

Q & A with the Author

What inspired you to start writing children's books?

I started reading to my kids from Day 1. When they're that age, you can read Frederick Forsythe, Clive Barker, stereo instructions, whatever. They're paying attention to pitch and tone, not content. At some point, they grow up and develop their own tastes. Not always good ones. They ask for the same book 37 nights in a row. Or they pick something with a nails-on-a-chalkboard awful rhyming scheme. ("Gobbling" does not rhyme with "goblin," in case there was any question.) Or they pick something that's plain outdated and stale. Three Little Pigs doesn't suddenly become riveting prose by substituting 'mice', or 'fish', or 'earthworms' for pigs. So I added a stipulation to certain books, the worst offenders. "If you want the story, word for word like it is on the page, you've got to talk to Mom. She has a higher pain threshold. If I'm doing bedtime, I get to make up my own story to go with the pictures." Goodbye, gobbling goblin. Goodbye, damsels in distress. Goodbye, Three Billy Ghosts Gruff. I've got something better in mind. And often, I'd put the book aside so I could spin whatever tale I wanted without being limited by the illustrations. Eventually, I started writing down the ones that got the best responses. The impulse to share them with other kids, beyond my own, followed. Publishing was the natural next step after that.

How did you get the idea for Claire vs The Flying Saucers?

I've always been a big B-movie fan. Campy alien invasion flicks are no exception. The ridiculous creatures, cheesy special effects, over-the-top melodrama. Fun stuff. Anyway, my wife was scrolling through music one day, and a line from OK Go's 'Invincible' just stuck in my head:

*When they finally come to destroy the Earth,
They'll have to go through you first.
I bet they won't be expecting that.*

I'd been brainstorming ideas for new children's book, and I thought, there are a million stories out there where the main character's challenge is learning manners, or sharing, or thankfulness. Why does the challenge have to be emotional? An intangible challenge in a visual medium. Watching someone split a cookie is not the most dynamic visual. Now, grouchy Martians with a craving for world domination and root beer? Like I said, fun stuff. As readers, we've seen the book about the first day of school anxiety. We've seen the book about appreciating friendship. Where are all the ridiculous, cheesy, over-the-top stories? It'd be a refreshing change of pace.

Claire isn't your typical eight-year-old. Where did she come from?

I've noticed lots of kids' books start with a character who's defined by shyness or insecurity. Typically, the story follows them through everyday challenges they have to work through until they learn to believe in themselves. But what if you started with a character defined by unrelenting, unwavering self-confidence? Flip the script. You could drop them in the most outrageous situations, and they'd plow full speed ahead. It grants you license to go in so many

interesting directions. As a random example, throwing an interplanetary alien invasion in front of a stubborn eight-year-old. Anyone with parenting experience is going to react with, "That's a bit silly." Followed by, "You know, that could go either way. Alright, I'm listening."