

About Jackets

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I thought the cover was breathtakingly beautiful, and found myself wondering if the child on it is Grey or Rhys. I found the name of the woman who designed the cover, but no photo info.

This is a quote from an e-mail I received yesterday, referring to the jacket on the book GOSSAMER, and referring also to my two smallest grandsons, whose names are Grey and Rhys.

I have often done the photographs for my own book jackets: NUMBER THE STARS, THE GIVER, GATHERING BLUE, and MESSENGER. So it makes sense for a reader to wonder if the lovely profile and hands on GOSSAMER are those of my own grandchild.

But no. I was mystified, thinking about a jacket for this book, and wondering how it might look. The most important character, after all, is translucent. But fortunately the book designer, Kathy Black at Houghton Mifflin, had a vision of it that was perfect. Not just the exquisite translucence of the child, but the posture, with its sense of wonder: it's all perfect.

Getting a jacket right is quite a feat.

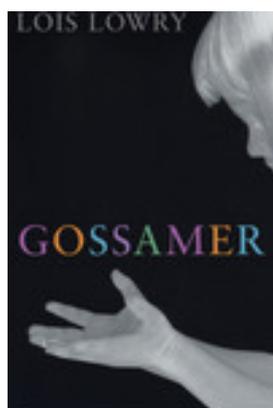
You may recall that in MESSENGER, the boy Matty has a puppy who is an important part of the book, and which accompanies him on a long and very difficult journey, often carried in his jacket.

The real boy, Jesse, who was a model for me when I was doing photos for that jacket, brought a puppy with him at my request. I did a number of shots that included the dog – I'll post one here – but it was a large puppy, and unwieldy, instead of the little one called Frolic who appears in the book. So although I love the photo that I'll show you here, it wouldn't work as a book jacket. If a reader starts thinking, "That dog's too big," or "How could he carry such a large puppy?" – then the reader isn't paying attention to the story.

So you hope for something arresting, and attractive, but not overly thought-provoking or worry-producing.

(I also love the jacket of "The Silent Boy" – it's a haunting photograph taken by my great aunt in 1911. Maybe, come to think of it, I'll talk a little more about that book sometime soon, because I've recently had an e-mail asking me about the marriage of story to photos in that book; the asker referred to the chicken-and-eggedness of it).

But now I must go pack. Tomorrow: Knoxville, Tennessee.



Tags: Untagged