

# Story Monsters Ink

DECEMBER 2021

The Literary Resource for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents



## ASHLEY BELOTE

INVITES LITTLE READERS  
TO CLIMB THE ME TREE

## D.J. STEINBERG

PENS A FESTIVE PICTURE BOOK OF POEMS

CHANGEMAKER:

## DANIELLE LEE

## PHILIP AND ERIN STEAD

BRING BACK A BELOVED CHARACTER

## CHESS CHAMPION OLIVER BOYDELL

IS AHEAD OF HIS GAME

## LARRY SMITH:

CREATED AN INSPIRING COLLECTION

ONE TO READ:

## PRINCE A. SANDERS

## JUDY NEWMAN

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## DOC'S DOG DAYS

ARRIVAL AT OCATE MESA

## TAYLOR TALK

THANKFULNESS

Q&A WITH

## CHARLES BEYL

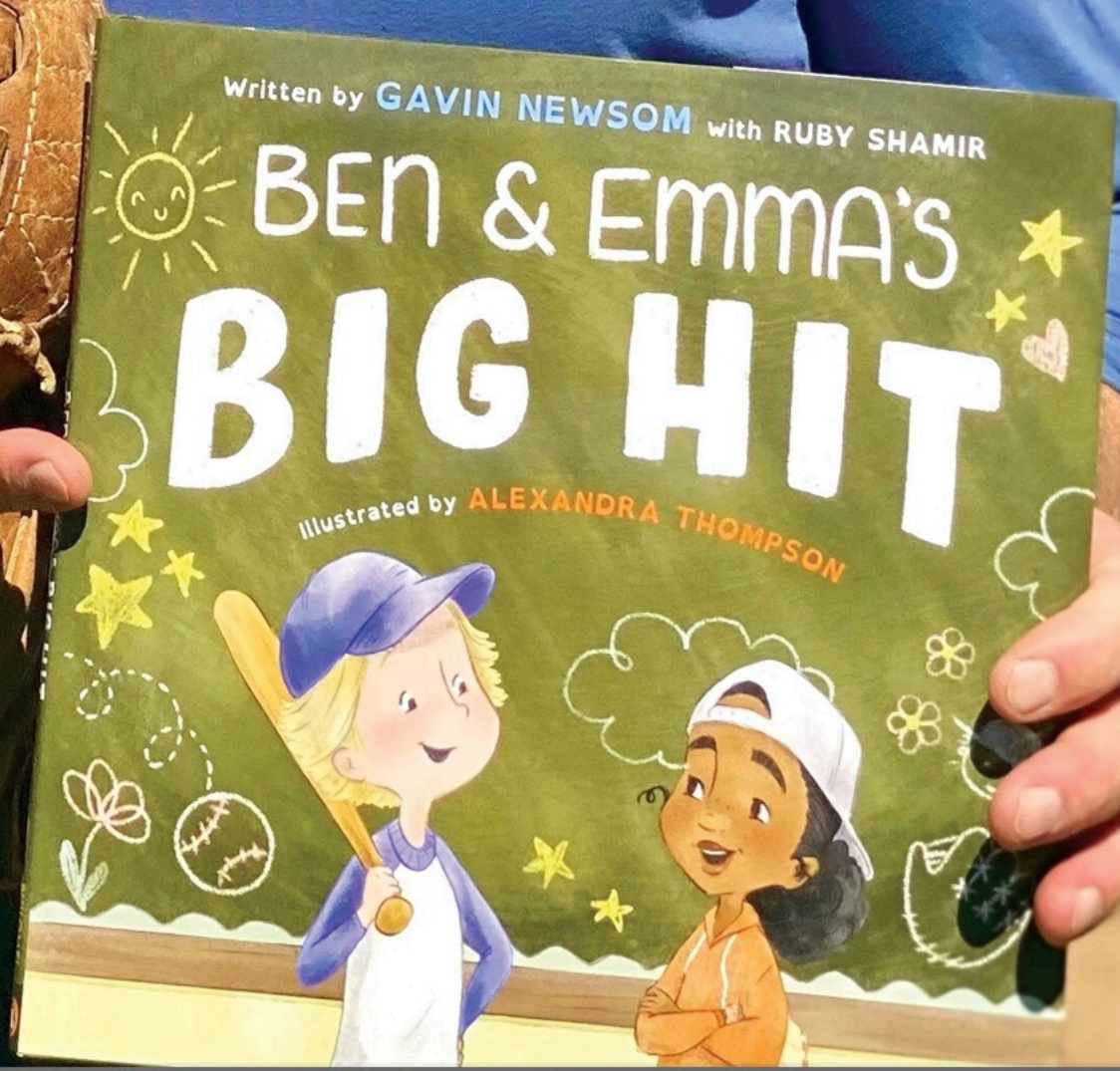
THE BOOK BUG:

