

# REPORTER'S COLUMN

THIS REPORT WAS FILED BY ONE OF SIX COLORADO KIDS STUDENT REPORTERS

Colorado Kids student reporter Jennifer Nelson, 12, interviewed Boulder author T.A. Barron at the Tattered Cover book store in Denver. Here's what Jennifer found out about this author of young adult fiction, including "Heartlight," "The Ancient One" and "The Merlin Effect."

**Colorado Kids (CK):** Tell us briefly about your childhood.

**T.A. Barron (TB):** My childhood was a wonderful one. I spent the first half in a small New England town where we had an apple orchard and lots of Indian artifacts. Then I moved to Colorado where I learned what a truly fabulous view really is. We moved to a ranch. The best part about the ranch to me was not the amazing view though — it was the sky because the sky somehow made me feel bigger and like anything was possible in my life.

**CK:** When you were a child did you ever think you would be an author?

**TB:** When I was a child I dreamed that I might be an author but that was different from *believing* that I might be an author. I sure wanted to and when I was about 9 or 10 I started writing my own little magazine called "The Idiot's Odyssey." I also often thought about being a forest ranger and being the only person in a huge area where I would be responsible for all of the trees and animals.

**CK:** What influenced you to write when you were a child?

**TB:** I simply loved stories. I loved hearing them; I loved to see a good movie. I loved stories around the campfire. I loved to tell stories. We told a lot of stories in my home and that made a huge difference.

**CK:** What was your career before you wrote your first book?

**TB:** First of all, I was a wandering, traveling backpacker and I used the fact that I had a Rhodes scholarship\* to travel as widely as I could. I thatched roofs in a little Japanese town, went to Africa a couple of times, and I stayed on a remote island in the middle of the Indian Ocean for a month. I had some incredible times. I hiked above the Arctic Circle and during that time, I wrote my first novel, which got rejected by 42 different publishers.

Then I came back to the United States and became the chairman for the Swiss Army knife company for a while and was president of its parent company. So that meant that I had a lot of people wanting me to do a lot of things. The amazing thing was as much pressure as I had on my time, the more I wanted to write. I kept getting up at 3 in the morning just to write. Or I would write in the back of meetings. Or I would write in taxi cabs. Finally I realized that I had this passion to write. Life is just too short, if you have a dream, not to follow it.

**CK:** What authors have influenced you the most?

**TB:** Madeleine L'Engle, Lloyd Alexander, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula Le Guin and T.H. and E.B. White are six of my favorites.

**CK:** Where did you get ideas for some of your novels?

**TB:** The best ideas I get are from real life. Now that may sound funny from somebody who writes about imaginary lands and places. Life is a fabulous thing because it is full of so many wonders. If you just keep your eyes and ears open to them you can find yourself with more ideas than you could ever write about.

**CK:** About how long does it take you to write a book?

**TB:** It takes between one and three years for me to write a book. I re-write my books at least seven or eight times before they are done. The real answer to your question is, as long as it takes to get it right.

**CK:** When you write a book is there a message you want your reader to learn or is your purpose sheer entertainment?

**TB:** I think books have to be entertaining, but I could never write a book that is just entertainment. I think the best books, the ones that really last and touch us, have an idea underneath. You can't get up and preach a sermon in a book, you have to have that idea woven into the fabric of the book.

**CK:** When you are not working, what do you like to do?

**TB:** I love to play with my kids. At the same time, I think anytime I can be outside, especially up in the mountains, is where I'm the happiest.




Photo courtesy of Philomel Books

Above, Boulder-based author T.A. Barron, above, credits the Colorado sky as part of his inspiration to be an author. Left, Barron's "The Fires of Merlin," takes readers to imaginary land.




Book jacket courtesy Philomel Books.



Using the voice-actor and character names from TARZAN listed below, find and circle each word in the puzzle. Look forward, backward, diagonally and upside down for the hidden words until you find all 10!

M	E	T	L	E	A	N	A	Z	R	A	T
I	I	A	L	R	B	H	T	O	O	T	H
N	Q	N	E	I	R	E	J	A	N	E	G
Y	L	T	N	S	G	N	K	S	P	R	I
W	W	O	N	I	L	B	L	A	D	K	N
D	R	R	O	E	E	W	T	Z	H	A	K
L	U	E	D	A	N	D	R	O	H	L	E
O	R	A	O	H	N	S	R	C	I	A	N
G	H	S	E	H	C	O	N	I	T	L	Y
Y	L	R	I	P	L	E	M	L	V	B	A
N	O	R	S	D	O	I	M	A	A	E	W
O	O	D	O	W	S	C	L	I	R	P	R
T	O	D	R	W	E	C	L	I	R	P	E



1. TARZAN    2. JANE    3. TERK    4. TONY GOLDWYN
5. MINNIE DRIVER    6. ROSIE O'DONNELL    7. TANTOR
8. WAYNE KNIGHT    9. GLENN CLOSE    10. KALA

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\* A Rhodes scholarship is a prestigious award associated with Oxford University in England.