

Interview with John R. Brooks **Author of *Bobby Bright's Greatest Christmas Ever***

Reader Views speaks with John R. Brooks, author of the new holiday children's book, "Bobby Bright's Greatest Christmas Ever." John is being interviewed by Juanita Watson, Assistant Editor of Reader Views.

Juanita: Welcome John, thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. We are excited to talk with you about your new children's holiday book, "Bobby Bright's Greatest Christmas Ever." Would you explain the storyline to your readers?

John: There is only one Christmas tree light bulb in the world who can talk and understand human language. He is the amazing Bobby Bright.

Created nine years ago in a conveyor belt accident at the world's largest Christmas tree light bulb factory, he and his special family of 24 other bulbs end up together on a strand at the McGillicuddy's house.

A very regimented older couple, who for the Christmas season do everything the same way each year, the McGillicuddy's always put their tree up the day after Thanksgiving. And every year, Bobby and his Bright family are on the strand that is at the bottom of the big box where all the Christmas lights are stored. As precise as the McGillicuddys are, that means the last strand out of the box always goes at the back of the tree.

And that's where Bobby and his family have been for nine years. They have never shined for anyone except one old crummy picture on what is otherwise a blank wall.

In the 10th year of existence, everything changes thanks to the magic of Bobby. He saves he and his family from being tossed in the trash. Through his amazing powers he creates a situation which leads to their lone strand winding up on the tiny tree upstairs which has been bought for the McGillicuddy's grandson.

Then the fun begins and the Bright family experiences what every bulb is created for. They shine and make people happy. Meanwhile, Remington discovers that these bulbs on his tree are very, very different, and especially that blue one right in front of the tree..

More surprising things will happen and by story's end it is definitely Bobby Bright's Greatest Christmas Ever. There is plenty of suspense along the way as Bobby works to make things good for he and his family, and then at the end of the book when there is every reason to believe Bobby and his family will have another great Christmas next year on Remington's tree, an accident occurs that will leave all reader's wondering if it can happen. And, an excellent reason for book number two in the series.

Juanita: : What inspired this story?

John: Probably the biggest thing is a remembrance I have always had from the time I was about six years old until 11. Christmas was big at our house, and during those years we were a family without a father, and were pretty poor. But we always had a big Christmas tree and my mom and grandmother (both of whom the book is dedicated) always managed to get lots of presents for my sister and me, with help from a couple of aunts and uncles.

I was always enthralled, as I counted the presents each day to see if there were any more new ones under the tree. As I made my daily count I always peeked around to the back of the tree and would see those lights no one ever saw. I wondered what it would be like to never be seen by anyone, or really shine for anyone.

Over the years as an adult, Christmas continued to be a big event. "Putting up the tree" was huge in my first family of children (3) and my current family (1). I'm not sure during all those years if I really thought a lot about those questions I had as a child, but in 2003 for some reason they came back. An idea germinated in my mind about one bulb in particular who might change such a scenario. And from there, Bobby Bright's embryonic beginning took place.

Juanita: Would "Bobby Bright's Greatest Christmas Ever" be considered a chapter book? What is the age range for your reading audience?

John: Most definitely a chapter book Juanita. There are 20 chapters in the 133 pages. Also there are nine very excellent and selected pieces of art. Since the book came out November first, I have been doing about 15 readings a week to elementary school students. This experience has basically confirmed what I thought the book would be. It is for children in the first through fifth grade range to read for themselves, but definitely also for parents to read to younger children, probably from late three year old to five or six years of age.

I think probably 2nd through 4th grade is the core area. However, at some elementary schools the sixth graders wanted the prologue and a chapter read to them and they continued to express interest.

Juanita: Who are the main characters, and what part do they play in the story?

John: Without question “Bobby Bright” is the main character. Created as the world’s first and only talking Christmas tree light bulb, due to an electrical shock during an accident at the world’s largest Christmas light bulb factory, Bobby and his family of 24 bulbs on the strand speak “bulbese”

But only Bobby understands human language and therefore the burden of interpretation in the McGillicuddy’s house falls on Bobby.

