



The Portal - Tracy Beaker by Jacqueline Wilson

Producenter: Tove Jonstoj och Keith Foster

IBIGE:

Imagine that you were walking down the street and every woman you met could be your mother. Because you just didn't know what she looked like. The bad news is that you live in a children's home. The good news is that you can imagine anything. That's the story of Tracy Beaker.

JULIA:

"My name is...Tracy Beaker. I'm ten years old and two months. My birthday is on May the 8th. It's not fair, because that dopey Peter Ingman has his birthday then too, so we just got that one cake between us. And we had to hold the knife to cut the cake together, which meant we only had half of it each. Wishing is for babies anyway. Wishes don't come true."

IBIGE:

Tracy Beaker is one of the most popular stories in British literature for young readers. There are lots of books, radio programs and television series based on the story, and the writer, Jacqueline Wilson is well known by English readers. Our reporter Keith Foster called her.

KEITH & WILSON:

"- Why did you choose to write about Tracy?"

- It was long ago. I kept seeing adverts in our local newspapers for children in children's home, desperate to be fostered or adopted. And I'd look at these photos of these kids, and sometimes they'd be smiling sweet kids, other times they'd be messing around like all kids, and pulling a funny face."



JULIA:

"My hair is fair and very long and curly. I am telling fibs. It's dark and difficult and it sticks up in all the wrong places. Stick a photo of yourself here –I'm not really cross-eyed, I was just making a silly face. My lucky number is seven. So, why didn't some fantastic rich family make me their foster child when I was seven, then?"

IBIGE:

Jacqueline Wilson thought it must be strange for a child to advertise to find foster parents.

KEITH & WILSON:

"...and I was just in two minds about this whole project, because I thought - wonderful if advertising in this way actually finds good foster parents for kids back in children's homes – but very embarrassing all the same, you know, having all your worst thoughts, sort of, publicly displayed like that. I just wondered what it would feel like to be in this situation, and so I thought, OK, I shall write about a dear spicy little kid stuck in a children's home and how she reacts"

IBIGE:

Jacqueline Wilson decided to write about a girl in a children's home. As a writer she's in real good company. Literature is full of orphans.

KEITH: Orphans in books

What do these characters in stories have in common? Pippi Longstocking, Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker, Huckleberry Finn, Oliver Twist, Peter Pan, Frodo Baggins and Tracy Beaker?

One thing: they are all orphans. All of them lost their parents at an early age. And they are all very very popular characters.

So why do writers make up so many orphans when they want to tell exciting and moving stories?

Well there could be three reasons, and here they are!



Boom

Yes, they're sad! We feel sorry for them! And it IS sad to not have any parents. But the orphan in the story is always brave and even though they long for their mum and dad they struggle on anyway!

And we feel sympathy for them, which means we like them more, which makes us want to carry on reading the story, so that we find out what happens to them! Clever stuff...eh?

Ok...What else?

BOOM

What's one result of not having parents? There is no one to tell you what to do! By making their characters orphans, the people who write these stories take away one of the things that stop adventures happening.

I mean, what would have happened to young Frodo Baggins if he had had a mum at home?

"Now look hear young man, you put down that ring right this minute! And you can tell that funny-looking man with the beard to stop hanging around outside your door!"

OK, so in books we feel sympathy for orphans, and they can do stuff their parents wouldn't let them do. There's one more thing.

BOOM

Orphans usually have a purpose. They have something they need to do. How about one of the most famous made-up orphans ever...Batman. When he was a little boy his parents were killed in a robbery...right in front of him.



Since then he has only had one thought: to stop crime, to stop others going through what he went through as a boy.

Funnily enough lots of superheroes are orphans. Spiderman, for example, and Superman, he lost his whole planet.

Orphans make good heroes, in stories. Although perhaps that all rather had had parents, just like Tracy Beaker.

JULIA:

"I like eating, EVERYTHING: I like birthday cake the best; and Smarties; and Mars bars; and big buckets of popcorn; and gummy spiders; and Ben & Jerry's; and Big Macs with French fries; and strawberry milkshakes"

"Well, it's like, it's not like a fairy tale, her life is not like a fairy tale, it's like, it's like real life"

IBIGE:

Emilia Mellberg met Joel, Viktoria, Amelia, Hawraaaaaz and their teacher Paul, who all really like Jacqueline Wilsons' books, especially the story of Tracy Beaker. They think she is different.

EMILIAS REPORT:

"- I think it's nice to read about a girl who is not perfect, because it feels like, in many books, the characters are so great, and stuff. Tracy Beaker is...she's herself.

- It's good because...it's like the reality, about families and friends and...you can read her thoughts and what she thinks.

- I find as a teacher here sometimes everything can be so politically correct.

And here's a girl who just comes right out with it "I love McDonalds, I love chocolate". And a lot of students think that, and Jacqueline Wilson is there to put those, sort of, honest thoughts on paper.

