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Milford couple's charming book was a perfect Earth Day read

By Betty DeRamus / The Detroit News



The little book is a chunk of pure magic, a fantasy about forest animals that band together to protect a newborn and seemingly lost deer.

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To encourage more youngsters to read, the Milford couple who wrote the book donated 3,072 copies of it to Michigan's elementary school libraries.

Last Friday, which was Earth Day, I decided to read it.

For a few short minutes, I tiptoed through a beautifully photographed fantasy about fawns and red-winged blackbirds, fat-cheeked chipmunks and tree frogs, cardinals and katydids, yellow-eyed owls and watchful squirrels.

For a few short minutes, I lived in a world where nobody concocted false stories about freeway rapists or murdered their grandmothers or molested kids.

The book is called "Lost in the Woods." Its authors, Carl R. Sams II and Jean Stoick, have been photographing wildlife for more than 20 years. They wrote another children's book, "Stranger in the Woods," which has been on the New York Times' best-seller list for five consecutive years.

"Lost in the Woods" is a small story that makes a large point. It's the tale of a newborn deer that seems to be all alone in the woods. The other forest animals worry that the fawn has been abandoned or wandered away from its mother, but that's not the case.

The mother doe instinctively knows that her smell can attract predators that might harm her child. So she leaves him alone, staying nearby to nurse and care for him.

Fawns are born without a scent and can use their spots to camouflage themselves until their legs are strong enough to keep up with their mothers.

"Teachers and librarians have been incredibly supportive of both of our books," said Stoick. "We even had curriculum guides developed for use in the classroom.

I can see why.

What child -- or adult -- hasn't felt lost or abandoned at some time?

And who has not longed to discover that they were never truly alone?

"Lost in the Woods" was the perfect book to read on Earth Day, and not just because it shimmered with images of skittering forest creatures and grass so green you could almost smell it.

The book is a reminder that we humans live in a world that is far bigger than our own egos, a world with its own rules of life and death, a world we have to respect and preserve.

Nature is frightening when it pounds us with tsunamis and tornadoes, but it is our refuge and strength, too. Calm rivers and lakes soothe uneasy spirits, lulling us with hypnotic rhythms.

Some people get close to nature by planting gardens in their back yards or on vacant lots, hungry for food that hasn't been sprayed, spliced and shipped thousands of miles.

"Often, the times I am photographing wildlife are when I am most

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relaxed," says Sams.

Earth Day is best celebrated outdoors, but I spent it in my living room, leafing through a book that made me smell grass, see wildflowers and hear the croaking, chirping, whirring songs of the universe.

I hope the children who climb inside its pages taste that same joy.

Betty DeRamus' column runs Monday, Wednesday and Friday in Metro. Reach her at (313) 222-2296 or bderamus@detnews.com.

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