

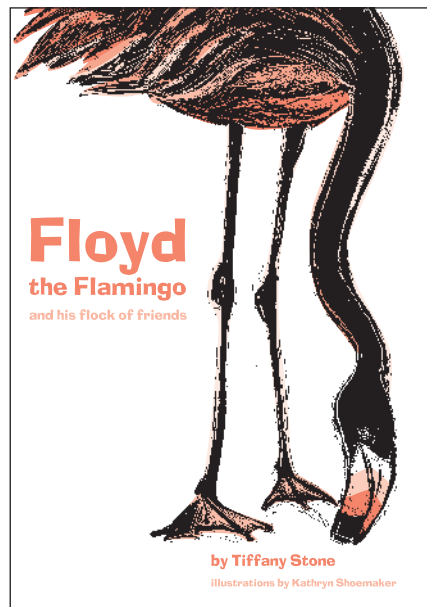
FOR KIDS
BERNIE GOEDHART

Following in Dennis Lee's footsteps

Floyd the Flamingo
and his Flock of
Friends

By Tiffany Stone
Illustrated by Kathryn
Shoemaker
Tradewind Books,
64 pages, \$9.95

Thirty years ago, Dennis Lee published his now-classic book of children's poetry, *Alligator Pie*. It was the first of a series that has earned him the unofficial title of Canadian poet laureate for the preschool crowd. But it wasn't the first of its kind. That honour goes to the long-out-of-print *Wiggle to the Laundromat*, published four years earlier - in 1970 - by a small house in small numbers. *Wiggle to the Laundromat* resulted when Canadian artist Charles Pachter plucked various poems from a manuscript Lee had been working on (he's a poet for adults as well as kids). Pachter used his own lithographs, drawings and collage work to illustrate it, creating an oversize children's book that for many years later could only be found in libraries. Those who were



lucky enough to encounter it, however, came away with verse that took root in the memory bank and could be called up again decades later. Just as *Alligator Pie*, one of the poems in that earlier volume, became part of the chant of childhood in Canada. So what does all that have to do with this title? I'm not sure, except that the sight of *Floyd the Flamingo* - albeit a small paperback volume and not an oversized hardcover book - reminded me of *Wiggle to the Laundromat*. The black-and-white illustrations by Kathryn Shoemaker, with their woodcut-scratchboard look, reminded me of the images in *Wiggle* - although Shoemaker's are considerably more kid-friendly than Pachter's were. And the rhymes offered here by Tiffany Stone reminded me of the ones offered 34 years ago by Dennis Lee. Stone's are every bit as nonsensical and they, too, have a lively rhythm. Take this one, for example:

*What flavour is a jellyfish?
Strawberry? Grape? Or peach?
Or does it taste like ocean
with just a hint of beach?
If you spread some on a sandwich,
will the sand get in your teeth?
And how would peanut butter taste
with jellyfish underneath?*

Or how about the ode to the crab apple, which begins:

*"It's small. / It's sour. / It's crude. /
It's not a happy apple. /
It's got crabby appletude."*

But my favourite is the one toward the end of the book - a poem perfect for bedtime:

*I eat the stars like candy.
They tingle and they fizz.
And when my belly's finally full,
I'm amazed how dark it is.*

It's not easy to follow in Lee's footsteps. He's honed his craft for decades now. His verses sing and stick with the listener; they're rich in images that talented illustrators have been more than happy to put on paper. But Stone and Shoemaker are no slouches either. This is the author's first book of nonsense verse, but Shoemaker has a variety of children's books to her credit. With *Wiggle to the Laundromat*, Dennis Lee was new to children's verse. So who knows? Thirty-four years from now, *Floyd the Flamingo* might prove to have been another calling card into Canadian children's lit. Ages 4 to 10.