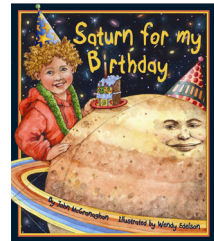


A Conversation with John McGranaghan *author of Saturn for My Birthday*



Where did you get the idea for *Saturn for My Birthday*?

The inspiration for my book came from my son Kyle. A few days before his fourth birthday I asked Kyle what he wanted for his birthday. Kyle asked for the planet Saturn. That answer stuck with me. It eventually became an idea, which eventually turned into a book. His request must have awakened all those old 3rd & 4th grade science fair projects I did on the solar system.



What are the most frequently asked questions you encounter as an author?

I can't say that I get a standard frequently asked question. Perhaps that's because I have not made the customary school visits or book signings yet. The question I encounter the most at this point comes from friends and acquaintances. They often ask what the book is about followed by how did you get that idea.

What gets your creative juices flowing?

My creative juices get flowing when I have an experience that gets me thinking that this could be a good idea for a book. What usually happens is the idea simmers in my mind, sometimes on the back burner, but eventually the idea takes the form of a story and then what's really fun is when I start writing.

As a school counselor, you probably spend a lot of time around kids. What advice do you have for their parents?

The best advice I can give to parents is to read to their children. Something that is easier said than done. From a learning standpoint, reading is probably the single most important thing you can do. Reading expands your child's vocabulary. Reading deepens understanding. Reading develops comprehension. Reading even sharpens math skills, not to mention the quality time you are spending together.

But it is more than just reading. It is stopping to talk about what you're reading. It is summarizing and asking questions. It is connecting what you are reading to life events and experiences. For example, that book about Saturn may spur a discussion about your past third grade science fair project or your child's upcoming science fair project.

Our desire to give our children the best often comes up against our hectic sometimes overwhelming lifestyles. The practice, dance recitals, baseball, etc... Don't let reading with your child become just another item to cross off your to-do list. Slow down, enjoy the time together.

That question your child asks in the middle of a sentence is an opportunity to talk and listen to each other. All too often we dismiss this opportunity because we want to finish the sentence, turn the page or complete the book. If we stop and listen, kids will talk. The difficulty is that kids often talk about things we find hard to listen to. Our expectations get in the way.

Research has shown that the single most important protective factor for keeping adolescents out of trouble is, if the teen feels connected to their family. Reading can be a doorway to that connection. So the next time you sit down with your child to read, and you open that doorway. Forget about your expectations, forget about finishing the book, and just see where the doorway leads you.

Great advice. What will your next book be about?

I'm not sure, but I have a couple of ideas floating around. If Saturn is well received perhaps there could be a follow up. There are many more planets and a whole host of other celestial bodies floating around in outer space. There is some interest in writing a young adult novel. Also this past July I hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. It was a once in a lifetime experience. I was amazed by the rock formations, the wildlife, the history and the actual hike itself. Something tells me there's a story in there somewhere.

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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