Mr. and Mrs. McGillicuddy are an older couple whose only child is grown. They are very regimented in all they do, including spring cleaning, and the way they test their Christmas tree lights each year to make sure they work. Also they are precise in where all the strands go. That is not good news if you are a group of bulbs that always get placed at the back of the tree where no one ever sees you.

Mrs. McGillicuddy likes to tell Mr. McGillicuddy what to do quite often. But at Christmas time he definitely needs it, because he is sort of a “bumbling” type character who becomes even goofier at times due to Mrs. McGillicuddy’s apple cinnamon eggnog which makes him sleepy and forgetful.

Remington is the 7-year old grandson who becomes the focus of Bobby and his family after the Bright family bulbs end up on the tiny tree his grandparents bought for him this Christmas. More and more in the series Remington and Bobby will interact and develop a close and very different relationship.

Juanita: : How will children relate to Bobby and his fantastic adventure?

John: If the readings I have done Juanita are any indication, then the kids are really going to relate to this special bulb. The kids in the five to 11-year old range have loved the idea of a Christmas light bulb that talks, and can do magical things. In fact they have been awed each time I mention the word “bulbese”.

I also think children, as they read the book, will realize that an inanimate object like Bobby might indeed be very much “alive” like they are. So far the idea of one very special bulb, who can do magical and thrilling maneuvers with his body, and is able to actually live on a tree and still act and think like a human and relate to a mom and dad, and family, has been intriguing to the young people I’ve dealt with.

Juanita: How does the theme of magic play a part in your story?

John: Well, it’s not like magic where something disappears, or where Bobby can actually create a series of tricks. Bobby’s magic is I think number one, the very fact that he can speak “bulbese”, but more important understand human language.

As for the other thrilling things that he is called upon to do, there is no question that the acts he performs to save his “family” from being tossed in the trash, are major in the book.

Juanita: John, you have some significant illustrators helping with your first book. Would you tell us more about the fantastic pictures scattered throughout your book, and the wonderful people that assisted with their illustrations?

John: I am very fortunate because this past June (2006) I discovered a group of former Disney/Warner Bros/Hannah-Barbera animated artists. These were gentlemen who had been released with the hundreds of artist who lost their jobs within the past 18-24 months due to the shutdown of so much animation at the major studios.

Five of them collaborated on the cover and the nine pieces of art. I would have had more art, but I will tell you they didn't come cheap. They were employees at the time (no longer are) of Miracle Studios, just north of Milwaukee.

All of their individual major movie credits are on the dedication page of the book, but to give you an idea, some of the movies they worked on include The Lion King, Beauty and the Beast, Toy Story, Pocahontas, Brother Bear, Hunchback of Notre Dame, Scooby Do.

I think they added the "class" that this book needed to get some early credence. I am certain self published books face uphill battles anyway, and to be able to go to someone and say, "check out the quality of this book", and know they will be impressed, is huge in my mind.

I have seen some self-published books before that were a joke and very poorly done. I wanted to make certain I could get the attention of distributors, stores, etc. and to do it I needed something to enhance what I think is a very cute and different story. The art these guys created did just that.

Juanita: What values will "Bobby Bright's Greatest Christmas Ever" teach children?

John: I think it teaches children to stop for a moment and think and observe other things in life other than just humans. I think it teaches and prompts more imagination, something sorely needed in my mind, with video games permeating the mindset of every young child these days.

The biggest value it teaches is quite obviously the values, and importance of family and how you must stick together. It teaches that no matter how important one person (or in this case bulb) is, that everyone must answer to someone. This is very pointedly shown when Bobby is reprimanded by his father for going too far with some of his antics, and stepping over a line of conduct that even a bulb must obey.

And really Juanita, family and Christmas and how they intermingle and are important to each other, plus the challenges of making something happen against often very overwhelming odds, are probably the two biggest values taught.

Juanita: What is the underlying message of your book?

John: BELIEVE, BELIEVE, BELIEVE. To me it is simple. Don't give up in an endeavor that is important. And for the Bright family, it has become extremely important, after spending nine years at the back of the McGillicuddy's tree and never getting to shine for anyone, that they provide joy and happiness to lots of people.

The path taken to accomplish this should show any child who reads the book, or any adult who is reading to a child, that persistence creates opportunity.

Juanita: John, what makes a great and memorable, holiday children book?

