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# Toys Go Out

by Emily Jenkins

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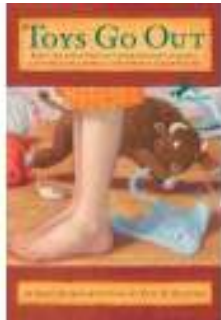
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# Summary

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*Toys Go Out* is a collection of six stories that reveal the small adventures of the same group of toys; the stories are not chronologically connected. In each story the toys learn about the world in which they live and their place in it. The adventures begin when three of them are trapped in a dark, damp backpack and, because they don't understand where they are going, imagine the worst. Then Plastic, the red bouncy ball, has an identity crisis until Tuk Tuk the towel sets her straight. Later, Lumphy conquers his fear of the washing machine, and both StingRay and Lumphy learn an important lesson about jealousy. In the end, they all celebrate their love for one another and the little girl at a very special birthday party.

Reviewed by Patricia Tauzer



## About the Author

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### Biographical Essay

I grew up in the Boston area in the 1970s. My mother was a pre-school teacher and my father a playwright. I remember visiting my mother's classroom and reading to the children there; even more vividly, I remember sitting in the back row of theater after theater, watching rehearsals – seeing stories come to life. My mother read me countless picture books, but at my father's house there wasn't much of that nature. He read me what was at hand: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Sherlock Holmes*. He also made up stories for me and recounted the plots of Shakespeare plays.

I was a raw child. In fact, I am a raw adult. This is a hard quality to live with sometimes, but it is a useful quality if you want to be a writer. It is easy to hurt my feelings, and I am unable to watch the news or read about painful subjects without weeping. I was often called over-sensitive when I was young, but I've learned to appreciate this quality in myself, and to use it in my writing.

Growing up, I spent large parts of my life in imaginary worlds: Neverland, Oz, and Narnia, in particular. I read in the bath, at meals, in the car, you name it. Around the age of eight, I began working on my own writing. My early enterprises began with a seminal picture book featuring a heroic orange sleeping bag, followed by novel-length imitations of *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* by Joan Aiken and *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren.

I have never kept journals or notebooks for my own sake. I am a writer who writes always with the idea of an audience in mind -- and at nine I was determined to share my Pippi story with the world. I got my father to type it up in a book format and photocopy it 50 times. Then he took me to an artist friend's studio where we silkscreened 50 copies of a drawing I'd made for the cover. I gave it to everyone I knew. That was my first book.

I have always been interested in picture books as a form, which stems (I suppose) from my background in theater. I am fascinated by the intersection of words and images – the way meanings of words can be altered by changing their presentation. An actor varies her intonation, or an illustrator changes a line – and the story is new. In college, I studied illustrated books from an academic standpoint. I went to Vassar, where children's book writer Nancy Willard was on faculty. She introduced me to illustrator Barry Moser, and the interview he gave me was the centerpiece of my senior thesis. While I was there, I spent three years as a student assistant in Vassar's lab pre-school, and after graduation found work as an assistant teacher in a Montessori school, teaching 6-9 year olds. That year, I began to write a novel with my father – through the mail. I was in Chicago and he was in New York. We thought it would be a fun way to keep in touch. I wrote a chapter – then he wrote a chapter. We rewrote each other's chapters. And rewrote them again. It took a long time, but eventually that story was published as *The Secret Life of Billie's Uncle Myron*.

Now I write full time (except when parenting) in a tiny little office in Brooklyn, accompanied by two plump and ancient cats -- the models for the dog characters in *That New Animal*.



# Book Review

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## **From School Library Journal**

*Starred Review.* Kindergarten-Grade 3—In this utterly delightful peek into the secret lives of toys, three beloved playthings participate in a series of small adventures. StingRay is a plush stuffed animal who enjoys acting the know-it-all. Lumphy is a tough little buffalo who doesn't mind the occasional cuddle. And Plastic (whose physical appearance is kept mysterious for quite some time) is a sensible bouncy ball. They are the best friends of a little girl and they deal with the world around them in their own particular manner. From meditating on the scary unknown (washing machines) to understanding what makes an individual special, Jenkins gives readers an early chapter book with plenty of delightful insights, well-thought-out details, and loving affection for her characters. Here is a book bound to be a favorite with any child who has ever adored an inanimate object. Zelinsky's beautifully detailed black-and-white illustrations are a lovely addition to this very special book.—*Elizabeth Bird, New York Public Library*

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## **From [Booklist](#)**

For beginning chapter-book readers, this secret-lives-of-toys story will entertain, inspire, and comfort as it relates the experiences of three engaging toy best friends: Lumphy the buffalo, plush StingRay, and Plastic. In six interconnected chapters, the distinctly drawn characters face concerns and situations kids will respond to: shy Lumphy's fear of the washing machine and having a bath; gentle Plastic's identity crisis; and know-it-all StingRay's embarrassing bathtub comeuppance, which ends happily with reassurances of her friends' love. There's even occasional "sibling rivalry," as the toys compete for beloved Little Girl's affections. The simple prose is clever and often hilarious, incorporating dialogue and musings that ring kid-perspective true, and Zelinsky's charming black-and-white illustrations, wonderfully detailed and textured, expressively portray character situations and feelings. Deftly blending humor and insight, the story will charm readers as the toys come to recognize and appreciate themselves, one another, and their deep connection. *Shelle Rosenfel* Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved.



