

# Enchanted youngsters clamor for a sequel

“The Ancient One,” with its adventurous heroine and Crater Lake setting, delights the book group

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By Sarah Allen

“Are we all connected somehow,” asks author T.A. Barron in his book “The Ancient One,” “across time, across space, across species...?”

Across phone lines?

The August gathering of The Oregonian/Multnomah County Library Junior Book Group certainly was. Barron channeled in by radiophone from his cabin atop a 14,000-foot mountain in Colorado, all the way to Portland’s Central Library. A delighted group of youngsters gathered around a speakerphone, books in hand.

“This is just a wonderful place to mess around with my kids and maybe write a few lines,” Barron said of his home, his animated voice filling the room.

But Barron has a soft spot for the Northwest, and Oregon in particular. Not only does Barron’s younger brother live here, but he also set his fantasy novel “The Ancient One” against a Crater Lake backdrop.

It is the story of Kate, a young girl visiting her Aunt Melanie in a fictional town of Blade. But her hope for a carefree vacation vanishes when she discovers a grove of giant redwood trees in nearby Lost Crater. With her finding comes conflict between those who see the trees as the dying mill town’s last hope and those who think they should remain a sanctuary forever.

But when, in an attempt to escape the chaos, Kate wanders down a trail into the crater, she’s suddenly thrown back in time 500 years, where a whole new kind of chaos awaits.

“It’s no accident that the place called Lost Crater bears a striking resemblance to Crater Lake,” Barron said. “There are incredible wonders of ancient forests there, as well as diversity of all the good people that I came to be friends with while staying with my brother.”

Oliver Field, 9, nodded.

“I liked how you put so much detail into the characters and the land,” Oliver said attentively, sitting up straight in his chair.

Barron was happy to hear it. He told the children that the world around them is reason enough to write, that “if you love stories, the sources come from real life.” Events and people in your young lives now, he told them, might inspire a book.

“There are things happening right now to the kids in this room who will be writers,” youth librarian and facilitator Katie O’Dell added.

“You’re quite right, Katie,” Barron replied excitedly. “Everything that’s happening now is going to be in your memory bank and stay there as a potential novel.”

Ten-year-old Claire Persichetti, who joined the group with her sister, Rachel, 13, asked Barron, “Will you write any more books with Kate in them?”

“Would you like me to?” Barron asked.

“Yes!” Claire cried.

“Would the rest of you like me to?” he asked.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” they called out.

One of the best things about writing a sequel to “The Ancient One” would be that he would have to come back to Oregon, Barron said. “You can’t lead a good life, or even a semi-good life, without a trip to Oregon every once in a while,” he said.

Barron so enchanted the group, it was as if he were in the room with them. Each of the seven kids leaned into the phone eagerly, some, like 11-year-old Laura Garvey, grinning widely.

Sarah Baggs, 12, told Barron, “I liked the suspense.”

“So you’re not mad at me for ending each chapter with a cliffhanger?” Barron asked in a charming voice.

Sarah giggled. Her friend, 12-year-old Erin Watts, sat next to Sarah, rolling her eyes shyly before blurting out, “I wouldn’t have read it all in one sitting if you hadn’t made it suspenseful!”