

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### **RHYMES AND DOODLES FROM A WIND-UP TOY**

West, Martha Sears

Park Place Press (108 pp.)

\$24.95 hardcover, \$13.95 paperback

ISBN: 978-0988678408; December 1, 2013

## BOOK REVIEW

What do lost emails, fishermen's tales, tentless campers, and windup toys have in common? They are all subjects of lighthearted poems for children and adults in this Shel Silverstein-esque collection by author/illustrator West (*Longer than Forevermore*, 2013, etc.).

After a short introductory poem on poetry, West introduces readers to feelings of loss of agency in "I Am Not a Wind-Up Toy"; the narrator says: "Conditions out of my control / Are winding up my key." Though the theme resurfaces, and frequently narrators are exposed to topics outside of their control (whether a perfume atomizer being sprayed at them, a tent that's blown away, or an audience that doesn't believe a true story), what unites these poems is not a topic or theme but a tone. Whether she's writing about family relationships or recipes renamed with the wrong ingredients, West writes in a lighthearted style, varying between alternate rhyme and limerick structures. Her rhyme schemes are steady, making lap reading pleasant. However, not all of the poems are of interest to children. "Son," for example, closes with a mother's wish: "I wish the wife he'll have someday / Could share with me the joy / Of knowing him, as I do now... / This warm and cheerful boy." The sentiment is lovely, but the poem is more likely to resonate with adult readers. Clever and humorous poems, such as "In the Moonlight," in which the narrator anticipates being proposed to when really her beau just drops his keys, may go over the heads of young readers. While the diversity makes the collection hard to categorize, the poems are easy to enjoy, and the quirky, black-and-white sketched illustrations are amusing. Some of the best poems for children encourage creativity; one proclaims: "There is no Boss of Crayons." In "Grandmother," a young narrator describes her love for her grandmother, who "like[s] pretending things, / 'Cause she remembers how." These all-age poems are satisfying in a way that the adult poems aren't, despite their clever sendups of emails that wind up in the ether.

A lighthearted collection that sometimes tackles weightier themes.

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# ForeWord Reviews

RHYMES AND DOODLES FROM A WIND-UP TOY

Clarion Review ★★★★★

**Shel Silverstein, A.A. Milne, and Ogden Nash** have a sister-in-rhymes named **Martha Sears West**. Her poems, like theirs, tickle the funny bone, lift the spirits, and warm the heart. **She focuses on the joy and magic of childhood, and how adults can retain a childlike sense of wonder.** Some of the poems are purely whimsical; others are poignant; still others seem intended for adults. **All are composed with flawless rhythms and inspired rhymes.**

"The Fisherman" looks at the long-held tradition of anglers exaggerating their stories of the one that got away, cleverly entreating the reader to consider that one tale about seeing something unusual just might be true: "A man who'd swum out to a shoal,/While holding up his fishing pole,/Was gazing at the sea around,/When suddenly, without a sound,/There appeared two non-conformist/Devil Rays that were enormous!" When proof of the creatures' existence arrives, the poet cautions: **"Not every tale that sounds unreal/Is fabricated out of zeal."**

In "Visitors," a child takes a dollhouse indoors after the outdoor fairies fail to protect it from destruction by uninvited guests: **"The house is in my bedroom now,/Where I can guard the place./You can't depend on fairies;/I'll be watching, just in case."**

Some of the poems are clearly not meant for children at all, like **"Minimally Invasive Posterior Lumbar Decompression,"** a jaunty rhyming ode to the doctor who healed the poet's aching back, and "Farewell," a poem in which a father sends a son on his way into adult life, with a bouncing meter and simple rhyme scheme that doesn't prevent the heartache from coming through: **"In part, the talk was serving/to alleviate my fears./Until I learned Japan would be his home/For twenty years."**

The author holds a bachelor's degree in linguistics from the University of Maryland. Her previous book, *Jake, Dad, and the Worm*, illustrated with watercolor paintings, told the story of a small boy who was inspired by a heroic worm. In this volume, **her line drawings are simple and clear, well-proportioned and appealing, reminiscent of Shel Silverstein's goofy kids and Ernest Shepard's charming depictions of Christopher Robin.**

**This book is an absolute delight.** The rhymes and accompanying doodles run the spectrum of human emotion, from the giggling nonsense of "Now They Know" ("I said something foolish,/And feared they knew it was me;/So I hid my head in a paper bag/And walked into a tree") to the sad nostalgia of "The Best Christmas" to the sheepish self-awareness of "Change" (**"There are things about myself/I ought to rearrange./Instead, I shuffle furniture;/It's easier to change."**).