## Discussion Questions

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Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

- Do you have a favorite toy now or do you remember one from when you were younger?
  - In chapter one, StingRay says, "it's not so bad if you don't complain." Do you complain, ever? Does it make you feel better? Or worse? How does it make others feel when someone is complaining?
  - Lumphy would rather be warned about something that he won't like. Would you? Why, or why not?
  - The Girl says her toys are her best friends. What makes someone a best friend? Can we always say that one friend is best, or are there different sorts of friends, with different qualities? Are there different ways of being friends? Are oldest friends the same as best friends?
  - Do you think the Little Girl loves one toy more than the others? Why or why not?
  - The toys play checkers, leap frog and pick-up sticks. Plastic annoys everyone during the checkers game. How come? What does it mean to be a good sport?
  - Lumphy is afraid of the washing machine -- and comes to love it. Have you ever been afraid of something and come to love it, later? What? How did that happen? Did you learn anything from that experience?
  - StingRay and her friends discuss what it means to be grown-up in chapter six. What do you think it means to be grown-up? Is there more than one way to define it? What things do grown-ups do that children don't?
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- Most questions from Source:  
<http://www.emilyjenkins.com/resources.html>



# Author Interview

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## **How did you get the idea for *Toys Go Out*?**

When I was quite young I lost a favorite stuffed animal called Silver Squirrel. He escaped from the outside pocket of a suitcase during a plane ride. I was very, very sad. But I always imagined he had wonderful (and sometimes scary) adventures after he left me. I got the idea for the first story in that book (when they're in the backpack) by noticing how my cats seem to feel when shoved into their cat carrier.

## **Will there be another book about Lumphy, StingRay and Plastic?**

Yes, and [Paul O. Zelinsky](#) has agreed to illustrate it! It's called [Toy Dance Party](#) and will come out in Fall 2008.

## **What happened to the ear of the one-eared sheep?**

I am not sure. It was an ear-losing accident, that is all I know.

## **Why doesn't the dryer talk properly?**

She is on the fritz. That's also why Lumphy never goes in the dryer -- if buffaloes or sneakers or anything large like that were to go in the dryer, the barrel would get out of line.

## **Who is your favorite character?**

StingRay is the most like me. I am a bossyboots know-it-all at heart, but unlike StingRay I have learned to keep my mouth shut sometimes.

## **What is the Girl's name?**

You will find out in the second book!

## **I would like to buy a stuffed animal that looks like Lumphy or StingRay. Do you have a suggestion?**

A number of people I know have bought a lovely buffalo made by Mary Meyer. It is a [Flip Flops Buddy Buffalo](#). I haven't yet seen a toy who looks like StingRay.

## **Is *Five Creatures* a poem?**

If you think a poem is a piece of writing where the rhythms of the words are

especially important, and where the words can have more than one meaning -- then yes, *Five Creatures* is a poem.

### **Where did you get your idea for *Five Creatures*?**

When my sister, Zoe, was in 2nd grade she was learning Venn diagrams (if you don't know what these are yet, ask your math teacher). To keep her company, I drew a Venn diagram that showed the four members of my own household: me, my husband, and my two cats. My cat Mercy is the one who can get under the fridge. My cat Pongo (that's him up there in the photo) is the one who sings loud late at night. And my husband, Daniel, is allergic to milk. I hung the diagram up on my fridge for several months, and one day when I looked at it, I thought I should make it into a book.

### **So it's true?**

No. I added things (like the fifth creature). I also changed some parts to make it funnier and more interesting, which is why it's fiction, rather than a true story. For example, both my cats look the same -- black and white -- but I thought it would be more fun for the readers if the cats looked different from one another. Also, the artist got to make a lot of the choices. For example, my cat Mercy is really the only one who can't get up on the high stools, but Tomek, when he was drawing his pictures, decided to make it the little girl who couldn't get up.

### **Are there more books with Tomek Bogacki?**

We've done *Five Creatures*, *Daffodil*, the *Bea & HaHa* books and *Daffodil, Crocodile*. On the later books we worked more closely together than we did on the first book. I got to see early sketches and offer my suggestions about how the characters should look. And I even got to go to Tomek's studio, which was really inspiring. *Bea* and *HaHa* were invented out of some sketches he had done — so in that case, the art work came first.

### **Any more books with Pierre Pratt?**

Yes. Look for *SkunkDog* in Spring 2008.

### **Where did you get the idea for *Daffodil*?**

The seed is a true story: my mother was forced to wear an ugly yellow party dress when she was a girl, while her sisters got to wear pink and blue. But I made up everything else in it.

### **What is your favorite thing?**

My daughter; my family. My favorite color is dusty blue, and my favorite candies are the red gummies, just like Alberta. My favorite character in that book is the small owl who is missing an eye. Can you spot her riding on the boat, wearing an eyepatch?

**Do you have dogs? (there are dogs in *My Favorite Thing* and *That New Animal*)**

No. Just cats. I had a husky named Trouble when I was little. Now, my favorite dogs are bulldogs -- so I'm glad to see a bulldog in AnnaLaura's pictures for *My Favorite Thing*.

From: <http://www.emilyjenkins.com/faq.html>



## Further Reading

If you liked **Toys Go Out** by Emily Jenkins,  
you might like to read the following books, too!

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- The End of the Beginning: Being the Adventures of a Small Snail (and an even Smaller Ant)** By Avi  
**The Indian in the Cupboard** By Lynn Reid Banks  
**Ivy and Bean** By Annie Barrows  
**Socks** By Beverly Cleary  
**Mercy Watson to the Rescue** By Kate Dicamillo  
**The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane** By Kate Dicamillo  
**Toy Dance Party** By Emily Jenkins  
**Clementine** By Sara Pennypacker  
**The Velveteen Rabbit** By Margery Williams