Bob Barner and YOU

Bob Barner

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Bob Barner and YOU
Recent titles in
The Author and YOU Series
Sharron McElmeel, Series Editor

Gerald McDermott and YOU
Jon C. Stott, Foreword and Illustrations by Gerald McDermott

Alma Flor Ada and YOU, Volume I
Alma Flor Ada

Jim Aylesworth and YOU
Jim Aylesworth and Jennifer K. Rotole

Toni Buzzeo and YOU
Toni Buzzeo

Jacqueline Briggs Martin and YOU
Jacqueline Briggs Martin with Sharron L. McElmeel
Bob Barner and YOU

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The Author and YOU

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Westport, Connecticut • London
SPECIAL THANKS

I would like to thank all of these people who in the past and present have taken a helpful interest in my career: Catherine Barner, Al Beck, John and Kate Briggs, Al Capp, Mary Cash, Doug Duchin, Martin Dunn, Libby Ford, Sara Gillingham, Regina Griffin, Guy’s Lunch crowd, Bob Hale, Jack Jensen, Trina Schart Hyman, Morris Kirchoff, Mr. Krabill, Valerie Lewis, James Marshall, Emilie McLeod, Mary Meehan, Mom and Dad, Victoria Rock, Joan Stevenson, Liza Voges, Andy Warhol, and Paul Szep.

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Series Foreword

Have you ever wanted to sit down and talk with the author of a beloved story? Have you ever wanted to find out more? Good authors are like good friends. They touch our hearts and minds. They make us wonder, and want to learn.

When young readers become engaged with story, they invariably ask questions.

- Why is Gerald McDermott so fascinated with myths and legends? How did he locate and choose which stories he wished to retell? Are the images in his books faithful to the culture they represent?
- Did Alma Flor Ada know the people that we meet in her stories? Why does she write in Spanish and English?
- Can Toni Buzzeo tell us how much of The Sea Chest is legend and what part is fact? What character does she like best: the Dawdle Ducking, Papa Loon? How does she get her ideas?
- How long does it take Jim Aylesworth to write and retell his stories? Did he always know that he wanted to be a writer and poet?
- How does Jacqueline Briggs Martin find the inspiration for her stories? How does she research the facts for her stories?

As teachers and librarians, we know that the moment children begin asking questions; we are presented with a wonderful opportunity. In response, we may hold discussions or create learning activities. Yet, answers to some questions are hard to come by. After all, our students and we cannot just sit down and talk with the authors we love and admire. But, wouldn’t it be great if we could?

Libraries Unlimited has developed The Author and YOU series to give you the next best thing to a real life visit with your favorite children’s authors and illustrators. In these books, you’ll hear from authors and illustrators as they reflect on their work and explain to YOU, the reader, what they really had in mind. You’ll find answers to some of the questions you and your students might ask, and to some you never thought to ask.

Just as each author or illustrator is a unique individual, so will his or her conversation with YOU be unique and individual. There is no formula, no pre-designed structure. We’ve simply asked each author or illustrator to discuss the things they think are important or interesting about themselves and their books—and to share their comments with YOU.
Some authors will provide actual ideas and plans for you to use in sharing books with young readers. Others will share ideas that will help you generate your own ideas and connections to their work. In some cases the author writes the book in collaboration with another. In others, it is a private reflection; but in all cases you’ll discover some fascinating information, and come away with valuable insights.

Previously this series has featured some notable authors and illustrators: Gerald McDermott, Alma Flor Ada, Toni Buzzeo, Jim Aylesworth, and Jacqueline Briggs Martin. This current addition to the series is authored by Bob Barner, an author and illustrator who creates his stories with words and pictures. Barner uses rhymes and rhythms to entice readers into his books—and then keeps readers coming back again and again to revel in the brilliantly executed illustrations. We are excited to present Bob Barner’s perspective on his writing and art.

It is our hope that by giving you these special messages from authors and illustrators, The Author and YOU series will increase your joy and understanding of literature—and in turn, will help YOU motivate young readers, surround them with literacy and literacy activities, and share the joy of understanding.

Sharon Coatney

Sharron McElmeel
GROWING UP WITH ART

Art was always like a friend to me. As an only child there were many times when I was soothed, encouraged, entertained, and comforted when I was making art. Many of the members of my extended family have both artistic and musical talents. I had two uncles who could draw very well, and several people in the family are self-taught amateur musicians. The only other writer in the family was my maternal grandmother, Francis Koehller. She wrote the “what’s new and who’s visiting whom” column for the Tuckerman Record newspaper in Tuckerman, Arkansas, for many years in the 1950s and 1960s. She also played the pump organ at church on Sundays and at her home. I
always looked forward to visiting her for a few days in the summer and playing the antique pump organ.

Most of the picture books I had when I was growing up were Little Golden Books—not books from the library, but rather from the supermarket. They were sold in wire racks at the end of the cereal aisle. My mother would bribe me by saying that she would let me choose a book if I behaved while we did the shopping. During our shopping trips I chose *The Three Little Pigs, Jack and the Beanstalk*, many books beautifully illustrated by the wonderful illustrator Gustaf Tenggren, and lots of nonfiction books, my favorites. Dinosaurs, sharks, farm animals, dogs, cars, classic fairy tales, and outer space were popular themes. My taste for nonfiction began at an early age.

When I wasn’t reading or drawing, I was involved in normal childhood activities.

Although I loved drawing, I don’t think I excelled as an artist in my first years at elementary school. I had to go through the process of overcoming my intimidation by materials and discovering my personal abilities. I went through all of the phases young artists seem to pass through—conquering a new technique, learning to draw realistically, applying color, and making a good design or composition. When I was in the third grade, another interest blossomed. I started playing the acoustic guitar—or trying to play—when I was...
about eight years old. My father always played the guitar at home on the weekends or in the evenings. When my hands finally got big enough to fit the fingerboard I started plucking out a few simple tunes myself. I became obsessed with guitar music and practiced whenever I wasn’t studying, drawing, or outside playing sports. I also watched all of the guitarists I could find on the television shows to see how the professionals played their music. I remember looking through the TV Guide on Sundays and marking the performers I wanted to see during the next week.

I saw Chuck Berry on the Steve Allen Show and Andres Segovia on Ed Sullivan. It was a lot of fun. We had a piano and a violin in the house that I spent some time with, but the guitar was my instrument of choice. My appreciation of art and music was in full bloom by the time I was eight years old. I practiced the guitar on my own at home, but I continued to take as many art courses as I could at school.

I finally began to enjoy drawing even more in high school, when I had lots of fun drawing just about anything in a realistic manner as the result of all of my practice. During those years I felt a sense of satisfaction every time I finished a still life or portrait that looked just like the model. I spent most of my time that wasn’t taken up with school or sports practicing the guitar or working on art projects. Then another door opened when a new art teacher arrived at school.