned during the party!

Our **Annual Bookmark Contest** always draws a big response from students in kindergarten through eighth grades. Judges have a difficult time selecting winners and honorable mentions in four age categories. The overall winning bookmarks in each category are duplicated and distributed in our store, and all participants are honored with a special bookmark reception.

Books Come Alive is another favorite event we host monthly that gets children and parents excited about books. Easy and fun to do, select staff members who comprise our acting troupe—the Toad Hall Players—act out stories with the help of audience members. Favorite presentations include *Froggy Gets Dressed*, *Don't Laugh, Joe!*, and *Rotten Ralph's Rotten Romance*. After our first performance of *Froggy Gets Dressed*, one child approached "Froggy" and said, "Fwoggy! You funny," for staff member Anastasia had truly made Froggy come alive for this child.

Late Night at Toad Hall, now in its third year, is a monthly series for four- to nine-year-olds held on the last Friday of the month. Parents have the option of staying with their child for the evening activities of crafts, stories, snacks, and finale presentation, or leaving their child in our security and returning for pick-up at 8 p.m. Parents enjoy their two-hour "night out," and the children love our Late Night festivities! During "Fiesta Toad," we fashioned tissue paper flowers and performed the Macarena and Mexican hat dances. At "Detective Toad" we created secret codes and wrote with invisible ink, and our final act of two "solve the mystery" puppet shows had the kids not only laughing hysterically but also thinking intuitively to solve questions. One of our loyal "LateNighters," Will, arrived dressed as Sherlock Holmes and commented during one of the crafts that Polonius from *Hamlet* was a spy!

The **Tea Parties** that staff member Glenda hosts each month are phenomenal! Complete with costumes, decor, favors, dainty treats, stories, and etiquette tips, her parties fill up months in advance! Toad Hall Tea Parties are so popular, Glenda has expanded from one party to three each month to host a total of forty-five children. Some recent themes were A Little House Tea, Bread and Jam with Frances, and a Nancy Drew Tea.

Our **Author Visits** are anything but typical! We love to combine author/illustrator presentations and signings with exciting events such as a Cat Parade, Books Come Alive, Bat Dancing, or Pony Pictures with a real miniature pony. We also invite our local chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators to hear authors speak about getting published. We enjoy bringing authors and storytellers into the store to help kids make powerful connections about the processes of reading and writing.

We offer educational and fun classes during spring break and the summer aptly named **Fun Days**. These hour-long sessions usually consist of stories, crafts, activities, and a snack revolving around a theme. Our science day "Density Necklaces" were a big hit with all ages, and Tiffany's cooking classes and pirate days filled up so quickly, we had to create more classes.

Other ways we have reached the Austin community through literature are performing a special Books Come Alive at the Safari Nature Festival in Zilker Park, performing picture book puppet shows at the Clarksville Jazz Festival, donating the services of Walter the Giant Storyteller to Zavala Elementary in East Austin, and giving book talks to Mother's Day Out groups.

We hope these examples, along with our scrapbook and video, illustrate our commitment to connecting parents and children with great children's literature. We know some of the most valuable time a parent can give a child is time reading together. For the past 20 years at Toad Hall Children's Bookstore, educating parents and inspiring children have been our primary focus. Our dedicated staff will continue this mission into the future.

Theresa Reding

(This essay helped Toad Hall Children's Bookstore become the 1998 recipient of the Women's National Book Association prestigious [Pannell Award](#) that recognizes the bookseller who best stimulates, promotes, and encourages children's and young people's interest in books.)