



PEOPLE

Old King Stinky Toes

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Whitefish Pilot

Eleven-year-old Baxter Graham's first book stinks.

The smell doesn't come from Baxter's writing, or his former fourth grade teacher, James Martin's illustrations, but from the main character.

The main character in Baxter's book has a foot odor problem so bad that everyone calls him Old King Stinky Toes, which is also the name of the book.

That smell has brought a book into being and taught a lesson in self-publishing and the business of books that no classroom could create.

Baxter came up with this book in 2000, when his father, Bob Graham, gave him the start to a story as part of a creative game.

"Old King Stinky Toes was a very stinky man..." was the prompt, and from there, Baxter developed the story, eventually dictating it to his father, who typed it into their computer.

The two eventually forgot about the story, until last year when Bob went through files on an old computer he was replacing. He came across the story then and said to himself "This is a really good story." He discussed it with Baxter, and the two of them decided they would

make it into a book.

They recruited Martin as illustrator, decided to home school Baxter for the year, and began work a little over six months ago, turning the story into a lesson into the world of publishing, marketing and the business of books.

Day-to-day work consisted of Baxter rewriting the story into more lyrical prose, Martin illustrating key scenes from the story, and Bob laying out the pages on his computer.

They found work on the 32-page book surprisingly easy, only taking four months to complete. At that point, they decided to self-publish, rather than look for a publisher to pick up their book. Little did they know the work had just begun.

"Waiting around for someone to pick up your book is like watching paint dry," Bob said.

In the competitive world of children's books, getting noticed by the big publishing houses is about as easy as standing out in a crowd. Smaller publishing houses are able to capitalize on this chasm and the niche of self-published books is slowly gaining respect as a real life way to bring sales and attention to a book.

The other advantage to self publishing was that they were

able to have complete creative control over the project.

Otherwise, according to Bob, "We would have had absolutely zero input."

Bob paid for 5,000 books to be printed for the first run. Using their savvy business sense they have learned lately, the Baxters demurred on the details of how many books they have sold. They would reveal that since receiving the books, the trio has continued to work hard to market it.

Baxter has already done several book readings, including one at Muldown Elementary, and another at The Saddest Pleasure bookstore inside of Montana Coffee Traders.

They have future plans to appear on the Montana Today Show in Missoula, and then do a series of book signings around the city. After that, they're talking about doing what Baxter called a "field trip" to Spokane, Seattle, and Portland.

"It's kind of fun," Baxter said of the readings. "It's fun being the author and saying 'this is my book.'"

He said that after his readings he gets more comments than questions from the audience. Usually from other children telling him that they like the book and illustrations. He said a



Laura Forner / Sacred Image for the Pilot

Child author Baxter Graham, center, displays his book, "Old King Stinky Toes," which he developed with the help of his father, Bob Graham, left, and teacher and illustrator James Martin, right.

lot of his readers like trying to find his dog, Colby, and rat, Cheese Cake, whose drawings are stashed throughout the illustrations.

Baxter said he always likes to tell his audience that they too are capable of publishing a book. He warns other children not to let their artistic creations become "refrigerator ornaments," but to try and do something more with them.

"There are a lot of creative kids out there," he said. "Some

of them probably have better technique than me, but they just don't have an outlet. Any kid could do this."

Baxter has already started working on his next book, "Bawk," a series of cartoons he has drawn that illustrate the life of his pet rooster, Bawk. He hopes to finish that book within the next few months.

Bob said he will continue to help Baxter with his work, as long as Baxter continues to enjoy it.

"We did this mostly for fun," Bob said, although he does hope to at least break even from book sales.

Old King Stinky Toes is on sale at The Saddest Pleasure, Book Works, Borders and the Imagination Station in Whitefish and Kalispell. Baxter will be doing another book signing on May 14 in at the Kalispell Imagination Station.

To learn more about Baxter and his work, visit www.drumstickmedia.com