

**BOOK REVIEW** *Fearless Girls: Wise Women and Beloved Sisters*,  
1998, Kathleen Ragan, Bantam Books, Australia & W.W. Norton &  
Co, USA & UK

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**BOOK REVIEW** by Joan Garvan, *Fearless Girls: Wise Women and Beloved Sisters*, 1998, Kathleen Ragan, Bantam Books, Australia, W.W. Norton & Co, USA and UK

*Fearless Girls* was written by an anthropologist Kathleen Ragan. She became fed up with reading stories to her daughters that featured male characters and decided to embark on her own journey of discovery. Ragan set out to sift through folk tales from around the world looking for the stories that featured girls or women; female characters. After going through over 30,000 stories she found approximately ten per cent of them were just what she was after. *Fearless Girls* is an anthology of some of these stories. A number of the stories I've read, so far, are about daughters or mothers.

The book is written for adults and many of the stories would be inappropriate for children. Ragan has drafted a children's picture version of the stories which, up till now, has been unable to be published.

The book is set out in regions: Europe; North & South America (Native Americans & New World Newcomers); Asia; the Pacific; Sub-Saharan Africa; North Africa & the Middle East and within the regions the countries or peoples of origin are identified.

In all, there are 103 stories and I have read at least a couple from each region. In a word, I think the stories are wonderful. The subject of the story, the setting and the characters are as diverse as their origins but, for me, the fact that in most, if not all, of the stories, the protagonist is female is their value. Ragan states in the introduction that a percentage of girls identify with the protagonist in a story, be they female or male. Unfortunately, I am not one of them. I need the character to be female. In moving through these stories I found I was running, hiding, scheming and flying and I loved the experience.

One of my favourite stories, so far, (and of course this would change with the reader) is Davit, from Georgia. This story was about a girl that had a sick brother and the family had tried everything but he was getting worse. The girl, Svetlana, set out in a journey to "ask the sun, himself, what would cure her brother. On her feet, she put a pair of shoes made of stone. 'Until these wear out', she swore, I will not give up my journey to the sun". Along the way she met various animals and people in trouble and said if she found something useful she would also bring that back. Eventually she met a stag on the edge of a forest with antlers so big that it couldn't enter and

drink at the water hole. She decided to climb the antlers and found they took her up into the clouds and eventually to a house where the sun lived. In her time at the house she found out what she needed to solve the problems and cure her brother which she then took back with her. To me the imagery was wonderful and the prospect of climbing through the clouds to the house of the sun enthralling. I hope Ragan soon finds a publisher for the children's version so I can share these stories with my kids!