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Don M. Winn on the IRDA Winning "The Knighting of Sir Kaye"



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What is the name of the book and when was it published?

The name of the book is "The Knighting of Sir Kaye" and it is the first book in a series called "Sir Kaye, the Boy Knight". It was published in October 2012.

What's the book's first line?

Long ago, in the days of the knights, good King Frederic of Knox passed away after a grievous illness that lasted for many years.

What's the book about? Give us the "pitch".

"The Knighting of Sir Kaye" is about young Kaye Balfour and his best friend Reggie during the Middle Ages in the fictional country of Knox. Together they have adventures, deal with bullies large and small, and try to help the inexperienced young queen start getting her damaged kingdom back on its feet. Along the way, Kaye is unexpectedly knighted and faces the difficulties of not only learning how to be a good knight, but learning how to be a good knight at only twelve years old.

What inspired you to write the book? A particular person? An event?

It was inspired by a creative writing exercise I wrote to entertain myself several years ago. The exercise was to write a story containing all the words in my dictionary that began with a silent letter K. Naturally, I wrote about a knight, and I named him K to go with the story's theme. Then that little story got stuck in my files and I forgot about it.

Several years later, I had started publishing my children's picture books and I was looking through my files for some inspiration for a new one when I stumbled across that old writing exercise. I showed it to one of my associates and asked if she thought it would make a good picture book. She actually suggested that I make the knight a child instead of an adult and that the story would work better as a chapter book. So I saw right away that there was a lot of potential there I had never thought about and that's how the book began.

What's the most distinctive thing about the main character? Who-real or fictional-would you say the character reminds you of?

Kaye knows how to knit. That is probably the most distinctive thing about him that a young reader would recognize. Knitting was an uncommon skill during the early parts of the Middle Ages and knitted items were luxury items. Also in medieval Europe, knitting was initially a male-dominated industry. I thought it would be interesting for Kaye to have a little part in that.

In my opinion, the most distinctive thing about Kaye is his idealism. He wants so badly to be a knight/hero like his absent father when he grows up that it's practically all he can think about. In this book, he is knighted much earlier in his life than he expected, and I think it will be interesting to see how the stories will unfold as he struggles with trying to find a balance between his high ideals and reality. Fortunately, Kaye has a strong sense of practicality and a good friend (Reggie the narrator) who balances him out, so he should manage fairly well most of the time.

Of the two main characters, I see a lot of myself in Kaye's friend Reggie. He's dyslexic, like me, although he doesn't know it since it's the Middle Ages and no one really knew anything about it. He's very interested in individual people and what makes them work and he likes things to always be happening around him. So Kaye really reminds me of exactly the type of person I was always drawn to when I made friends at that age. He's calm, cool, collected, competent, and good at almost everything he tries to do. Definitely someone to be relied on in a tight place.

What's the main reason someone should really read this book?

Basically, it's a lot of fun. It's about adventure and friendship. Although it's intended for kids close to the 3rd grade level – independent readers, who are proud to be reading chapter books on their own, it's also a great book for parents to read aloud to kids of any age, which I highly recommend.

I've had many comments from parents who let me know that their son or daughter loved the book and finished it on their own in just a few days. It seems to appeal especially to reluctant readers, and I love to hear that. I know very well what it's like to struggle with reading as a child, and I wanted to keep the story fairly fast-paced and fairly short, so that kids could enjoy the story and also enjoy that feeling of accomplishment that comes from finishing a story sooner rather than later.

A few parents have mentioned that they really enjoyed that the boys in the book are respectful to adults and that it's something they consider wholesome reading for their kids. I guess I can see where that would come from. I was a very reluctant reader when I was a kid, but the books I did like were The Hardy Boys and even The Boxcar Children and I'm sure a lot of that flavor has crept into my work. I've always liked hard-working heroes who have to rely on their wits to solve their problems while maintaining positive relationships with others.



Geragotelis



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