

Children's book features arctic dogsled adventure

KIANN'S IDITAROD
Shelley Gill
Illustrated by Shannon Cartwright
65 pages incl. illustrations, \$9.95

■ Shortly before the Iditarod begins, burlap bags are stuffed with booties and batteries, candy bars and canine food to be dropped at the 26 checkpoints the teams will pass along the way.

Rest when the sun is high.
Eat, then sleep, then hit the trail, or faster teams pass you by.

Gill also includes adventure when she depicts the hazards inherent in the competition: the bitter cold, the encounter with wild animals, the danger of getting lost in a snowstorm. As Marian Rafal, librarian at Bloomfield Township Library, says, today's children's books "do not talk down to kids. They treat children with more respect than books used to do."

This reviewer certainly enjoyed Kiann's Iditarod, but then, I'm a grown-up. The book wasn't written for the likes of me. For genuine feedback, I knew I needed some help. So I turned to the experts — the second-graders in Linda Shapiro's class at Hickory Grove School in Bloomfield Township.

Seated on the floor in a semicircle before me, students listened raptly to the epic tale. When asked which parts of the story they enjoyed the most, eager hands shot up with a variety of responses.

"The wolf part," cried one young fellow.

"The dogs sleeping on top of their little houses," offered a girl with a smile.

"Kiann and the other lead dog growling at each other," and "the shots fired to drive the mouse away" were mentioned as exciting episodes.

Obviously caught up in the story's suspense, one second-grader announced, "I liked it when they crossed the finish line."

One of the children volunteered that she really loved the illustrations. Her opinion was shared by the rest of the class. Drawn in vibrant colors, with great warmth and realistic detail, the pictures reveal a love for animals and a

gentle sense of humor.

The illustrator, Shannon Cartwright, is a graduate of the University of Michigan Art School. According to her father, Chuck Cartwright, a Birmingham resident, his daughter was inspired to move to Alaska by her grandmother, who served as a public-health nurse when the 49th state was still a territory. The artist now lives in a remote area of Alaska with her dog, Cirrus. Transportation to her home involves a five to six mile hike from the train track.

Gill and Cartwright have collaborated on a number of books, including Mammoth Maggie (1984), Alaska's Three Bears (1990), and Danger, The Dog-Yard Cat (1989). The latter is co-authored with Libby Riddles, the first woman to win the Iditarod. Prancing across its pages is a scrappy "break-all-the-rules" cat who leads a team of huskies to Iditarod victory.

When I asked the second graders at Hickory Grove School if they would ever like to ride on a dog sled, a chorus of voices answered "Yes!" Then one youngster quickly added "... but not for a thousand miles!"

Perhaps some of us can learn more about the Iditarod from Shelley Gill in person. She will give a presentation at 11 a.m. Saturday at the Rochester children's bookstore, Halfway Down the Stairs.

Esther Littmann, a Bloomfield Township resident, is a lecturer in English and German at Lawrence Institute of Technology. Each month, she reviews books by local authors and by authors making appearances at local book stores. To comment, call 953-2047, mailbox 1893 from a Touch-Tone phone.



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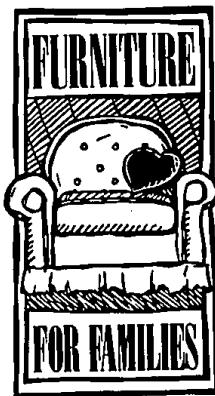
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