

FEATURE

Local authors offer more than entertainment for children

By **Melissa Wolfe**

Politicians are not the only newsmakers trying to make a change these days in people's lives. Two Queen Anne authors are affecting the genre of children's literature with books emphasizing a child's ability to make a difference.

Carole Lexa Shaefer and Michele Lucien each published their first children's book this year. The books are designed to appeal more specifically to ages four to seven years, but, Shaefer said, "a precocious three-year-old and a childish adult" would enjoy her literature as well.

Shaefer's two completed works, *In the Children's Garden* and *Under the Midsummer Sky*, were published earlier this year. Her third one, entitled *The Squiggle*, is not yet finished but is already planned for publication.

Sharing the idea of "giving children the sense they have power and control," the stories describe incidents in various culture settings where a person can help make a difference in other people's lives.

In the Children's Garden offers an encouragement to the reader to create his or her own garden and *Under the Midsummer Sky* is a story of a Swedish couple celebrating a holiday by secretly setting up festivities for the other to enjoy.

By reading the garden story, "you're inviting the children to participate," Shaefer said. And it encourages individualism because whether it's a garden or something else, "nobody else would ever quite make it come out the same."

Michele Lucien also encourages children's participation in her book, *My World*, by having them write about themselves. Two



Carole Lexa Shaefer

animated figures lead the readers through various subjects, such as birthdays and family. Then, the readers are given the next page to write about their own birthdays and families.

"The bottom line is self-esteem," Lucien said. "It's realizing what you are and want to be is important. With that foundation, you can go further."

The book was inspired by Lucien's seven-year-old niece and developed into a school-curriculum form after Lucien consulted with numerous parents and educators about it.

Gerald Forester, a University of Washing-



Michele Lucien

ton professor of education, was one of those who helped Lucien.

"There are many findings to support the belief that increased self-esteem enables children to live closer to their potential," Forester said. "More of these self-esteem-builder activities need to be used by parents."

"I'd really like to see it used in the school system," Lucien said.

Eliminating race and gender issues was one aspect of the book Lucien included to ensure it would appeal to any child. In addition, Lucien's next book will focus on other people's worlds to encourage discovering

other cultures.

Lucien thinks other authors also are writing more about other cultures.

Shaefer, who has included elements of the Swedish and Chinese cultures in her books, agreed.

"You want to develop characters so you're not creating any stereotype," Shaefer said. "You do everything you can to avoid bias in children's literature."

Shaefer has been writing for 10 years and has lived on Queen Anne since 1971.

"I love living on Queen Anne and working on Queen Anne," Shaefer said. "I hope to do it until I'm at least 100 years old."

Lucien has lived on Queen Anne for three years and plans to keep writing, too.

"It means more to me than anything that I can make a difference," Lucien said.

Lucien plans to help more children with her book at a Sept. 17 appearance at Seattle Public Library's Magnolia branch. A hands-on activity is planned, which will feature children being able to complete and share their responses to her book.

"It's something they can keep for the rest of their lives," Lucien said.

Shaefer also has considered the potential impact her literature could have on readers.

"If they have a nice experience with me," Shaefer said, "this builds their relationship with books."

Now, Shaefer plans to keep writing for the young.

"You have to be lyrical like a poet and precise like a journalist," Shaefer said. "I'm in love with it."

Melissa Wolfe of Interbay is a communications student at the University of Washington.