## LUCY COUSINS

## GOVERNOR

# GAVIN NEWSOM

HITS A HOME RUN WITH NEW PICTURE BOOK







Q&A

# CHARLES BEYL

by Julianne Black DiBlasi

Remember elementary school as in learning to count, reading, being the line leader, and getting to hold the door open every time the class left the room—for the whole day? Remember how big it all was: concepts, book bags, the school bus?

But then, you realize when you walk your kids into school for a parent-teacher night that things are all of a sudden knee-height and the chairs are, well, tight?

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**W**e took the lessons and the experiences in stride, and they grew as we grew. But when you are right in the middle of a forest of adults, navigating your world, little wins are HUGE, hard things are for superheroes, and a helping hand every now and again is a blessing.

So we can all enjoy transporting ourselves right back into the toddler space and time with *Scout the Mighty Tugboat!* Its pages are so nostalgic in both creative sense and storyline. The perspectives, the colors and shapes, and the overall themes will speak volumes to the little kid inside you while reinforcing your own little one's momentum and growth to do, to try, and the value of asking for help to save the day.

Charles Beyl is the author and illustrator of *Scout the Mighty Tugboat*, and I was able to steal a few minutes of his time to discuss some background on this modern classic.

**Q:** *Scout the Mighty Tugboat* has such a clean and simple feel, but really handles some deeper subject matter for a young age group. For example, the idea of being able to *do something hard* is a central theme I hear in my own child's elementary classes. Do you get a lot of responses from parents and teachers using the book as an example of trying bigger and new things?

**A:** People have told me that *Scout* is a great role model for little ones who are learning to do new things. I wrote this story for our grandson and granddaughter. At that time, their dad was a tugboat captain working in the Houston ship channel. He would work four days on and then have four days off. So I wanted to write a story that would explain the hard work their dad did in a fun way that they could easily understand. Once I started to develop the character of Scout, the story became something bigger. It was now a story about doing things on your own and how good that feels and also about getting help when you need it.

**Q:** Another theme I loved was asking friends for help. The story didn't waffle on whether or not to ask for help, it was just a logical response to a situation after first giving it a try yourself. It leads to a great introduction to a group or team project. Were you inspired by your own experiences to add the helpers?

**A:** I am glad you picked up on that aspect of the story. Our grandkids at that time were two and four so they were just beginning to discover that they could do things themselves and didn't always have to ask for help. Doing simple things like climbing up on a chair or eating a sandwich on your own



is a big thing when you're a two-year-old, it can make you feel pretty good about yourself. I thought about how hard it was for me to learn new things when I was growing up. Tying your shoes, riding a bicycle, or learning multiplication, if you've never done them before, it's a stressful thing.

But there are times when you do need to ask for help, those times when you are out of your comfort zone. It took me a long time to learn that you shouldn't feel bad asking for help. I'm not so sure every child gets that message when they experience the story but I hope they will at some point. Our newest granddaughter is a year and a half old and she loves the book for the colors, counting the boats, and finding the different birds, turtles, fish, and whales but her favorite page is where all the helpers come to the rescue. She's probably just connecting with this on a visual level right now but when she's older she will understand the importance of asking for help and working together.

