

"The passion of my life is young people in their teens living in a psychologically corrupt world."

Writer Becomes Publisher, Stays Writer: The Bick House Back Story

by Linda Carlson

FEW OF US ARE TALENTED AND LUCKY ENOUGH to have a book published when we're 26, and to still have books coming out a half century later.

But Dale Bick Carlson was, and is.

Into print with juvenile and young adult fiction, including *Perkins the Brain* and *Warlord of the Genji* with such publishers as Doubleday and Simon & Schuster in the 1960s and 1970s, Carlson has a backlist of more than 80 titles, some from Bick Publishing House and some originally published by others.

Passionate about topics ranging from psychology to philosophy, from conservation to self-help, Carlson thinks of herself as a writer first. With a staff of six at Bick House, mostly supervised by her daughter Hannah Bick Carlson, she can both commit herself to the projects she believes most important, and see her nonfiction shepherded into print.

Although Carlson's first published books were humorous, science fiction, and mystery titles for kids, and she later created picture books, her initial bestseller was in an entirely different genre. *Girls Are Equal Too*, published in 1969 by Atheneum, was followed by *Where's Your Head: Psychology for Teens*. They are what she calls "passionate pleas to teens to not listen to the 10,000 years of cultural misinformation they have inherited, but to think through their lives and values, behavior, and evolutionary psychology for themselves."

These are the books that garnered Carlson praise in the *New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly* and *School Library Journal*, and award after award from the American Library Association and its regional chapters.

Despite this new direction, and with young children at home, Carlson continued to write books for major publishers, with titles ranging from *The Plant People* (youth sci-fi for Franklin Watts; 1977) and *Testing in the States: Beyond Accountability* (edited for Jossey-Bass; 1981), to the *Jenny Dean* sci-fi mysteries (for Grosset & Dunlap in the 1980s). With at least one new title a year, she paid the bills, won honors, and became a minor celebrity, complete with book tours and broadcast interviews.



Dale Bick Carlson, whose decision to become a publisher stemmed from her passion for helping teenagers and young adults make responsible decisions.

A Move and a Major Passion

In 1993, however, Carlson made a career switch. Settling in Madison, CT, where she now works from a marshside home within blocks of an Atlantic beach, she established Bick Publishing House to create books for teenagers and young adults that "help them make responsible decisions for their lives." Psychology and ethics are among the topics she's focused on, and there's a life sciences series with an emphasis on accessible content, comprehensive glossaries, and detailed illustrations.

For adults, Bick publishes on mental illness, addictions, living with disabilities, and wildlife rehabilitation.

It was her physical move from a New York City apartment that led to some of her first self-published titles. "When I moved near the marsh 30

years ago, I became a wildlife rehabilitator to help abandoned and distressed wildlife and wrote books about that," she recalls. "I joined a local organization to serve adults with mental disabilities and wrote books about that."

"I started Bick Publishing by getting back rights to books so I could republish them."

with her daughter Hannah, now vice president of Bick, the *Basic Manuals for Friends of the Disabled*.

"But the major passion of my life is young people in their teens living in a psychologically corrupt world," Carlson emphasizes, "and I started Bick Publishing by getting back rights to books issued by Atheneum so I could republish the best-sellers *Girls Are Equal Too*, *Where's Your Head*, *The Mountain of Truth*, and *The Human Apes* as Bick's backlist."

Thus established, Carlson was able to continue with books that she perceives as meaningful to her and important to her audience, but less commercially attractive to major publishers. "In short," she says, "my purposes became larger and book income smaller."

Among those titles, still in print, are the *Wildlife Care for Birds and Mammals* series, including *First Aid for Wildlife*, and, written

Of course, financial challenges come with heading a small publishing house, but Carlson has enjoyed seeing her books reach young people and adults all over the world. WorldCat, the large network of libraries and library content, lists 90 titles for her, with member libraries owning a total of almost 11,000

copies of her books. She's been published in a dozen foreign languages, including Spanish, French, Finnish, Polish, Dutch, Chinese, Hebrew, Hindi, and Gujarati, and translations into other languages, including Greek, are in the works.

Help Along the Way

Although Carlson says that her emphasis has always been on creating content more than on the very important marketing tasks of publishing, she obviously has paid attention to selling rights. That's one of her pieces of advice for other publishers: Find a good foreign rights agent. Today she works with Bob Erdmann of Columbine Communications & Publications, whose clients include many other IBPA members.

"Without distribution, you're nowhere," Carlson continues, noting that she has "been blessed by always having enthusiastic distributors, currently BookMasters/Atlas Books."

She also credits IBPA—the late Jan Nathan, Terry Nathan, and the staff—for support and advice: "Without them," she declares, "I'd have been dead in the water long ago." And Carlson cites the value of having other long-time colleagues, illustrating the importance of networking throughout your career: "I've also benefited from my good reputation in the teen/YA field, advice from my friends at Baker & Taylor and Follett, and the years of good reviews."

Linda Carlson (no relation to Dale Bick Carlson) writes for the Independent from Seattle.



This colorful collage welcomes visitors to the Bick site and quickly conveys the publisher's mission as well as information about the content and look of individual titles.

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