

***Interview with Gary Lamit, author of [Wally the Walking Fish Meets Madison and Cooper](#)***

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to interview Gary Lamit, who is here to talk about his new children's book "Wally the Walking Fish Meets Madison and Cooper."

*An educator for almost forty years, Gary Lamit has taught second graders through university students and has published over thirty books on a variety of subjects. Married with grown kids, he currently teaches at a community college. He spends considerable time reading children's books to his pre-school extended-family members, whose number seems to increase every few months!*

**Tyler:** Welcome, Gary. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to interview you. First of all, I have to ask you about the title—where did you get the idea for a walking fish, and just how does Wally manage to walk?

**Gary:** Last summer I had a family reunion and my son (Uncle Jamie in the book) finally got to meet his only niece, Madison. Jamie is working on his PhD in biology and his thesis is on fungus. He is a mushroom expert and has written a number of papers on the subject. Jamie took Madison into the woods everyday and they went hunting mushrooms and exploring. Jamie's girlfriend Cinnamon was also with them and though she does not appear in the story she also was an inspiration. Cinnamon has a PhD in biology and her thesis was on walking catfish. That was the inspiration for the book company's name and the main character, Wally. Wally the Walking Fish! Walking fish are in Thailand where they are indigenous and also in Florida where they are an invasive species. They can "walk and move" out of water for extended periods. One of the reasons that they are difficult to control is that they can simply walk across the road to get to another pond or lake.

**Tyler:** Will you explain to us also who Madison and Cooper are?

**Gary:** Madison is my only grandchild. She will turn six years old the end of this month- July, 2009. Cooper is my wife's and my 100 lb giant yellow lab that will be eight-years old in November. Cooper eats or tries to eat constantly. He loves to swim and the illustration of him jumping into the water off the dock came from an actual photo. Madison and Cooper really look like the illustrations.

**Tyler:** How do Madison and Cooper meet Wally?

**Gary:** At the family reunion we rented a lakeside house. Madison and Jamie went fishing from the dock and caught a catfish. It was her first fish. Again the first few illustrations of the book were taken from actual photos. So the story is very similar to real life except that the caught fish could not talk! So that's how "Madison met Wally". But the real Madison did catch and release her fish.

**Tyler:** What else, besides his ability to walk, makes Wally special?

**Gary:** He is very interested in his world, especially the new things he sees and encounters out of water. He is sometimes afraid and unsure of these new experiences and encounters, but he still makes himself keep going and strives to overcome his own fears and concerns. Wally discovers that he loves to meet other animals and to make new friends outside of his fish family and friends in the water.

**Tyler:** I understand Wally goes on adventures with Madison and Cooper—but can he be a “fish out of water” to do so?

**Gary:** Other than talking, a real walking fish can move about very quickly out of water and some can even climb trees. Our Wally is mainly a simple pond walking catfish that discovers he can communicate with others who are not like him. Not Fish. He loves to explore his new world and especially Madison who easily befriends all beings. Wally and Cooper become competitive friends. Just like brothers often are.

**Tyler:** Without giving away what happens in the book, can you give us some idea of the adventures this trio has?

**Gary:** Starting with the pond, the three new friends swim together to visit Betty the Beaver, go to the beach to play in the sand, and explore the local forest that is full of beautiful mushrooms and foliage. Along the way they play and kid each other, and Wally and Cooper try to outdo the other in friendly competitions.

**Tyler:** Will you tell us about the illustrations for “Wally the Walking Fish Meets Madison and Cooper”?

**Gary:** Most of the illustrations came from photos; Madison and Cooper fishing on the dock, catching a catfish, playing in the sand and getting buried up to her neck, exploring the forest and gathering mushrooms are all real events. Of course the idea of a fish wearing boots is fantasy as is the conversation between characters. But, the conversations between Madison and Cooper are rooted in their lives. Cooper cannot talk, but he definitely makes himself understood! And everyone talks to him.

**Tyler:** Gary, I understand you have plans for more “Wally the Walking Fish” books. Can you tell us about them?

**Gary:** The next “Wally the Walking Fish” book is more of a child’s story and is more words than illustrations. It is a nice bedtime story that only requires listening.

**Tyler:** As an educator, I understand you want the “Wally the Walking Fish” books to be educational. Can you explain how they are educational, and particularly for which age group they are suitable?

**Gary:** I tried to incorporate both in the story and in the educational panel information about each of the animals and plants that the three new pals encounter. Mushrooms, beaver ponds, walking fish, flying fish, beavers, and dogs all have their own information block that will deepen the reader or listener’s knowledge of the natural world.

**Tyler:** Gary, I mentioned above that you’ve written thirty books. Will you tell us about some of your other books—are they all children’s books?

**Gary:** I started writing engineering books in 1978 and have had over thirty published to date. My first non-technical books were fishing journals for children: [My Fishing Journal](#) (full color), and [Fishing Journal](#) (for older kids and young adults). Both books come from WalkingFish Books.

**Tyler:** It sounds like you’ve been interested in fish or fishing for a long time. When did that interest begin and why do you retain that interest?