**Q:** *Scout the Mighty Tugboat* has a nice balance of clean images and repetition for younger audiences but references to older concepts like tankers and cruise ships. Where do you find the sweet spot has been as far as grades or ages that seem to get the most out of the book?

**A:** My target audience for this story was preschool and early elementary grades—children who are just discovering the amazing world around them and trying to figure out how it all works. I have always been a huge transportation nerd. Any machine that moves is exciting to me. Also, I wanted



to incorporate the environment that is such an important aspect of the shipping industry. We all need the things the ships bring to our ports and we need the people who run the ships to do it in a way that protects the water and animals in that beautiful environment. As a father and grandfather, I have read a lot of books to children so I try really hard to make my books entertaining to both children and the person reading them the story.

**Q:** As both the author and illustrator, how did the crafting process go with this project? Images first? Or text first? Also, how heavily did you end up editing before arriving at the final version?

**A:** I had that initial idea of creating a story for our grandkids relating to what their dad did for a living. The idea sat sloshing around in my brain until I did a very simple illustration of a tugboat pulling a giant container ship for our grandson one day. It turned out nice and I decided to show it in my portfolio at a Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators conference here in Houston.

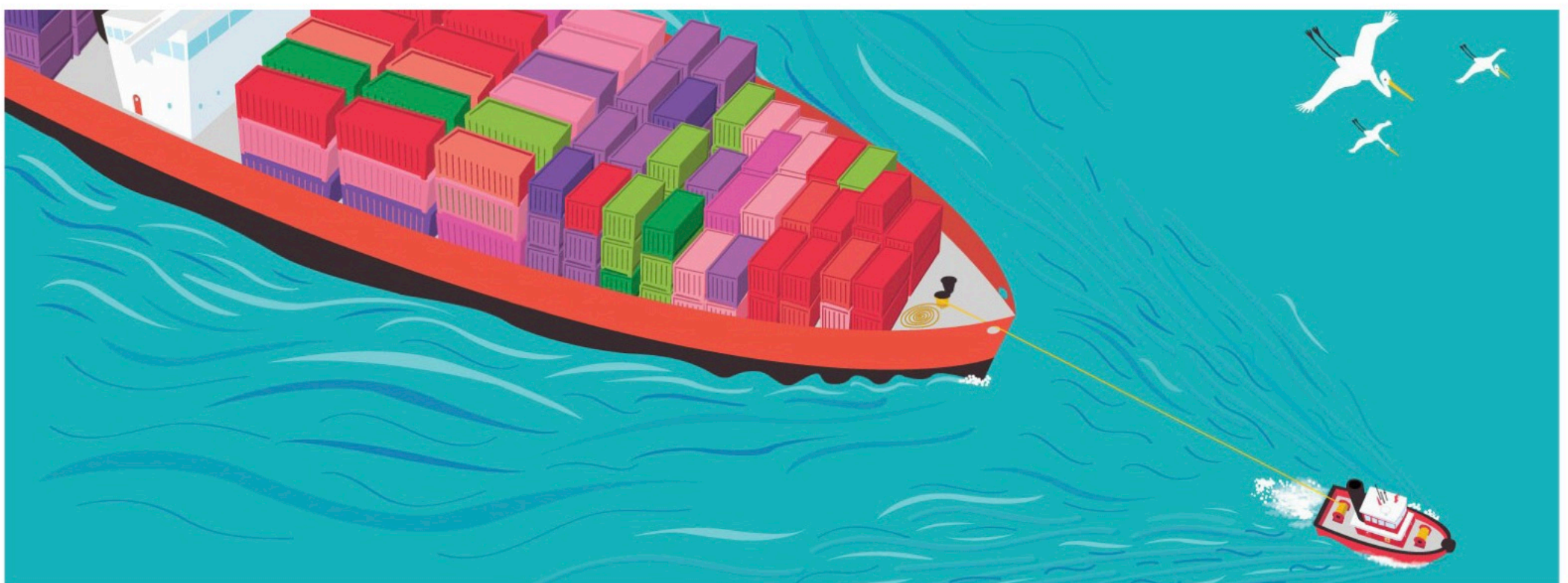
A number of people really liked the artwork so on my way home I started thinking about writing a story about that tug. My first story was called *Tug-tug Tugboat* and it was all about the repetition of sounds and bright colors heard and seen on the bay. My agent, Elizabeth Bennett, helped edit the story and we worked together to get it ready to present to publishers. Sue Tarsky at Albert Whitman & Co. loved the story and offered to publish it. She helped me to establish a more definite beginning, middle, and end to the story. The one major edit they asked me to make was to change the name of the tug. They sent me a list of name suggestions and "Scout" immediately jumped out because that's the name of



