



Angel finally arrives

Book on self-esteem long to germinate, but author confident kids get the message

By CARL HAHN
LIFE editor

It took Wendy Collier about 15 years of reading, attending workshops and doing exercises to build her self-esteem to the healthy level it's at today.

Now a public speaker and instructor of self-esteem courses in Red Deer, at one time her evaluation of herself was abysmal. She believes the lessons she learned as an adult could have changed her life as a child — and could change the life of any child who lacks self-esteem.

That's why the former school teacher has self-published a children's book on self-esteem. *Being different is cool* offers kids a quick lesson on how to keep a healthy attitude despite the cruelty of other children.

"I think that's one of the things people don't realize is (self-esteem) is actually a really critical part of development for kids," Collier says.

She's had the general story line simmering on the back burner for several years, adding a few ingredients every so often until she was happy with it. Every year or so she would go to the major bookstores and see if someone else had beaten her to the market and published something similar.

"You just expect that to happen. But literally there is nobody out there that has written this kind of story."

With the surge of interest in self-esteem in the past decade, Collier is surprised the only other book she's found is one by Jamie Lee Curtis, and it's aimed at very young children. Collier's was written for ages five to eight, although it also seems to fit criteria for the nine to 12 age group, she says.

She finished all the artwork for it this summer, and decided her book was finally ready for an audience.

In *being different is cool*, the Self-Esteem Angel visits with three children, Melanie, Shane and Ashley, each of whom has been teased and made feel unworthy by other children. The angel explains to them why it hurts, and then helps them look at the comments more objectively, and value their own unique characteristics.

"What she's saying is basically a lot of the things that I've learned over the years about self-esteem," Collier says. "Our differences are what make us really amazing people."

She knows how it feels to be picked on, by observ-



Photo by JERRY GERLING/Advocate staff

Author Wendy Collier with illustrations of an angel's visit to teach young people that it's cool to be different.

ing others and from personal experience.

"From my teaching I saw how hurt kids were by teasing, and I know how hurt I was by teasing."

Collier hopes that children who do the teasing will also understand from the story just how hurtful their words can be.

"I think most kids that do that, they don't even realize that they're hurting the other kids."

That's why she feels so determined to get the book out to children. Collier's so confident of its usefulness that she's printed 5,000 copies, the sales milestone that qualifies a book as a Canadian best-seller. And she's convinced it will reach that mark.

"We've never had anybody say anything negative about the book," she says.

The initial book launch Nov. 15 was so successful she's relaunching it Dec. 11 at 2 p.m. Her idea of a book launch, after all, is more than just a reading and autograph session.

Collier decided in September that she wanted more of a celebration around the unveiling of the book, so she put the dialogue in script form, and turned it over to Tree House Youth Theatre. A quartet of child actors performed the play at the launch,

to an audience of about 20 children and more than 100 adults.

Collier was very impressed by the play. She says the children memorized their parts perfectly, and the angel had a confident, comforting "warm glow" about her. She wants more people to be able to see the play, so the second launch is being held in the Memorial Centre.

She's also offering to donate 15 per cent of the retail price (\$19.99) of any books sold by Dec. 15 to a charity of the buyer's choice. She's trying to get the book under as many Christmas trees as possible, because she believes self-esteem is the best gift a child can receive.

"I really believe it fills a need that is out there."

Collier hadn't planned to promote the book outside Central Alberta before Christmas, but she's already been invited as a guest on the CFRN Edmonton noon hour news Dec. 6. Representatives for Vicki Gaboreau have also made initial contact about interviewing her in January or February.

For more information on *being different is cool*, check the website at www.angelbooks.ca or call Wendy Collier at 302-9709.