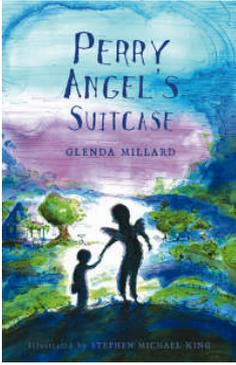


BOOK NOTES:



Perry Angel's Suitcase

Written by Glenda Millard,
Illustrated by Stephen Michael King

Published by ABC Books

SYNOPSIS (PLOT)

Perry Angel's Suitcase is the third installment in a series of books about the Silk family (*The Naming of Tishkin Silk* and *Layla Queen of Hearts*). This whimsical book tells the story of Perry Angel, a young foster child who comes to the Silk family.

Griffin Silk and his best friend Layla are excited to hear about Perry's coming and plan all of the things they will show him. The Silk family and Layla arrive early to meet the 10.30 express on which Perry Angel is arriving with his companion, Melody, from the welfare office. Perry arrives looking small and lost and clutching a battered suitcase imprinted with faded gold letters that say PMGd A.

Over the next few months, Perry becomes part of the Silk family. And even though he doesn't talk, Griffin and Layla love him and care for him at school and at home. What they don't know about Perry Angel is that for seven long years, he has been searching for the place where he truly belongs. Left on the steps of the welfare office in a suitcase from the Post Master General's department of Australia, Perry longs to be part of a family.

When Perry overhears Griffin's parents, Ben and Annie Silk, discussing an impending visit from Melody, Perry believes he is to be taken away and sent to yet another family. Clutching his battered suitcase, he runs away and hides on the Silk's raft. It is there that Ben Silk finds him and asks Perry Angel if he will become one of the Silk family children.

Over a special ceremony of Cake and Thankfulness that evening, Ben Silk tells his family, for the first time, that he too was a foster child, cared for and loved by Griffin's grandmother, Nell.

THEMES

Perry Angel's Suitcase is a story of belonging and finding one's place in the world.

Says the author: 'I write about ordinary, everyday situations and events that occur in many families. It is people's reaction to these ordinary things that I'm interested in and in my writing I try to show how different characters facing the same situation react in different ways. My desire is to express emotion: fear, jealousy, kindness, love, joy and sorrow, and to manifest the tenderness and frailty of the human spirit and, conversely, its capacity for great strength. I find that because these emotions are common to all, they are therefore an appropriate form of communication to people of all ages, including children.'

The story shows how different families can be: Perry Angel is a foster child, with no family at all; Layla lives in town and is an only child; Griffin lives an 'alternative' lifestyle on a farm with four sisters, his parents, his grandmother, a dog and a bird and a family of ducklings who think they are chickens.

Loneliness, fear and isolation are also strong themes in the book, all of which are softened by the joy and love found in the Silk family. The author also explores the themes of love, acceptance and the meaning of 'home'.

WRITING STYLE

The author writes in a gentle, whimsical manner. She uses rich, lush descriptions to paint a picture of the Silk family – their traditions, family life and the love they have for each other.

The writing has a strong feeling of a classic story, in the spirit of Frances Hodgson Burnett (*The Secret Garden, A Little Princess*) or Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians*.

Glenda Millard tells the story from varying view points – Layla's, Griffin's and Perry's – so that the reader gains an insight into what motivates each character throughout the story. This device also gives the reader an understanding of Perry's welfare background, which is vital to the plot's progression.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Glenda says: 'I've always been interested in people who are considered different by others or even by themselves. Sometimes difference comes about by birth or circumstance, and at other times as a matter of choice.

'It seems that I'm also driven to write about family and belonging, but not always in the traditional sense.

'My fictional Silk family lives what might be called an alternative lifestyle in a conservative country town. In my first two books about them, it was interesting to discover how other families and individuals reacted to their chosen lifestyle, especially Griffin's best friend, Layla, and her family.

'In addition to my interest in difference and family, I wanted to explore human longing for love, acceptance and home.

