



# *A Conversation with Author* **GARY ROSS**

*Can you talk about the genesis of this amazing story?*

I originally wrote a few stanzas for a friend's movie. He needed to have a character read a bedtime story to her child, and since he was out of money on the movie, he asked me to write it for him as a favor. I told him I would — if it could rhyme. I've always liked to rhyme, and I thought it would be fun.

After the film came out, people began posting on the Internet, wondering where they could buy the book, but of course, the book didn't exist. In the following years, I wrote more and more stanzas and the story began to emerge. It's only the last few years, however, that I really focused on finishing the story.

*Can you talk a little more about why you chose to tell the story in rhyme?*

I've always been drawn to rhyme — whether it's Dr. Seuss or Shakespeare, song lyrics or T. S. Eliot, it's always held a fascination for me. However, rhyme is a very challenging thing to pull off when you are trying to sustain a narrative. I hope that readers get so immersed in the story that they stop noticing the rhyme altogether.

*Can you describe the story in a few words?*

Well, it's a journey. Bartholomew is a boy with great curiosities, fearlessness, a little wanderlust, and a healthy dose of individualism. He takes flight with his bedsheet and is blown to three different worlds — I suppose there is a bit of Gulliver in it. As with all journeys, I hope that Bart learns and grows from the experience. If anything, I think his senses of freedom and individuality are reinforced, and he gains a newer, more mature perspective.

*Do you feel it was the books you read as a child or the ones you read to your own children that made you want to create this kind of tale?*

I think I was influenced by both. One of the greatest things about being a parent is that you get to relive your own childhood in many ways. You're sort

of a guide leading your kids through a fantastic new world that you get to experience all over again. So I got to reread *If I Ran the Circus* and *McElligot's Pool* and *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* — all the wonderful Dr. Seuss books. But I also got to discover fantastic new things like *Charlie Parker Played Be Bop*. There is nothing better than getting to experience childhood through your kids.

*In the same vein, do you see it as a story that you relate to as a child or as a parent — or both?*

I'd say both. The maturity that Bart gains through his journey has a kind of parental distance, but I certainly hope that his wanderlust, his guts, and his spirit of adventure are true to being a kid. I think parents will relate to the desire to see their kids fly, coupled with the worry that they will get home safely. I think kids will relate to the desire to break free, as long as they know they can return.

*Bartholomew Biddle has such adventures. Was your childhood like that, or was it more that you yearned for that freedom and adventure?*

When I was twelve, we lived in London for a few months, and I was suddenly able to take the Tube around this big city. It felt a little like Bart's bedsheet. I think I always had that in me. I also had parents who encouraged it; my parents saw that I had memorized the London subway map and were willing to let me venture forth.

*Was the freedom of flight something that always attracted you the way it does Bartholomew?*

Flight is something that has always enthralled me. I got my pilot's license when I was in my



twenties, and now I fly helicopters — always with an instructor, as I think it's just too dangerous to fly on your own if you're not a professional. But I love to fly, and I've even done some aerobatics! When I took my kids to Disneyland, we went on a flight simulation called Soarin' Over California, and I wanted to ride it again and again . . . long after my kids wanted to move on. Yes. It thrills me and always has.

*Do you think it is harder for kids today to act on their adventurous spirit than it was previously?*

Well, it's a more dangerous world, certainly. I don't think I would have let my kids run around London at age twelve the way my parents let me. But I do try to encourage that kind of thing in them. When they were young, we taught them how to scuba dive, and they both got certified at the age of eleven. We took them on kayaking trips and explored sea caves. I think it's important for kids to dive into adventure, as long as adults make sure that it's safe for them to do so. I hope it's not harder for kids today. If you can't take a big bite out of the world, then what is it there for?

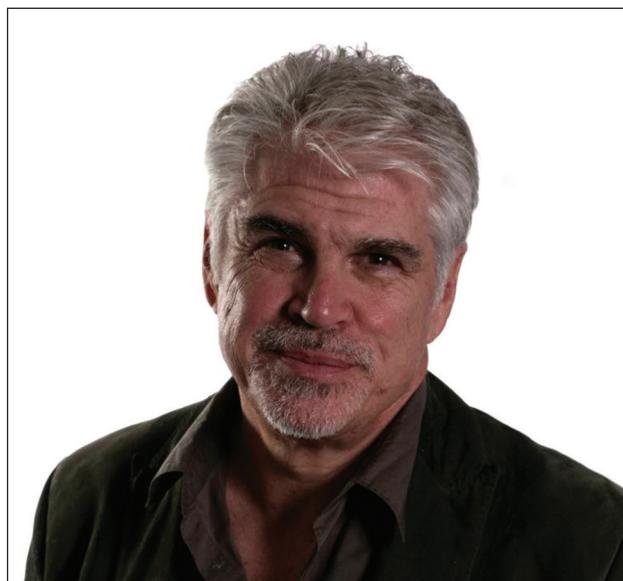
*The book is also about friendship and companionship. Can you discuss the relationship between Bartholomew and Densmore?*

Bart encourages a sense of freedom in Densmore — literally urging him to take flight from his oppressive school — but at that point, Densmore is unable to break free. A while later, when Bart is stuck in the doldrums of the canyon, it's Densmore who revives that spirit in Bart. I think that's a lot of what a good friendship is about — friends reinforcing and bringing out the best in each other.

*In the end, Bartholomew heads back to home and school. Can you talk a bit about how he's changed after his adventure?*

Well, I think he has a more mature perspective. He has knowledge and even (considering his age) a bit of wisdom from his journey. His yearning for freedom was an impulse at the beginning of the

story. Now that he has experienced freedom, he understands its relationship to the rest of his life: it's part of him, but just a part. Now that he's free, he doesn't have to yearn for it. He's seen it and felt it, and you can't un-ring a bell. He'll always be free. Now he can go home.



Photograph by Jack Ross

*Gary Ross is a critically acclaimed screenwriter, director, and producer who has been nominated for four Academy Awards. He launched his career with the Oscar-nominated screenplays for Big and Dave, made his directorial debut with Pleasantville, and wrote and directed Seabiscuit, which received seven Oscar nominations. In 2008, he entered the world of children's books, writing and producing the animated feature The Tale of Despereaux, based on Kate DiCamillo's best-selling novel, and in 2011, he began directing The Hunger Games, the first movie based on Suzanne Collins's best-selling dystopian trilogy. Gary Ross has also served as president of the Board of Commissioners for the Los Angeles Public Library, where he established mentoring programs for inner-city youth and expanded young adult services throughout the library system. He lives in Los Angeles with his family.*