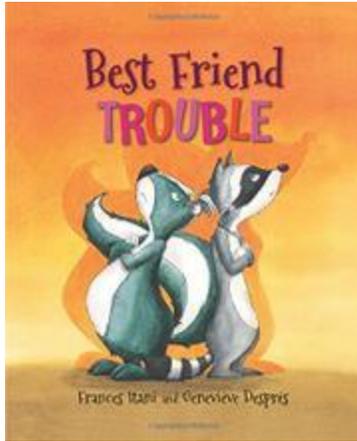


SPOTLIGHT



Frances Itani is perhaps best known for her award winning and critically acclaimed adult novels such as *Deafening*, *Remembering the Bones*, and *Tell*. So, it came as a bit of a surprise to me to learn that she also has a couple of children's picture books to her name: *Linger by the Sea* and *Best Friend Trouble*.

The latter tells of a skunk named Lizzy and a raccoon named Hannah, normally best friends, but who are currently not getting along. It follows Hannah, but truthfully both girls seem to share a little of the responsibility in this (hopefully)

temporary feud.

At the heart of *Best Friend Trouble* is a story that emphasizes the need for appropriate catharses and for eventually dealing with interpersonal issues head on. Hannah goes to each member of her family seeking to vent. In turn, each of these family members offer advice on how to blow off some steam. Her brother recommends nailing a board, her father banging on some cymbals, and her mother drawing a picture. Each approach works in the sense that Hannah is able to calm down more and more, but the problem is still there. Fortunately, now Hannah is in a headspace where she can comfortably talk things out with Lizzie.

There's a risk in such a didactic tale to alienate even the youngest of readers, to be too obviously preachy, unrealistic, and boring. However, Geneviève Després' illustrations perfectly balance out the potentially heavy-handed message with expressive and friendly cartoons. Little details, such as Hannah's tongue sticking out as she concentrates on hammering a nail, add a whimsical humorous touch.

With the text and illustrations combined, children are likely to enjoy the story without even realizing they've been taught some wonderful coping strategies to a very common problem.

Illustrator Geneviève Després will be visiting Yellowknife during Canadian Children's Book Week and presenting at the Yellowknife Book Cellar on Saturday, May 14th from 10:00 to 11:00 AM.

- John Mutford, Public Services Librarian