

**THE WAY A DOOR CLOSES  
BY HOPE ANITA SMITH**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006  
Grades 6-8**

Submitted by Brenda Eames, Teen/Young Adult Services Librarian  
East Baton Rouge Parish Library, Baton Rouge

**Title: The Way a Door Closes**  
**Author: Hope Anita Smith**  
**Illustrator: Shane W. Evans**  
**Publisher: Henry Holt, 2003**  
**Pages: 52**

**Summary**

Poems express the feelings that 13-year old C.J. goes through as his loving father chooses to leave the family.

\*\*\*\*

*The Way a Door Closes* is a deeply moving collection of poetry that weaves the story of 13-year old C.J.'s life with and without his father. Ms. Smith paints a picture of a loving African-American family that struggles with the crisis of job loss and the strain that unemployment places on the family. Shane Evan's artwork vividly portrays the joy and despair that are experienced by C.J. and his family.

"The first 12 poems describe the contentment C.J. feels about being a part of a close-knit family. With the 13<sup>th</sup> poem, 'The Way a Door Closes,' his father abruptly leaves home. 'And when he went out the door/he held on to the knob./The door closed with a/click./I felt all the air leave the room/ and we were vacuum-sealed inside./-I can tell a lot by/the way a door closes.' In carefully chosen, straightforward language, Smith conveys the boy's roller-coaster emotions with pinpoint accuracy. The results are poems that are heartbreaking, angry, and tender." (source: *School Library Journal*, May 1, 2003).

When Ms. Smith was asked whether she had thought of an alternative ending where C.J.'s father does not return, she replied:

"I never thought of having an alternative ending to this book. I introduced C.J.'s father as a warm, loving father and husband. There is no way I could justify his leaving and not coming back. It wasn't in his character. I also felt that the story of black fathers leaving and staying gone had been told a thousand times. This book is my blue moon, to fathers and fathers in the making, a second chance, a light to help them find their way home." (source: Henry Holt and Company's Interview: Hope Anita Smith: A Conversation with Hope Anita Smith on *The Way*

a Door Closes:

<http://www.henryholtchildrensbooks.com/authorinterview.asp?ID=Smith> )

### **Author's Biography**

Ms. Smith was born and grew up in Akron, Ohio. She began writing poetry at age eight and enjoys sharing her love of stories and poetry through both professional storytelling and by creating a program entitled *Bookmarked for Poetry*, which makes winning student's poems into bookmarks. *The Way a Door Closes* is her first book.

### **Illustrator's Biography**

"A graduate of Syracuse University, Shane W. Evans has illustrated several children's books, on which he has worked with the likes of basketball greats Shaquille O'Neal and Magic Johnson. He also illustrated *Osceola: Memories of a Sharecropper's Daughter* by Osceola Mays and Alan Govenar, which was honored as both a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Book and an Orbis Pictus Honor Book for nonfiction. 'Every time I put paint to brush, brush to canvas, it is a journey,' he notes. 'Some journeys are pleasant; some not so pleasant. All are life lessons.'" (source: Candlewick Press bio

<http://www.candlewick.com/authill.asp?b=Author&m=bio&id=2778&pix=n> )

### **Awards and Honors**

Bank Street Best Children's Book of the Year  
Books for the Teen Age, New York Public Library  
CBC-NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts  
Claudia Lewis Award  
Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award – Author  
Judy Lopez Memorial Award for Children's Literature (Women's National Book Association)  
Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award Honor Book

### **Related Titles**

*Aleutian Sparrow* by Karen Hesse  
*The Brimstone Journals* by Ron Koertge  
*Locomotion* by Jacqueline Woodson  
*Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech.  
*Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse  
*Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* by Ron Koertge  
*Under the Pear Tree* by Brenda Seabrooke

*Activities for Creating Pictures & Poetry* by Janis Bunchman and Stephanie Bissell Briggs. This book's aim is to focus on the process of creating both artwork and poetry. It combines poets and artists by themes and

encourages both art and poetry using various mediums and styles.

*Keesha's House* by Helen Frost tells the stories of seven teens facing family and other problems using various styles of poetry.

*The Dream Bearer* by Walter Dean Myers

The book examines the difficult relationships between many fathers and sons in the African-American community.

*Handbook for Boys* by Walter Dean Myers

The story examines a community mentoring program run by Duke Wilson out of his barbershop on 145<sup>th</sup> Street and its impact on two teenage boys, Jimmy and Kevin.

*Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices* by Walter Dean Myers

These fifty-four poems are each written in a separate voice and modeled after the people Myers knew growing up in his Harlem neighborhood.

*Somewhere in the Darkness* by Walter Dean Myers

Crab, Jimmy's father, escapes from a prison hospital to take one last opportunity to reconcile with his son. Jimmy, who hardly knows his father, agrees to accompany him on what he thinks will be a trip to Chicago but turns out to be a trip to Crab's past, which leads to Arkansas.

*145<sup>th</sup> Street: Short Stories* by Walter Dean Myers

These short stories set around 145<sup>th</sup> Street show a lighter and more magical side of life in the Harlem neighborhood where Myers grew up.

## **Classroom Connections**

**Poetry Writing:** Use this and *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* to encourage students to write poetry.

**Job Search:** C.J.'s father has lost his job and C.J. offers to get a job after school or to perhaps take a break from school to work. Have a classroom discussion on unemployment. Have the class learn about the process for applying for after-school jobs. You may include job interview skills, resume preparation, cover letter writing, career exploration, career papers, etc. You may also include a discussion about the reasons his mother would not want him to take a job.

## **Web Sites**

Henry Holt and Company: Books for Young Readers

<http://www.henryholtchildrensbooks.com/authorinterview.asp?ID=Smith>

Site features an interview with author Hope Anita Smith.

### Mapping Your Future

<http://mapping-your-future.org/>

Includes college and career planning tips and resources for middle and high school students and their parents.

### Online Poetry Classroom

<http://www.onlinepoetryclassroom.org/index.cfm>

Contains ideas on teaching and using poetry in the classroom. Includes sample lesson plans.

### Poetry 180: A Poem a Day for American High Schools

<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/>

Features information on reading poetry out loud plus links to 180 poems that can be read aloud.

### U.S. Census Bureau Facts for Features: Father's Day

<http://www.census.gov/Press->

[Release/www/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/001792.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/001792.html)

Includes fun statistics on fathers in the United States.