

Hilda Van Stockum

Hilda Van Stockum writes: "Perhaps you think this funny, but I started to write when I was eight. I did not go to school then; I was taught by my parents. We lived far from schools in the country: my father was commander of Ymuiden, the seaport of Amsterdam. Few people had cars in those days--I had never even seen one. (We had a donkey and carriage, but the donkey was lazy and never ran.) My father set me long sums to do while he was away commanding Ymuiden. I was so bored with them I used to write stories on the opposite blank page. I wrote my 'memoirs,' which weren't very long (the high point was that I'd fallen into a brook on a picnic.) I also wrote the story of 'Mientje and Cateau,' two naughty girls who exchanged the sugar in the sugarpots for salt. I thought that was extremely funny.

"Why do I write? I can't help it. I don't like seeing a blank paper. . . . It's got to have a story or picture on it. I enjoy writing the story even if it is not published. It's good practice. Anyone who wants to become [a writer] should start by just writing; it doesn't matter what. . . . I write whenever I can, and whenever I'm not painting. I don't have a regular life because of the telephone. No one can have a regular life with a telephone. You sit in the bath, and the telephone rings. You're just pouring a nice cup of tea, [and] there's the phone again. You've got to an exciting point in your story [and] tingelingeling. But whenever the phone isn't ringing to tell me six children are coming to visit, or my daughter wants to go shopping with me, or will I please come because my youngest grandchild has swallowed a safety pin . . . and when I'm not cooking a dinner for unexpected guests or painting a picture, or looking at a funny play on television which I can't miss because I like to hear my husband laugh, I'm writing.

"Perhaps you think I'm never serious, but I really was when I wrote *The Winged Watchman* and *The Borrowed House*. Perhaps you get serious when you grow older. I'm very old, as you may have guessed; I was five at the beginning of the first world war, and the second one, in which I lost my brothers, seems [like] only yesterday. I wrote those last two books to give an idea of what it was like to be in Holland then. They are both true stories . . . Janna was a real little girl who is now married and her husband is Jewish. *The Borrowed House* was my way of forgiving the Germans. Jesus says you must forgive your enemies, and for me it was hard to really forgive the Germans, through whom I had lost my brothers and many other relatives. . . . Writing *The Borrowed House* helped. I did a lot of research on Germany under Hitler and I found out that Hitler's first victims were all Germans and many were not Jews. Many clergymen and soldiers and other prominent people bravely opposed Hitler and were killed for it. How do we know we'd have had the courage to stand up to a Hitler? We're lucky we're not put to the test. Germans are like other people: there are good ones and bad ones. So writing that book cured me of hating Germans.

"My favorite modern children's book writers are J. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Lloyd Alexander, Leon Garfield, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Joan Aiken, Madeleine de L'Engle, Patricia Lynch, Noel Streatfield, and Astrid Lindgren. I like writers with more than a factual outlook on life. I want a little vision in books; without vision, the people perish. Facts, especially sordid facts, can kill. They must be faced, but they can only be faced effectively if our eyes are lifted to the hills. I think perhaps modern writers are too obsessed with the negative side of life and feel they must reflect it. I myself feel it is necessary to look at the positive elements and to point them out. The newspapers are only too glad to let us know the moment something is wrong. It is for authors who have time to reflect and consider (and who don't have to make 'news' all the time) to remind people of the age-old truths and to tell of the goodness that is still here, among us and in us, struggling against the evil. It is that goodness that makes life interesting."

Hilda Van Stockum's works have been translated into Hebrew, Danish, Portuguese, German, and Dutch.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hilda Van Stockum". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent flourish at the end of the name.