'Thus, in *Perry Angel's Suitcase*, I have introduced a little boy who is different by birth, but experiences, perhaps even more so than most of us, the search for belonging, love and a place to call home.'

AUTHOR /ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Glenda Millard is the author of over a dozen novels and picture books for children, including *The Naming of Tishkin Silk* and *Layla, Queen of Hearts*.

Glenda Millard was born in the Goldfields region of Central Victoria and has lived in the area all her life. The communities she has lived in and the surrounding landscapes have provided a rich source of inspiration and settings for many of her stories.

It was not until Glenda's four children became teenagers that she began to write in her spare time. She is now a full-time writer.

Apart from writing, some of Glenda's favourite things are Jack Russell Terriers, hot-air ballooning, making and eating bread and pizza in the wood-fired oven that her husband built in the back yard and reading books which either make her laugh or cry.

Glenda has published six picture books, three junior fiction titles, short stories and two young adult titles. *The Naming of Tishkin Silk* was Honour Book in the CBCA Book of the Year Awards and for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. *Layla, Queen of Hearts* was also shortlisted in the CBCA Book of the Year Awards and was the winner of the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for children.

The illustrator, Stephen Michael King, is one of Australia's most popular and awarded children's illustrators.

Stephen describes drawing as something that he simply can't live without! 'As far back as I remember I loved to draw. All I needed was a stick and a nice patch of dirt and I was happy for hours. When I was ten years old I became partially deaf and experienced difficulty communicating with people. Drawing and dreaming became my escape ...

'I work from a small studio in my backyard surrounded by my growing forest of trees. Our house is in a tiny township near the Hawkesbury River in Sydney and we are surrounded by national park. My favourite pastime is sitting on my front step and dreaming of the veranda I will build one day.

'I work mainly with watercolours and ink, although I do occasionally use coloured pencils. I work fast so my ideas stay fresh and my brush and linework fluid.'

EDITORIAL COMMENT

The Naming of Tishkin Silk and *Layla Queen of Hearts* are not only two of ABC's best-selling titles; they are also two of the most-loved books on our children's list. After Glenda delivered the manuscript for *Layla*, we immediately started badgering her for a third story about the Silk family. Originally, we expected a story about Griffin's sisters, The Rainbow Girls, so Perry came as a surprise. However, I believe this to be the strongest and most poignant story in the series so far. Perry is such a vulnerable figure, embodying so many childhood fears – isolation, lack of home and family. Glenda's portrayal of the Silk family – their traditions, their love, their wonderfully alternative lifestyle – is the perfect foil for Perry's vulnerability. A beautifully moving story, I believe the Silk family series is destined to be a children's classic series for many years.

STUDY NOTES

- The book can be used to discuss the meaning of home and belonging.
 - Talk about what home means to students.
 - What does it mean to belong?
 - What is Perry's greatest fear?
- Perry Angel carries his battered suitcase with him everywhere.
 - Discuss what this suitcase means to him.
 - What is the picture inside?
 - What does he fear will happen if he lets go of the suitcase?
 - You might like to discuss children's own 'security blankets'.
- Perry's suitcase is imprinted with the letters PMGdA. Before you reach the section in the story that reveals what this stands for, talk about what these letters might mean. What might they reveal about Perry?
- Griffin and his grandma, Nell, discuss the meaning of Perry, which is short for Peregrine, meaning traveller or pilgrim. Peregrine is also the name of a falcon. Talk about how these apply to Perry Angel.
- The Silk family has many wonderful traditions, including the painting of Easter eggs, passing around messages of love, and the ceremony of Cake and Thankfulness.
 - Talk about students' family traditions.
 - Why are family traditions important?
 - How do they differ from family to family and culture to culture?
 - Does the school have any school traditions?
- Perry Angel gets teased at school for being different.
 - Talk about what it means to be different.
 - How can we help people who feel they are different or disadvantaged?
 - What should children do if they are bullied or see someone being bullied?
- *Perry Angel's Suitcase* is the third story in a series about Griffin, Layla and the Silk family. You might like to read the first two books in the series as well. How are the themes in Perry Angel's suitcase similar to those in the first two books? What do you think this says about the author?