

## Hill, Elizabeth Starr 1925-

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HILL, Elizabeth Starr 1925-

*PERSONAL:* Born November 4, 1925, in Lynn Haven, FL; daughter of Raymond King (a science-fiction novelist) and Gabrielle (Wilson) Cummings; married Russell Gibson Hill (a chemical engineer), May 28, 1949 (died, 1999); children: Andrea van Waldron, Bradford Wray. *Ethnicity:* Caucasian. *Education:* Attended Finch Junior College, 1941-42; attended Columbia University, 1970-73. *Politics:* Independent. *Religion:* Episcopalian. *Hobbies and other interests:* Music, theatre, art.

*ADDRESSES:* *Home*—Langford Apartments, P.O. Box 940, Winter Park, FL 32790. *Agent*—Wendy Schmalz Agency, P.O. Box 831, Hudson, NY 12534.

*CAREER:* Freelance writer. Former actress in radio and summer-stock productions. Adult education teacher at Princeton Adult School. Painter, with work exhibited in metropolitan New York.

*MEMBER:* University Club of Winter Park.

*AWARDS, HONORS:* Notable Children's Book citation, American Library Association, 1967, for *Evan's Corner*; Pick-of-the-Lists citation, American Book Association, 1992, for *Broadway Chances*; award for outstanding achievement in children's books, *Parents' Guide to Children's Media*, and Parents' Choice gold Medal award, both 1999, both for *Bird Boy*; Parents' Guide to Children's Media award, for *Chang and the Bamboo Flute*.

## WRITINGS:

### FOR CHILDREN

*The Wonderful Visit to Miss Liberty*, illustrated by Paul Galdone, Holt (New York, NY), 1961.

*The Window Tulip*, illustrated by Hubert Williams, F. Warne (New York, NY), 1964.

*Evan's Corner*, illustrated by Nancy Grossman, Holt (New York, NY), 1967, revised edition illustrated by Sandra Speidel, Viking (New York, NY), 1990.

*Master Mike and the Miracle Maid*, Holt (New York, NY), 1967.

*Pardon My Fangs*, Holt (New York, NY), 1969, revised as *Fangs Aren't Everything*, illustrated by Larry Ross, Dutton (New York, NY), 1985.

*Bells: A Book to Begin On* (nonfiction), illustrated by Shelly Sacks, Holt (New York, NY), 1970.

*Ever-after Island*, Dutton (New York, NY), 1977.

*When Christmas Comes*, Penguin (New York, NY), 1989.

*The Street Dancers*, Viking (New York, NY), 1991.

*Broadway Chances* (sequel to *The Street Dancers*), Viking (New York, NY), 1992.

*The Banjo Player*, Viking (New York, NY), 1993.

*Curtain Going Up!* (sequel to *Broadway Chances*), Viking (New York, NY), 1995.

*Bird Boy*, illustrated by Lesley Liu, Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1999.

*Chang and the Bamboo Flute* (sequel to *Bird Boy*), illustrated by Lesley Liu, Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 2002.

Contributor to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Contributor of stories and articles to periodicals, including *New Yorker*, *Reader's Digest*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Seventeen*, *Woman's Day*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Collier's*, *Cricket*, *New World Writing*, *Faith Today*, and other magazines in the United States, Britain, and France.

**ADAPTATIONS:** *Evan's Corner* was adapted as a film and produced by Stephen Bosustow in 1969.

**WORK IN PROGRESS:** *Wildfire!* for Farrar, Straus.

**SIDELIGHTS:** Although she is best known as the author of the picture book *Evan's Corner*, Elizabeth Starr Hill has written books for young readers of a variety of reading levels. Including both fiction and nonfiction among her published works, Hill excels at creating believable characters who often grow in self-knowledge through their interaction with the natural world. "I find the natural world amazing, fascinating, endlessly absorbing—and people are as much a part of it as a tree or a chipmunk," the author once commented to *CA*. "There are stories in every country morning; and also in every city afternoon, and every frightened naptime. The important thing is to pay attention to life."

First published in 1967 and reissued with new illustrations in 1990, Hill's *Evan's Corner* focuses on an African-American boy who tries to find a quiet place in his family's noisy apartment. His mother gives him a subtle lesson in sharing after she allows him to claim a corner of the apartment as his own. Praising the story in *School Library Journal*, Luann Toth noted that Hill presents young readers with a "sensitive and thoughtful" protagonist and shows the value of "the support and encouragement of a loving family" in learning that things gain in value when they are shared with others.

Beginning readers are the intended audience of Hill's *Bird Boy*, which takes place in China and focuses on a young mute boy named Chang. Living on a houseboat, Chang has developed a special love for water birds, and when his father helps him raise one of the cormorant chicks through which the family makes their living, Chang gains in self-

confidence. In addition to introducing readers to Chang's family's unique way of life, Hill "effortlessly weaves in multiple themes of courage, responsibility and friendship," explained a *Publishers Weekly* contributor. Praising the story for inspiring young readers with disabilities, Lauren Peterson added in her *Booklist* review that *Bird Boy* imparts an important lesson: that "friendship and trust must be given only to those who earn it." Praising Hill's "excellent little novel," Elaine A. Bearden noted in her review for the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* that "readers will identify with Chang and his desire to do grownup things." Hill continues Chang's story in 2002's *Chang and the Bamboo Flute*.