The "Wind-Up Toy" of the title refers to an introspective poem in which the author insists that she does just as she pleases, but winds up admitting: **"Even when I think that I'm/The one in charge of me,/Conditions out of my control/Are winding up my key."**

**West deserves a place on the bookshelf alongside Nash and Milne,** whose classic poetry carries timeless reflections on the universal condition of being a sensitive human being. —Karen McCarthy

## Rhymes and Doodles from A Wind-up Toy

By Martha Sears West. Paperback. 99 pages. ISBN: 9781475174076

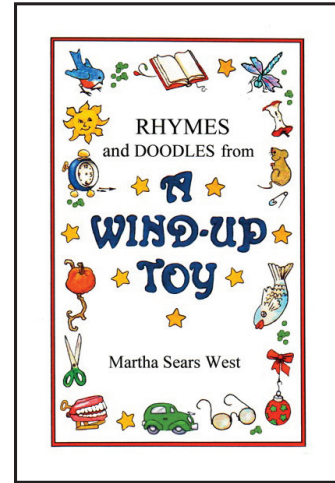
Mention poetry to most readers from 2 to 92 and watch their expressions. “I’d rather have a story.” That’s before they met Shel Silverstein or Jack Prelusky.

Now Martha West offers clever, funny, touching everyday poems, some even intended for adults. No musty, dusty book of poetry with the poet writing with “thy or “anon.” Instead the reader finds fresh and happy wordplay.

The author tells her readers about Laura Lee, the cow, Tommy Toothpaste with minty breath, and a purse that contains, among other things, a broken jar of honey. One reader who has never found so many words that make so little sense so she writes her own poem.

The broad, black-line illustrations beg to be colored with a fat crayon. West’s best review has been written by a twelve year old: “Wow, it’s great! And it’s not even stupid or anything.”

What more could a poet ask?



<http://loganbooktable.wordpress.com/2011/04/06/rhymes-and-doodles-from-a-windup-toy/>



## Author and Illustrator Martha Sears West with her two books, “A Wind-Up Toy” and “Jake, Dad, and the Worm.”

(photo by Jennifer Meyers/*Herald Journal*)

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Martha Sears West says her grandchildren love her books and her neighbors say wonderful things about her artwork, but she can't rely on what they think. "You just can't trust friends and family," the newly published Logan resident says.

That's why waiting to receive her first objective review on "Rhymes and Doodles from a Wind-up Toy" was so agonizing. It came just days ago from *ForeWord* Clarion, thrilling West by **giving her five out of five stars on her book of poetry**. "Rhymes and Doodles" has come on the heels of "Jake, Dad and the Worm," a whimsical narrative about a child who discovers even though he is young, he can still learn and explore before he grows up. For West, who lives with her husband, Steve, in a classical home tucked away in a quaint Island neighborhood, these books represent a lifetime of thoughts and memories.

"Jake, Dad and the Worm" was actually born more than 30 years ago, when the Wests were raising their three children in Maryland. **Martha remembers hearing her family applaud a little worm who was slowly making his way through their backyard. "I was amazed and pleased to see that they enjoyed something so simple,"** she said.

So, a few years ago when she threw around the idea of writing and illustrating her own book, Steve suggested making the famous worm the focus of the book. Martha ran with the idea, after being encouraged by her well-written daughter and professional artist. "I thought, 'If he thinks I can do it, I can do it,'" she remembers of her thoughts following a conversation with son Allan West, who lives in Tokyo and paints large-scale pieces.

West remembers her love affair with writing and artwork beginning early. As a 12-year-old she and a close friend spent their free time writing poetry. Also as a child, she received oil paints from her uncle, Jack Sears, a known writer and artist at the time. Throughout the following years, she cultivated both talents, going so far in high school as to receive a scholarship to attend the Chouinard Art School in Los Angeles every Saturday for months. After high school, West



attended the University of Utah, where she mulled an art major but ultimately settled on French teaching after deciding to go after something she didn't know much about. "It's better for your character," she says.