**Gary:** My dad and I fished since I was very little. Fishing has always been part of my life. After I had children, I wanted to spend as much time with them as I could. Camping and fishing were one way to have quality and quantity time with them. For almost twenty years we camped and fished throughout the Western U.S. On average we spent fifty days or more per year outdoors on family trips. Fishing was a way of helping them engage the outdoors in a non-passive way. Fishing is also a way to go where possibly no other human has ever walked (fly fishing streams and rivers) or boated (the ocean).

**Tyler:** I understand you’ve gone fishing all over the United States and Canada—will you tell us about some of your favorite places and which kind of fish you most enjoy trying to catch?

**Gary:** Our favorite family fishing outings were near our ranch in Montana. We had ninety acres and a family compound of buildings with two trout ponds (five and twenty-two acres). The ranch was a quarter mile from the Shields River, and within fifty miles of Yellowstone National Park. The Yellowstone, Madison, Gallatin, and

Jefferson Rivers were only a short distance away (at Montana speeds). Every day we spent time on one fly fishing excursion or another. Usually, it was our excuse to get outside and wade (or canoe) in a river or lake, and then hit the local hot spring for a soak!

The other spot we still go to is Monterey Bay, California where we always caught something from our Boston Whaler in the past and now in our rowing dory in the present. We did not know what it was half the time, but we caught something! By the way—fishing is not the same as catching. You do not always have to catch to enjoy the art of fishing, especially when fly fishing or just being on the lake or ocean.

**Tyler:** Did you always want to write children’s books? How did that interest develop?

**Gary:** I love books. I love reading. I love writing. My family says it’s the Finn in me. In Finland people average nine books each as gifts at Christmas. There are authors and there are writers. After the first six books on engineering, I realized I was a writer not an author. I have never made much money writing, but I always get drawn back to another project even when I swear I will not do another book!

I will retire in five years, and I realized I wanted to stop writing engineering books at that time. The fishing Journals led into the children’s books, and seemed natural since I have always considered being a father (and now grandfather and uncle) the most important and rewarding things I have done in life.

**Tyler:** What did you enjoy and what did you find difficult about writing a children’s storybook as opposed to the fishing journals or even the engineering books you wrote?

**Gary:** One of the most difficult aspects of getting the book completed was making sure my vision of each character was correct. The illustrator did a marvelous job on the scenes and the three animal characters, but Madison was harder to capture since I knew what she looked like in real life and wanted to get the book character similar but not exactly the same. To get Madison’s character correct it took an extra month of sketching and illustration adjustment.

The story and the characters’ personalities came surprisingly quick and easy. In reality, Madison and Cooper of the book really are the same as the real child and dog! I simply had to have them speak for themselves.

One difficult item involved removing 50% of the words after the illustrations and story were complete. I needed to have every sentence sound natural and without the need for each sentence to begin or end with; “Madison said”, “said Cooper”, Wally commented”, etc. That is not a natural conversation. Putting within the character’s dialog the name of the person or animal they were talking to or referencing something that only they would have or be doing took some editing and time.

As an example:

As they walked to the beach, Wally says: **Coop and I will bury you up to your neck.** (Wally telling Coop let’s bury Madison)

**I can dig faster than you Wally,** said Coop! (Coop is going to dig. Who else would say this?)

**No you can't. I have flippers,** said Wally! (The only character with flippers is Wally)

As Cooper started to dig he says; **I have paws!** (The only character with paws is Cooper)

Madison said: **Okay you two just don't cover my head!** (The only character being buried is Madison so it’s obvious she is talking)

**Tyler:** Gary, do you hope children will have any specific response to “Wally the Walking Fish Meets Madison and Cooper”?

**Gary:** I hope children will love the story and the characters. I tried to make each sentence a real conversation. This is a conversation between friends just as if you were there as they were talking. If you pay attention to each statement, you will see that the spoken dialog could only have come from one character since they almost always refer to each other by name or activity. **I wanted this book to make children feel they were participating in the day’s activities and bantering with friends, not reading or being read a story. No parents, just three friends spending the day together.**

**Tyler:** Thank you for joining me today, Gary. Before we go, will you tell us about your website and what additional information readers can find there about “Wally the Walking Fish Meets Madison and Cooper”?

**Gary:** My website is [www.walkingfishbooks.com](http://www.walkingfishbooks.com). The website has a multitude of [resources](#) for children including links to fishing and outdoor activity guides and information. An Amazon store ([AStore](#)) is also available for parents and children to quickly locate and purchase books and outdoor gear for children and the whole family. Children (with their parent’s permission) can also post their experiences and send us photos of their outdoor adventures. There is also an essay about my own fishing experiences from my earliest memories of fishing trips with my dad in Michigan, as well as our other fishing trips throughout the Great Lakes, as well as other trips with my children in places such as San Francisco Bay and Yellowstone National Park. I invite you to visit my website and learn more about fishing and even ice fishing with me! For my family and hopefully for yours, fishing is an excellent excuse to get out into nature and spend time with those you love. I hope my books and website encourage people to do that.

**Tyler:** Thank you, again, Gary for letting me interview you today. I wish you much luck with “Wally the Walking Fish Meets Madison and Cooper” and all your future Walking Fish books.

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