

## Robert the Goose

**Henny:** Good morning! This is Henny Cornish and welcome to another edition of “Speaking of Books.” Today we are joined by Robert the Goose, son of the legendary Mother Goose. Robert has a new book out, “Tales My Mother Told Me.” We’ll be talking about his book, but first tell me, Robert. How’s your mother?

**Robert:** Thanks for asking, Henny. Mom’s doing fine, now. As you may know, she went into a bit of a depression after Dad died. Geese mate for life, you know. She gave up writing children’s books altogether. But she’s put that behind her. She’s still retired from writing, but she pecks out a living on a farm up in Yorkshire.

**Henny:** I’m sorry to hear about your father. I didn’t know he had died. I was under the impression that fairy tale creatures were immortal.

**Robert:** Well they don’t die of natural causes, but they can be killed. My mother documented many such deaths in her books. Mostly wicked witches, evil dragons, and the like. In Dad’s case he went out for a night with the boys and he had a little too much sauce for the gander, if you know what I mean. They didn’t have a designated flyer, so he tried to fly home himself. He flew straight into a microwave tower and, well, his goose was cooked.

**Henny:** Such a tragic story. But tell me about your book. You’re trying to set the record straight on some of your mother’s tales, are you not?

**Robert:** That’s right, Henney. Mom always had a purpose to the stories she wrote. There was a moral in the tale, a lesson to be learned. But over the years, many of the stories have been shortened. The lessons were lost, and what remained was meaningless. Take “Tom, the Piper’s Son” for example. To begin with, his name was simply “Tom.” Not “Tom Tom.” Yes, he stole a pig. But the story was originally one of redemption. It showed how Tom the man outgrew the indiscretions of Tom the boy. But how do most people remember the story? “The pig was eat and Tom was beat.” That’s not even proper English! My mother never wrote that. And she certainly would not have condoned corporal punishment against a child! The truth is Tom was sentenced to 90 days of community service, helping the farmer from whom he had stolen the

pig. In the process, he learned a useful trade. Instead of wasting his days piping, like his father, he became the leading swine herder in the county. And incidentally, he raised the three little pigs.

**Henny:** I never knew that! And is that story pretty much the way your mother wrote it?

**Robert:** Not at all! What would be the moral to that story? That houses made of straw or sticks won't stand up to a heavy wind, but a house built of brick will? Well Duh! What kid doesn't already know that? The story was supposed to be a warning against runaway government bureaucracy.

**Henny:** How so?

**Robert:** The story as it's typically told is true as far as it goes. The wolf blew down the first two houses but he couldn't budge the brick house. So he went to the local planning office to register a complaint. It turned out the pig didn't have a permit to build that house. The first two pigs didn't need building permits because straw and stick houses fell under the category of "temporary shelters," but a brick house – that was a permanent structure. And when they found out he built it himself . . . well! That brought in the bricklayer's union! The pig wasn't a certified mason. He wasn't even an apprentice. The union convinced the planning office that the house couldn't possibly be safe. That it was liable to collapse of its own weight at any moment. Since there was no permit to build the house in the first place, the planning office ordered it to be demolished, for the protection of the occupant. And so it was. And the pig was eaten by the wolf. But, the planning office was proud of the fact that they had prevented him from being injured by his own house.

**Henny:** That's amazing. Did your mother often write about government bureaucracy?

**Robert:** More than most people know. I'm happy to say, though, that true versions of a few of her stories do occasionally surface. The ant and the grasshopper, for example. Or the little red hen. Those are really two slightly different versions of the same story. My mother wasn't above recycling a plot now and then. In both cases you have one industrious character with foresight and a willingness to work now and delay gratification until later. In one story it's an

ambitious bachelor and in the other it's a concerned single mother, but essentially the same character. They work hard while those around them fiddle, or dance, or otherwise fritter away the hours. Then, when hard times come, the industrious character is prepared to weather the storm while the shiftless characters suffer. That's where libraries, book publishers, and others who want to keep in the government's good graces typically end the story. My mother's version went on to tell how the shiftless characters complained to the government that it wasn't fair that they should suffer while the winner of life's lottery lived in luxury. Since there were more voters in the shiftless crowd than in the winner's circle, the government agreed and used taxation, confiscation, and other government tools to redistribute the wealth. Eventually, the winners stopped producing and everyone perished when the next hard time came.

**Henny:** Wow! Your mother really did have a dark side, didn't she? We're almost out of time, but I do want to ask you about the true story of Cinderella. We were talking about that before the show and I found it fascinating.

**Robert:** (Laughing) Yes, that's one case where my mother didn't tell the full story. She thought the abbreviated version taught a better lesson than the unvarnished truth, and it's her short version that is usually told today. Everything up to the ball happened pretty much the way it did in the story my mother wrote. The fairy godmother assigned to Cinderella was new, though, and she didn't really think things through. Those glass slippers might have looked pretty on the shelf, but they hadn't even been beta tested. You don't have to be an experienced cobbler to know that glass slippers wouldn't be very comfortable. Among other things, they make your feet sweat. There's no place for the sweat to go, and being glass, everyone at the ball could see Cinderella's feet sloshing around in pools of sweat. Everyone but the Prince, that is. The fairy godmother did have the foresight to provide Cinderella with a low cut gown, so the Prince wasn't exactly looking at her feet. When the clock began striking midnight, though, she couldn't run in those slippers. That's why she left one behind. She careened across the ballroom like a drunken roller skater on a slip-n-slide. When she came to the palace steps she fell down and broke her ass. One slipper flew off, and she threw the other into the moat in disgust. She made it to her carriage and dove in just before the last stroke of the clock, but of course that's when the carriage turned back into a pumpkin. So, the Prince

wound up marrying one of her ugly stepsisters. It turned out to be a very happy marriage, though. They had a daughter who was even uglier than her mother, but she grew up to be a very competent queen who ruled over a vast empire for more than 75 years.

**Henny:** So was Cinderella crushed when the carriage turned back into a pumpkin?

**Robert:** Sadly, yes. To be more precise, she was squashed.

**Henny:** Well that's all the time we have today. Be sure to tune in next week when Christopher Robin will tell us the sad story of Eeyore's struggle with depression.