After she and her husband married, they lived in Salt Lake before moving to the Washington, D.C., area where they raised their three children. When Steve retired 17 years ago, they planned to move to Seattle - to stay "on the water" - but stopped in Logan so Martha could see where Steve had spent his summers as a childhood. That's when she saw their current home, which reminded her of her childhood house in Bethesda, Md. With the Logan River running through its backyard, it fit the "on the water" requirement, she said, laughing.

Throughout all of those years, West has kept a pen in hand and paintbrush nearby. Her own artwork - in addition to her son's - grace the walls of her home. "For many, many years I've written a poem a day," she said, adding that they usually are drafted for specific people in mind. Over the past couple of years, she started working on poems that applied to a broader audience. Those are what make up her 95-page "Rhymes and Doodles" book. But she admits they're all written with a specific purpose in mind. One is dedicated to her daughter's mother-in-law, a kind and gentle woman. Another describes a "minimally invasive" surgery and its aftermath. **And a treasured poem is dedicated to her mother, who after a stroke at 87 couldn't remember who Martha was, choosing to call her a "happenmaker" because she made things happen.**

West, who went back to school in her 50s to get a degree in linguistics, said she has other books coming. Her ideas for writing come to her sometimes late at night - prompting her to call herself a "wind-up toy," as referenced in one of her book titles.

For now, she's cherishing her first review and looking forward to having her books available to the public at The Book Table, which she said has agreed to sell them. —*Emilie Wheeler*

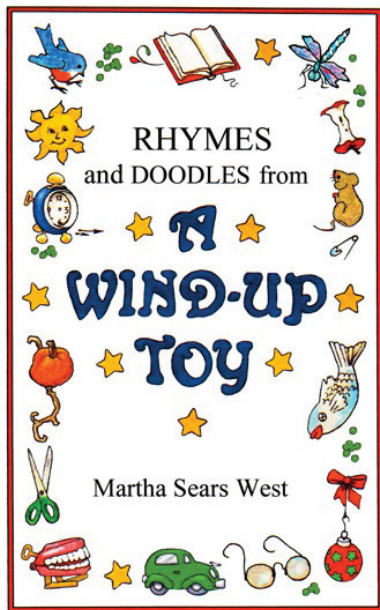


# Take Five!

## Five books that will get you through a hard time

by ForeWord Magazine

When the going gets tough, here are five titles to make the “going” a little easier.



### 5. *Rhymes and Doodles from a Wind-Up*

**Toy** by Martha Sears West [<http://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/rhymes-and-doodles-from-a-wind-up-toy/>]

Shel Silverstein, A.A. Milne, and Ogden Nash have a sister-in-rhymes named Martha Sears West. Her poems, like theirs, tickle the funny bone, lift the spirits, and warm the heart. She focuses on the joy and magic of childhood, and how adults can retain a childlike sense of wonder. Some of the poems are purely whimsical; others are poignant; still others seem intended for adults. All are composed with flawless rhythms and inspired rhymes.



## Book Review



**Ridge Writers on Books: For the young, younger and young at heart**  
by DONNA McCROHAN ROSENTHAL  
Published July 4, 2012, Rigeview California

Martha Sears West takes the unique approach that “old people can remember being young, but children can’t remember being old” or to put it another way, she “hopes the occasional reader will chortle, ‘Aha!’ – possibly out loud, and in a library.” Reviewers have compared her playful verse to Shel Silverstein, A.A. Milne and Ogden Nash.

In “**Rhymes and Doodles from A Wind-up Toy**” (text/illus., paperback, 106 pages) lost email circles about “In Saturn’s rings/ With luggage we’ve lost/ And other things” and “Looking sharp while acting rude/ Won’t compensate for your attitude.”

West’s other titles include “**Jake, Dad and the Worm**” (text/illus. West, 2010, paperback, 40 pages, \$11.95) about a lad who laments, “When there are things I want to do/ I’m never big enough” until observing a persistent earthworm shows him how much he absolutely can do.