one of our granddaughters. So of course Scout had to be the name of the tugboat in my story!

**Q:** I think my favorite spread visually has to be when all the friends come to help. There is such an awesome overall presentation in the basic flat colors paired with transparencies here and there. The solid colors create a nice friendly assurance that help really is on the way, while the transparent layers give it depth and movement. Can you give us any insight into the creation and backstory that went into this image?

**A:** That spread is a big hit with a lot of kids I talk to who have read the book. It was one of my favorites to work on. When I talk to students about how I learned to draw, I go back to my discovery of how any drawing is just a combination of shapes. I love to create vector art in Adobe Illustrator by starting with simple geometric forms and then editing them (similar to





sculpting) into objects that we recognize as ships, birds, fish, or whatever.

I spent a good portion of my childhood in Tacoma, Washington, very close to the Puget Sound where we saw lots of tugboats, ships, and ferries. My parents took me along one day to Seattle where we went out on their friend's boat to take part in a holiday boat parade. When the parade was over, all of the boats headed back to their home docks and I remember watching them all bob up and down in the churning water, so that scene was an inspiration for me. I also wanted to capture that moment you feel when all of your friends come to help you in a time of need. I think the transparent lines of the waves help to capture that energy.

**Q:** You mention your grandchildren in the book sleeve; I'll bet they get to "taste test" the stories and images as you work! How have their responses shaped your projects?

**A:** I do share my progress with them as I work on a book. They will let me know what they like and don't like. They also love to come up with their own ideas for stories which are a huge inspiration for me. We love to hike in the park near our house and just walking and chatting with them allows me to see the world through their eyes.

My series of Chip & Ben books were inspired by a conversation I had with our grandson. He had a play date with his friend Ben. He was so excited to tell me all about the things he did that day with "my friend Ben." I just loved the sound of that phrase as he kept repeating it over and over. Those three words started to symbolize for me, the idea of making a friend and how important it is to a young person to start the process of assembling this quiver of people who become your friends.

**Q:** There is a lot happening on your website! What projects are coming up for you? Any hints you can give our story monsters?

**A:** There are four books in the *Chip & Ben* series. The first two, *My Friend Ben Won't Share* and *My Friend and the Sleepover* are available now. The third book, *My Friend Ben and the Big Race* will be out in the spring of 2022. Right now I'm reworking the interior sketches for the fourth *Chip & Ben* book, *My Friend Ben and the First Snow*. It will be published in the fall of 2022. After I revise the sketches I will be doing the finished artwork.

I have many more story ideas that I would love to turn into picture books. Before moving to Texas, we lived in an old farmhouse in Pennsylvania. We had two dogs, two cats, and nine chickens, all of which provided many experiences that would make great picture books.

When I'm not working on my books, I illustrate for a wide variety of clients. Recently, I have done some murals here in Sugar Land, art for coffee mugs, and some editorial illustration. I also teach a digital graphics class at the University of Houston. I really enjoy sharing what I know with my students and seeing all of the amazing things they can do.

For more information on Charles Beyl and his books, visit [charlesbeyl.com](http://charlesbeyl.com). ●

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