Among Hill's novels for middle-grade readers is the three-book series that includes *The Street Dancers*, *Broadway Chances*, and *Curtain Going Up!* The series focuses on a girl who lives an unsettled life due to her parents' theatrical careers. In *The Street Dancers* readers meet Fitzi Wolper, who lives in New York but is home-schooled because of the moves required by her parents' acting stints. Because the family's fortunes fluctuate with their ability to land roles on Broadway, nothing seems normal to the increasingly self-conscious teen, and normal is what Fitzi wants. Citing *The Street Dancers* for its "good balance of realism and glamor," *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* reviewer Kathryn Pierson Jennings added that Hill's "characters are believable." Calling the novel a "charming" tale that "grows out of the author's own stage experience," a *Kirkus* contributor praised the work for presenting a realistic picture of life behind the theater curtain.

Fitzi's teen years continue to be explored in the two sequels to *The Street Dancers*. In *Broadway Chances* Fitzi's grandfather lands a small role in a Broadway musical and her parents are offered small roles as well. After she auditions for the child's lead and loses to an arch-rival, Fitzi nonetheless wins a dancer's role and helps to thwart a kidnaping between rehearsals. "Hill presents an enthralling look at a theatrical production," in the opinion of a *Kirkus* reviewer, and Jennings added in her *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* review that the author includes the requisite "good old Broadway happy ending." A love

interest enters the picture in the series conclusion, *Curtain Going Up!*, as Fitzi wins a dance solo in a Broadway show but loses her heart to Mark Hiller, the show's charismatic young lead.

Other novels Hill has written for middle-grade readers include *When Christmas Comes* and *The Banjo Player*. In *When Christmas Comes* a young girl named Callie attempts to come to terms with her parents' divorce, but is upset when the family breakup leaves her living in a trailer park with her father and his new wife. The fact that everyone is busy celebrating the approaching holiday season doesn't improve her mood, but when she and a friend find and care for an abandoned pup Callie finally begins to come to terms with the changes in her life. Praising the novel's characters, a *Kirkus* reviewer noted that the stepmother, Fran, "is both creative and patient with her new charge," and praised the novel's ending as "satisfyingly heartwarming." Citing the relationship between Callie and her father and new stepmother as "well drawn," *Booklist* contributor Kay Weisman noted that young readers would find *When Christmas Comes* "a satisfying read." A work of historical fiction that focuses on the Orphan Trains of the late 1800s, *The Banjo Player* also features a teen protagonist in young Jonathan. Moving to New Orleans, the teen becomes a street musician, and later an actor on a showboat. Praising Hill's protagonist as commendable, *School Library Journal* contributor Bruce Anne Shook called *The Banjo Player* "upbeat reading" that "provides plenty of colorful details about the late 1800s in New Orleans and vicinity."

Describing her writing process, Hill once commented to *CA*: "Story ideas are a combination of knowledge and imagination. I believe the use of our senses is as important to writing as the actual setting of pencil to paper. If we know—*really* know—how things look and sound and smell and feel, the daydreams that come to us will be rooted in life, recognizable to young readers.

"When I was a little girl, my mother told me, 'Learn to love nature. Then you'll always be happy.' It was good advice. Some of my happiest hours are spent in relative idleness, watching storms or butterflies or

the coming of a new season. The wonder of growth and change never diminishes, and I try to express some of that wonder in my writing."

## **BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:**

### **PERIODICALS**

*Booklist*, November 15, 1989, Kay Weisman, review of *When Christmas Comes*, p. 668; October 1, 1992, Kay Weisman, review of *Broadway Chances*, p. 326; January 15, 1995, Ilene Cooper, review of *Curtain Going Up!*, p. 928; April 15, 1999, Lauren Peterson, review of *Bird Boy*, p. 1528; October 15, 2002, GraceAnne A. DeCandido, review of *Chang and the Bamboo Flute*, p. 405.

*Books for Keeps*, May, 1991, review of *Evan's Corner* p. 29.

*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, July, 1991, Kathryn Pierson Jennings, review of *The Street Dancers*, pp. 264-265; June, 1992, K. Jennings, review of *Broadway Chances*, pp. 263-264; March, 1995, Deborah Stevenson, review of *Curtain Going Up!*, pp. 237-238; July, 1999, Elaine A. Bearden, review of *Bird Boy*, p. 389;

*Children's Book Review Service*, May, 1985, Jeanette Cohn, review of *Fangs Aren't Everything*, p. 110.

*Horn Book*, September-October, 1991, Ethel L. Heins, review of *Evan's Corner*, p. 618.

*Kirkus Reviews*, August 15, 1989, review of *When Christmas Comes*, p. 1246; May 15, 1991, review of *The Street Dancers*, p. 672; May 15, 1992, review of *Broadway Chances*, p. 671; July 1, 1993, review of *The Banjo Player*, p. 861; October 1, 2002, review of *Chang and the Bamboo Flute*, p. 1470.

*Publishers Weekly*, November 1, 1991, review of *When Christmas Comes*, p. 82; May 3, 1991, review of *The Street Dancers*, p. 73; May 18, 1992, review of *Broadway Chances*, p. 71; June 28, 1993, review

of *The Banjo Player*, p. 78; April 10, 1995, review of *Curtain Going Up!*, p. 63; March 29, 1999, review of *Bird Boy*, p. 105.

*School Library Journal*, May, 1985, review of *Fangs Aren't Everything*, p. 90; March, 1991, Luann Toth, review of *Evan's Corner*, p. 173; June, 1991, Tatiana Castleton, review of *The Street Dancers*, p. 106; May, 1992, Jennifer Kraar, review of *Broadway Chances*, p. 114; July, 1993, Bruce Anne Shook, review of *The Banjo Player*, p. 85.