

Author Rob Skead: on collaborating

by Chazda Albright -

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Author Rob Skead writes notes on a yellow pad of paper just anywhere he can, but once he's tucked into his writing nook at home, the rest of the world falls away and all his attentions and imagination give over to the story he's creating.

[In the first part of this interview, Skead discusses what it was like working with his editors and how finding the right publisher is like finding the right spouse. To read all about that, [Go Here](#).]

In this 2nd part of the interview, Rob Skead talks about the challenges of writing historical (wartime) fiction *for kids* and what it's like to co-author with his dad.

He likes vegetarian pizza, herbal green teas and the color blue - just because it makes him happy. Author Rob Skead also loves to travel. His favorite place is Interlaken, Switzerland, for its beauty. Like so many writers, Rob's story ideas sometimes come from travel experiences. He says, "and I did get a story idea there, but that is one I've yet to write. It would work best as a screenplay."

His favorite time period? The American Revolution. So it's no surprise that he's been writing about that with his dad for an exciting series of adventure books for kids.

"I've spent so much time there in my imagination and I keep going back there," Skead says. "Even yesterday when I was on a boat ride up the Hudson River and went by West Point. My imagination went crazy conjuring up images of British ships in the river and patriots in New York watching them. Our nation was birthing - thanks to so many brave and creative men and women and even kids!"

Co-authoring Short Distance

Rob and his family live right next door to his folks, so collaborating on something as in-depth as a trilogy of historical novels is actually a matter of walking over to the neighbors. "Can I borrow a cup of sugar?" Is replaced with, "did you edit that last page of chapter four?"

Rob Skead says, "My father, who is now 89 years old, and I work closely on the story development, with him banging out the first treatment and then me adding ideas later. He does most of the research." The Skeads started writing together when Skead Sr. was 84 years old.

It's never too late to pursue writing!

"I do the writing aspect, action and dialogue, with him [my dad] serving as editor. We will brainstorm on what happens next if there's something that's not working."

What Rob likes about working with his dad in this way has mostly to do with trust. That's important in any co-authorship venture. You've got to have trust in the other writer's abilities and perceptions.

As Rob explains, "The great thing about working with him is there is inherent trust between us and no egos. It's never about us as individuals and always about creating the most fun and meaningful story we can. And if he doesn't like something I create, I'll stand up for my thinking, but if he still feels strongly it doesn't work, I scrap it and move on. Something better is then created. And the trust gets even stronger."

About Becoming a Writer, and Being a Writer.

I asked Rob what first inspired him to write. Everyone has a personal journey there, and it's always interesting to discover what people have to say about it.

Rob says, "I was inspired to write simply because it's a God-given talent, one my mother noticed in me as a boy and encouraged me to pursue as a young adult in my twenties. I've been published for 15 years. My previous books are all about sports since that is what I know and love. I've been writing for twenty years though, and have lots of great stories that I've written through the years yet to find a publishing home."

I asked, "Of all the books you've written, do you have a favorite?" I know this is a nearly impossible question for writers to answer for one of two reasons:

1. either they love all their books and are attached to them all almost equally,
2. or as soon as the book is published they push it aside so they can move on more easily to the next story.

Rob loves his books.

“Normally, that’s a hard question to answer because all my stories are like my kids. I think [The Turkey Bowl](#), even though it’s shorter than my other books, is one of my most creative endeavors. As well as [Elves Can’t Dunk](#).

“But, that said, [Patriots, Redcoats & Spies](#) and the sequel, [Submarines, Secrets and a Daring Rescue](#), are my all-time favorites because I did them with my dad. Both the process of creating them and the final outcome are very special. I’m hoping they become classics for teaching middle school children (and even adults) about what it was like to live during this important time period in our history.”

I asked Rob to talk about the series, to share what his biggest challenges were with this kind of material.

The Biggest Challenges of Writing Historical Fiction for Kids.

“There were several challenging aspects—getting the history and time period correct, making sure the journey aspects were spot on with places and timing, and making sure difficult subjects (stealing and war issues like fighting and death) were appropriate for kids. That’s why we have a section in the back of the book where we explain the parts of the story where we took creative license with histories or timing of events.”

Sometimes, it can be surprising to find out what needs changing. Rob shares a funny lesson about what colonials would have been unwilling to eat. “In one draft of *Patriots*, we had the boys eating tomatoes on their journey. An educator at West Point informed us that colonials thought tomatoes were poisonous and didn’t eat them.”

Clearly, that was taken out of the story! But sometimes it’s difficult to decide where ethics and historical accuracy should be defined - especially as this is reading material for kids. The matter of ethics matters, but war is bloody and desperate.

“In book one, the boys had to steal horses to get from point A to B, but stealing is wrong. How do you handle this? I think we nailed it in the scene and at the end. In both books, there are gunfights, knife fights and people get hurt and shot. This happened in the American Revolution. How do you convey this in a book for kids? I think we nailed it appropriately too.”

Book three in this series is written but the Skeads don’t yet have a publishing schedule for that. Why? The publisher wants to wait to see how these first two books do on the market.

Support your fellow writers! Check out Skead’s terrific books.

Always read as much as you can.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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