



FOREWORD

By John Anthony West *

Independent Egyptologist, Lecturer, Author of the *Traveler's Key to Ancient Egypt*, and Creator of the Emmy Award-winning Documentary, *Mystery of the Sphinx*.

There is a unique and universal magic to ancient Egypt. Something about it resonates with the young as well as the mature, and that fascination cuts across all national and cultural boundaries. The Russians, the Chinese, the Japanese, Hispanics, Africans, as well as the more predictable Europeans, British and Americans flock to Egypt to revel in the fabulous art and architecture. Most, if asked, would be hard put to say exactly why. Commonly, people on my intensive study tours of Egypt tell me that this trip fulfills the dream of a lifetime, and that dream is often provoked at seven years or so, when the first grade school version of ancient history is presented to them. Though academic Egyptology does its best to make this amazing civilization sound as boring and superstition-ridden as it possibly can, the kids are not taken in. The seeds of the dream are sown at some subliminal level, grow and flourish even without deriving any apparent sustenance from ongoing education, and come to fruition in later years.

And the kids are right. The magic and mystery of Egypt are real and profound, and that boring, superstition-ridden Egypt promoted by the academics is not so much wrong as childish in its own right.

Shelli Wright Johnson

Still it is rare to find a book intended for children that actually captures that real magic and mystery. *The Story of Bes* is one of those rare books.

Focused on the odd, but universally captivating, little dwarf god with his protruding tongue, often playing his harp and shown attending the birth of the king or queen (*the Divine Child*), Shelli Wright Johnson successfully brings this amazing civilization to life. In telling the story of young Andy, entranced in his grandma's attic, she breathes sense into the complex Osiris/Isis/Horus myth (itself resonating down through the ages in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and resurfacing again four hundred years later in Disney's animated tale, *The Lion King*) in a way that communicates directly to its intended audience: children.

My young son Zeke is, unlike his Dad, no reader or potential scholar as far as I can tell. To get him to read anything as all usually requires endless persuasion, extensive cajoling and sometimes, when all else fails, threats. Yet at age ten, serving as an initially unwilling guinea pig for an earlier draft of *The Story of Bes*, he actually returned over and over again to the book on his own, requiring no threats, cajoling, even persuasion, until he'd finished it. This does not happen often!

Asked to provide a considered and detailed oral critique of the book, Zeke thought at some length, marshaled all of his critical faculties, and pronounced it, "Cool!" Well, he probably won't grow up to be a literary critic either. Still, there it is, and I am happy to pass on that considered evaluation: *The Story of Bes* is . . . well, Cool!

*Author's note: John prepared this Foreword years ago for the First Edition of *The Story of Bes*. Young Zeke has long since become a card-carrying adult who continues to make his father proud.