John: I'm not sure, with one book under my belt, I meet the qualifying standard to address such a question. But I will just concisely say that any holiday book that grips the imagination of the child, maintains their enthusiasm and leaves them wanting either a sequel, or constant re-read of the book should rate, at least in their eyes, as memorable.

Juanita: I understand that this is the first book in a series of Christmas adventures you'll be releasing in the coming years. What are your future plans for the series?

John: There will be four more books, and the plan is to have a new one each of the next four Christmas seasons. Second in the series will be 'Bobby Bright's Christmas Heroics'. Bobby saves Mrs. McGillicuddy from a tornado. Later he saves his own father and an aunt from being thrown away and replaced on the tree. It is a story with the values of protecting, saving, and loving your family, while still being a fun read with lots of chances for imagination.

Just briefly the final three books are "Bobby Bright spends Christmas in Spain"; "Bobby Bright's Christmas as a Professor"; and "Bobby Bright meets his Maker".

In book three he manages to sneak his family into the McGillicuddy's luggage and goes to Madrid where Remington's dad is stationed. Book four is quite the tale as Bobby will help Remington secretly learn "bulbese" and Remington will teach Bobby some words in human language. The final book will deal with an amazing discovery (author driven). The conveyor belt operator at the world's largest Christmas tree light bulb factory who helped create Bobby with the electrical injection 15 years ago winds up as a long lost relative of the McGillicuddys, and some strange coincidences are discovered as Bobby meets the man who made him and his family so different.

Juanita: John, you must be very busy with your sports casting career. Why did you decide to start writing children's books, and will your writing career, one day replace your sports casting?

John: Join a large and growing group of people asking that question Juanita. Welcome aboard. At a number of signings where I have been either recognized or promoted as the former "Voice" of the University of Oklahoma Sooners and some other teams too, people say "why in the world are you doing this?" or maybe, "how did you ever get started or even think about kid's books?"

You know to be truthful, I haven't ever given a real good answer. I don't know. I guess I just liked this idea of "Bobby" and what it represented and I ran with it. Now don't get me wrong. It's not like I'm some doofus, who has been only able to do play-play-sports. I have always branched out and done different things. And I have always loved to create. So this is just a budding part of me in some respects, and in other respects, something that's been with me for a long time.

I know this, for years I wrote lyrical poems. Some were good. Some were pathetically bad. But I enjoyed it. However, I never believed I could ever be a "poet". I do believe I can be a children's writer. Plus I love kids. And I love performing for them during the readings I'm doing.

And I decided 18 months ago to basically quit play-by-play. I still do some professional hockey games during playoff time, but I'm content to be where I am. I went out on top in my chosen profession. I'm 68-years old, feel like I'm 40, and sometimes act like I'm 10.

Maybe all this is happening at the right time.

Juanita: How can readers find out more about you and your book?

John: You can go to our website, www.bobbybrightbooks.com and get a chance to read the prologue of the book, get some information on myself and my sportscasting background, and see a list of even more movies our great artists once worked on. A fun part of the visit enables children the chance to hear Bobby talk and do a trick for them.

While our early focus has been within my home state of Oklahoma, and I might add very successfully received to this date, we are looking to make the book available, not only through our website where you can order it now, but in stores nationally. We are now in the Barnes and Noble system and anyone could order it through them by going to any store and simply stating you want to order the book.

The website ordering is quite easy too and we offer pay pal, credit cards, or check or money order option also.

Juanita: John, it has been great talking with you and finding out more about your new children's book "Bobby Bright's Greatest Christmas Ever." We encourage everyone to pick up a copy of this soon-to-be family Christmas classic, and keep it in mind for gift-giving this season. Do you have any final thoughts for your readers today?

John: Well of course I like hearing those words from you. I want it to be successful. I know it is an uphill battle to get the book in all the right places. But I guarantee you it is going to happen in the next few months. I am now convinced with really just two states, Oklahoma and Wisconsin, as a proving ground that this book can be a classic and the start of a really fun series. And who knows Juanita, maybe even a movie or video. Which means that one day I just might take you and all your

Reader Views friends on a chartered 180 passenger jet and head to the L.A. premier of the movie together.

Thanks for giving me time to visit.