

Dripping Springs, Texas

Aspiring Writers Consult Barron

By Amy Strahan

Feature Editor

Aspiring writers at the middle school were given the unique opportunity to meet science fiction/fantasy novelist T.A. Barron as he signed copies of his work at the middle school's fall book fair on November 8. Barron, who is currently on a national tour for one of his latest novels, *The Merlin Effect*, is also the author of *The Ancient One* and *Heartlight*. Although he has written continuously throughout most of his life, it is only in the last six years that he became a full time novelist, and authors including Madeleine L'Engle and Lloyd Alexander already praise his work.

While answering the questions of middle school students, he encouraged them to "follow their dreams," no matter what obstacles may bar their path. The significance of this statement was made clear as Barron related his experiences to listeners.

Barron's travels have contributed greatly to his writing. A Rhodes Scholar, after graduating from Princeton with a degree in law and business, he studied at Oxford. His scholarship allowed him to embark on a whirlwind trek across

the globe, which he completed in a year. During that time, he thatched roofs in Japan, rode the Trans-Continental Railway across Russia, climbed mountains in Nepal, was delayed in India due to illness (never drink the water in India), admired the landscapes of Africa, and also toured Europe. He managed to touch a grey whale and catch a glimpse of its "silvery" eye while kayaking off the coast of Baja, California, which helped inspire some of the events in *The Merlin Effect*. Out of all these sights, however, one of his most memorable was watching the sun rise slowly from an 18,000-foot pass on the "Cho-oyu" mountain in Tibet. Despite his harried travels, it seems as if no detail was lost.

Although his novels have been very successful, (The Screenplay for *The Ancient One* is currently being written) T.A. Barron's talent for writing was cultivated as he also pursued an ambitious career in business. After his travels, he helped start a capital finance corporation in New York, and after several years became president. However, his success could not satiate his love of writing. He recalls that as his business career blossomed, the need to write became so obsessive that he found himself writing at

every spare moment, including board meetings (his co-workers assumed he was taking notes on the discussion at hand). Accordingly, he resolved to leave his career in New York and devote all of his time to writing; he moved back to his hometown of Boulder, Colorado, six years ago, which he describes as "the best decision I ever made."

Barron advised students that "life is too short" not to enjoy one's work, and added that "if you start young, great things can happen." Although T.A. Barron became a full-time novelist in his thirties, he recognized his calling at a very early age. He first began publishing his own magazine in the fifth grade, for which he charged five cents per copy, and attracted a number of readers.

T.A. Barron's next book, entitled *To Walk in Wilderness*, is scheduled to come out soon. Unlike his previous works, this is a collection of poetry and journal entries written while he was on a thirty-day trip in the Rocky Mountains, supplemented by photographs of the beautiful scenes he describes. He also hopes to have another out by next fall, which will also be about the Rocky Mountain National Park.