

Author T.A. Barron believes in magic

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On a recent weekday afternoon, author and Boulder resident T.A. Barron told us about how he writes his books and which people in his life inspire his characters.

Q. You're a man. How do you write such strong girl characters?

That's a very important question. I'm going to reveal one of the wonderful parts about writing stories, and that is that you find inside of yourself many more voices and characters than you thought you had.

When I started writing "Heartlight," a story about that special friendship Kate has with her grandfather, I didn't know it would be Kate in the book. I knew it would be grandfather and one of his grand-

children. It could have been a boy or a girl.

In any case, when I was thinking about it, I was lucky enough to become a father when my daughter Denali was born. And about that time I realized that "Heartlight" was really about the idea that anything is possible for a bright, capable person. And it struck me that maybe this would be the only story from me, especially if that story would help her feel like she could do anything she wanted with her life.

That was why I wanted to make the character a girl. That was the easy part. But trying to listen to



Barron

myself and find the voice of a young girl inside of me, that wasn't so easy.

The first thing I did was sit down with my wife, Currie, and interview her about what she was like at 12. And she was a whole lot more interesting than I was at 12. I learned a lot, but I wasn't there yet. The second thing I did was interview my nieces. But I still didn't know enough.

The third thing I did was I stopped writing my book and wrote a biography of Kate. I wrote about those things that made her special, like did she wear green socks ever or was she an only child? What did she reach for when she came home from school and opened the refrigerator? Also big things like what were Kate's deepest, darkest fears? And what were her dreams? By writing the biography, I got to know Kate.

Q. Do your wife and daughter ever give you advice for your stories?

Lots of times. But do I listen to it? Sometimes. You want to know something tricky, though? If they make a suggestion which I think is totally outrageous and I get mad, it's probably a good idea.

Q. What's your favorite book you've written so far and why?

I can't tell you. It's the same as if you asked me that of my kids I love best. The answer is they are all different and I love them all. What's much more interesting to me is which of my books is your favorite.

Q. How important to you are the issues that your characters care about, like the

environment and family relationships?

What keeps me going through the work of writing a book are the issues and ideas underneath the story. I have to love the story. I have to love the characters and want to know them better. But it's those underlying ideas: How do we save our planet? How does a 12-year-old girl relate to her parents? To her grandfather? How do we all find our way in life? Those are the things that really get me going and let me spend that year or two it takes me to write a book.

Q. What is the most important issue you've written about?

I'll say one that may not be the most important, but is one of the most important. It's the idea in *The Lost Years of Merlin*, and it's that when you discover what happens to this little boy who becomes a great wizard, we might also realize that you have inside of yourself a special magic that's all your own. So just like Merlin gets to discover that he has magical powers, so do you. And just like Merlin you might not know it for sure. And you might not even call it magic when you do know it. But you do have a kind of special magic. That's the wonderful thing about the story and it's helping me understand more about that idea.

Books By T.A. Barron
Heartlight
The Ancient One
The Merlin Effect
The Lost Years of Merlin
The Seven Songs of Merlin

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