

## **Fearless Girls, Wise Women and Beloved Sisters**

Kathleen Ragan, ed.  
New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 1998

### **Reviewed by Joan Garvan**

*Fearless Girls* is written by anthropologist Kathleen Ragan. She grew tired of reading stories to her daughters that only featured male characters and decided to embark on her own journey of discovery. Ragan set out to sift through folktales from around the world, looking for the stories that featured girls or women. After going through over 30,000 stories she found that approximately ten per cent of them were just what she was after. *Fearless Girls* is an anthology of some of these stories.

The book is written for adults and many of the stories would be inappropriate for children. Ragan has drafted a children's picture book version of the stories for which, to date, she has yet to find a publisher.

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

In all, there are 103 stories and their subjects, settings, and 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 greatest value. Ragan states in the introduction that many girls identify with the protagonist in a story, be it female or male. Unfortunately, I am not one of them. I need the protagonist to be female. In moving through these stories I found I was running, hiding, scheming, flying, and I loved the experience.

One of my favourite stories is "Davit" from Georgia. This story is about a girl who has a sick brother and her family has tried everything but he is getting worse. The girl, Svetlana, set out on 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 meets various animals and people in trouble and says if she finds something useful she will also bring that back. Eventually she meets a stag on the edge of a forest with antlers so large that it cannot drink from the water hole. She decides to climb the antlers, finds they took her up into the clouds and eventually to a house where the sun lives. During her time at the house, she finds out what she needs to solve her problems and cure her brother which she then takes back with her. The imagery is 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!