

600,000 pennies for 3 elephants

Before my first grade-school field trip to Boston, designed by my teachers to give the class direct experience to some of the history of our United States Navy, my aunt told me about joining her classmates in 1927 to collect pennies to pay for the refurbishment of the very warship I was going to visit — the USS Constitution.

Within that first year, American children collected \$148,000, and the ship's restoration plans began. I was enthralled with her story, and eventually I discovered that this is a part of history many people know about — due to both family memories and notations in history books. Too bad, I thought, that was the only time kids did something that inspiring. Then I was given a wonderfully illustrated copy of "Pennies for Elephants" written and illustrated by Lita Judge, and I discovered another story, based on a similar true event, also in Boston and pre-dating the penny collection for our oldest commissioned warship by 13 years.

In 1914, thousands of children worked together to

earn \$6,000 to buy the first elephants for the Franklin Park Zoo. This was a piece of history I had never heard of, and I surmise that surely this must have been one of the sparks that prompted the USS Constitution penny collection.

THE AVID READER



Elaine Holden

Judge, a resident of Peterborough, is best known for her beautiful book "One Thousand Tracings: Healing the Wounds of World War II," published in 2007. That moving and tender book gave us our first real glimpse into how

Judge not only structures her research but also how she can show her readers that the little things both children as well as adults do can make all the difference in the world. Her current story takes Judge further back in time but still shows her continuing to be motivated from little known pieces of our history and weave a remarkably inspiring and exciting story.

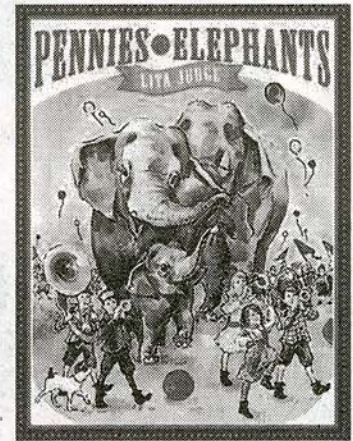
The two main characters, a brother and sister, not only collect pennies for the elephants, but also get to know them. The story, told through the eyes of these two siblings, tell about these three gentle elephants offered to

the city of Boston's Franklin Park Zoo.

The city politicians did not wish to pay for those retiring pachyderms, and children of New England decide to take matters into their own hands by getting the money themselves. Thus, Judge has given new life to an otherwise unknown event. At the time elephant fever was whipped up by the Boston Post, a publication that never stinted in its efforts to sell newspapers, listing every child who donated even one penny. The Post maintained suspense, while selling even more papers, with notations of other institutions and cities around the country making similar monetary offers in attempts to out-bid the New England children for those charming elephants.

1914 was a time when many immigrant waves washed on New England shores, and these newcomers from other cultures entered a very class-conscious city when they arrived in Boston. Those lines of demarcation between the classes stratified society and true separation among social ranks was the norm. This story really tells of a break in that stratification. Children of all social strata united for this common cause, and in so doing found a bridge across a great social divide. For that alone, the book is well worth the read. But far beyond that, it is a delightful way to introduce a child to history. Judge's illustrations are appealing to all ages, and the little whimsical touches in both the pictures and the text make this a book that children and adults will go back to many times.

Judge is thorough, very detailed, and her story is complete in itself. At one point in the story a Stude-



"Pennies for Elephants" was written and illustrated by Lita Judge of Peterborough. Judge also wrote "One Thousand Tracings: Healing the Wounds of World War II."

baker was mentioned and I wondered how modern children would ever figure out that reference. I didn't have to worry. A few pages further I found a charming illustration of one. These, and other clever techniques, serve to enlighten while entertaining. I would recommend this book to both parents and teachers who are looking for ways to bring history alive, give summer readers a chance to investigate past events close to home, and welcome some much needed nostalgia about times when a penny was worth a lot, and children, who had both heart and hope in abundance, drew together and made history happen.

Elaine Holden of Peterborough is a nationally recognized expert in the diagnosis and treatment of dyslexia. She is the director of The Reading Foundation and Senior Lecturer at Rivier College Graduate School of Education. She wants everyone reading.