

SENIORS

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CARA BRADY/MORNING STAR

MARIE FIRTH works on another in The Meadows School Project book series. She is donating all the profits from her children's books, illustrated by students, to the project.

Author inspired by Meadows

BY CARA BRADY
MORNING STAR STAFF

The Meadows School Project was started by Kidston School teacher Sharon MacKenzie to bring students and seniors together. The result has been six years of learning, fun and friendship with an unexpected bonus.

Coldstream Meadows resident Marie Firth, 93, wrote some stories that the students liked so much they wanted to illustrate them. The result is The Meadows School Project book series being sold to raise money so the project can continue.

"When I wrote *The White Elephant*, the children thought so much of it that we decided to publish it. We've sold hundreds of copies already. I so much enjoy having the children here that I want to donate the money from the books to the project," she said.

"The children are so interested in what went on when we were growing up and what we did without TV and computers and cars."

There are currently three books in the series with a set of 10 planned to be ready before Christmas.

"I've been writing all my life, I have a good imagination and I've travelled a lot," said Firth, who has also written short stories, science fiction books and Regency novels.

She was born in Stettler, Alta. and was brought up in Vancouver where she married Ben and they raised their family at the coast. She received her Author's Certificate for Children's Literature from the Institute for Children's Literature in West Redding, Connecticut when she was 84. She has had poetry and stories published in children's magazines. Thirteen of her Christmas stories have been published in *The Morning Star* Special Holiday supplement. She is also an artist and has illustrated some of her own work.

"The stories keep mounting up and I don't know what to do with them. I write in pencil first, then get on the typewriter. I've had to quit the computer. I think the important thing about writing for children is to have an imagination and a bit of humour," said Firth, who is working on a story for older children set in Australia.

"I think everyone can sit back and dream and have a good idea and transmit it to other people so they'll feel as good as you do. When I'm writing a story, I project to the characters what I would do in that situation. There's a lot of me in all the stories. Kira (Urbas), who illustrated *Brenda Bear*, is very good at getting herself into the stories. I get the ideas from actual events and

things I see in the paper or the news. There are so many stories but there's only one way to write and that is to write and then get somebody to criticize it and learn from the criticism."

Firth appreciates Sharon MacKenzie's part in getting the books published.

"I give her all the credit. Without her, this wouldn't be happening. I'm very happy with writing, I always have something to do," she said.

Firth has established the Marie Firth Scholarship to be awarded to a Kal secondary graduating student showing promise in writing and illustrating and going on to more education in these fields.

The first three books in the series are: *Brenda Bear*, illustrated by Kira Urbas; *The Visitors from Quark*, illustrated by Sean McMahon and *The White Elephant*, illustrated by Jay Boehnke, Carly Alexander, Tamara Andronik, Brittany Jackson, Jonathan Grant, Alex Rysen, Lexus Shmyr; Micah Tumlinson and Kim Wilson. The books have been sold in B.C., Ontario and Newfoundland.

For more information about The Meadows School Project see www.intergenerational.ca.

"I so much enjoy having the children here that I want to donate the money from the books to the project."

— Marie Firth

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