- Do you like Tracy Beaker?

- Yeah, sure!

- Why?

- Well, I know she's a lot like me.



- In what sense?
- I'm...like, kind of screamy, like, wild, and stuff.
- I thought it was really nice to read something that you don't see that often, because you don't always read about an annoying little girl who thinks she's the best."

JULIA:

"Things I don't like: the name Justine, Louise, Peter...ah...there's heaps and heaps of names I can't stand."

EMILIAS REPORT:

- "- Why do you think she is so mean?
- She doesn't want to show other people that she's sad inside, because she really wants a family, but she realises that she doesn't really have one.
- She doesn't want to show it."

JULIA:

"My best friend is...well I've had lots and lots, but Louise has gone off with Justine and now I haven't got anyone. Just at the moment. Most of all I hate: Justine, that MONSTER GORILLA! And not seeing my mum."

EMILIAS REPORT:

- "- You think that the writer who wrote it had something to say when she wrote it?
- Maybe because you shouldn't judge people that are angry all the time. Maybe they are sad inside and they really want to have friends but they can't show it, in some other way than being aggressive.
- I think it's because, maybe, she wants kids to know about foster care and stuff. And all her other books – I've read them all – there all about these situations that kids can have in families.
- You think you would be friends with her if you knew her in real life?
- No, I don't think so.
- I think that I could be friend with her if I read the book and I knew how she was, but if I hadn't read the book before I met her, I'm not sure"



JULIA:

"I started this book on...I don't know. Who cares what the date is? You ALWAYS have to put the date at school. I got fed up with this and put 2091 in my day book. And wrote about all these rockets, spaceships, and monsters, zooming down from Mars to eat us all up. Ms Brown got really annoyed"

KEITH & WILSON:

"- Do you think that our imagination can save us, sometimes - if children are like, in many of your books, if they are in a very tough situation, an exposed situation - that imagination can be their escape room?
- When you're a child, frequently, if you're in a horrible situation, there's not much you can do about it. You can't just say: "Well, I don't like this family" or "I don't like this school, I'm going to pack my bags and go", as you can as an adult. You've got to put up with it. So, you know, having your own imaginary world is one way of escaping from something that you're not enjoying."

IBIGE:

Sometimes parents come and visit their children in the children's home. Tracy's mum never comes. When Tracy was younger she used to sit and wait for someone to knock at the door. Now she doesn't do that anymore.

JULIA:

"No more dumb sitting around for me, because my mum is probably too far away to come in a quick visit. Yeah, that's it! She's probably abroad somewhere, she's always loved travelling. She's maybe in France (music)...or Spain, she likes sunshine (music). What am I thinking of? She would have gone to the States...maybe Hollywood. My mum looks so great; she'd easily get into the movies. You can't hop on a bus and visit your daughter when you're hundred and thousands of miles away in Hollywood...now can you?"

EMILIAS REPORT:

"- If you would ask the writer something, Jacqueline Wilson, what would you ask her?
- Why would you choose to write a book about an annoying little girl?"



KEITH & WILSON:

“- Ha,ha,ha...she IS annoying, I agree. However, what I’m trying to do is, not only write – hopefully, a good, funny, but ultimately touching story – but also show that there are reasons for Tracy’s behaviour. And if you’ve had a very rocky start in life and you’ve been let down so many times by your mother, and now she’s not coming to see you at all, you can generally behave in two different ways: you either withdraw into yourself and become almost mutant, desperately depressed and sad; OR you go the other way, and you become very fierce, very demanding, very determined to stick up for your own rights because nobody else will do it for you. And I think this is why Tracy is the way she is. And although she can be a total pain in the neck, in that situation...I think that most children, when they read the book, do understand why she’s acting up like this.

- What gives you the most pleasure when you write? It seems like you often put your characters in very difficult situations. Is it finding a way out for them that you enjoy?

- It is lovely being a writer because you can literally play God. And if a child is very unhappy within a fictional text, then it’s wonderful, you can think: “Aha, it’s OK darling, I’m going to make everything OK FOR you”, you know. It’s just like having a huge jumbled ball of strings and then you just tease it very carefully, so day after day...and then it just slowly unravels beautifully, and you get it exactly the way you want it to...that gives you immense satisfaction. And I think the best times about writing are right at the very start of the story: when you’re just starting up first page, and it’s all there before you; and then the very end, when you get to the end. I still childishly write THE end, at the end of my manuscripts, because it’s such a lovely feeling.”

IBIGE:

Keith Foster talked to the writer Jacqueline Wilson, Emilia Mellberg met Viktoria Eriksson, Joel Viitanen, Amelia Dahlén, Hawraaz Kamari and their teacher Paul Morris at The English school, Eskilstuna. Julia Foster read from The Story of Tracy Beaker. I’m Ibige Dahlberg-Kang.