

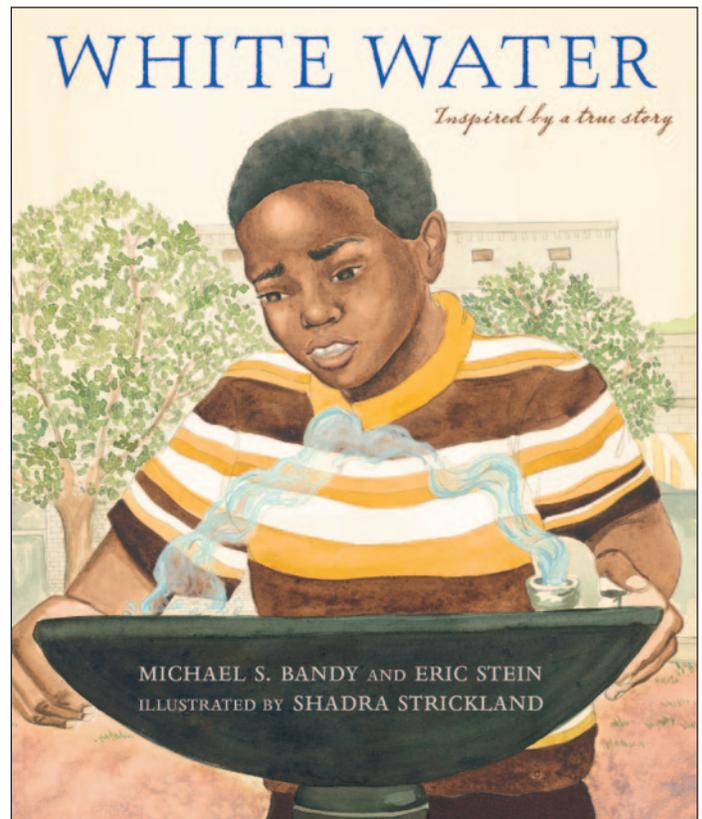
WHITE WATER

BY MICHAEL S. BANDY AND ERIC STEIN
ILLUSTRATED BY SHADRA STRICKLAND

*An interview with authors
Michael S. Bandy
and Eric Stein*

Conducted via e-mail

Set in 1963 in the segregation-era South at the dawn of the civil rights movement, *White Water*, based on a real-life childhood experience of author Michael S. Bandy, shows how one epiphany opens up a whole world of possibilities.



HC: 978-0-7636-3678-4

What inspired you to write White Water?

MICHAEL: This event had a tremendous impact on my life. I realized that what happened on that August day in Opelika, Alabama, changed my life forever. For the first time, I was confronted with a crossroads experience. Writing *White Water* helped me express what I went through in a way that folks could readily understand and appreciate.

ERIC: Almost thirty years ago, Michael told me about how he had snuck over and tasted the water from the “whites only” drinking fountain and how this event had such a life-changing effect on him. I thought it was an amazing event but didn’t quite know what to do with it at the time from a writing perspective.

Many years later, while having lunch with a film producer, I mentioned the idea to him, and he suggested that we write it as a short film script. We did, and it was read by a children’s publishing executive who loved it and suggested we write it as a kids’ book. She mentored us through that process and then took it out to publishers, where it found a wonderful home with Candlewick Press.

How would you describe your co-writing experience?

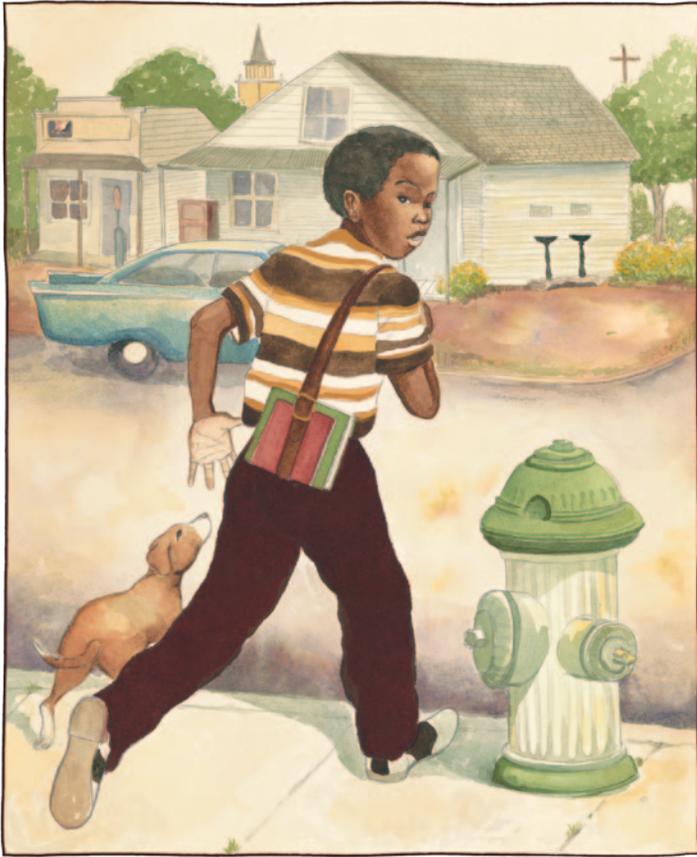
How did you divide the writing duties?

MICHAEL & ERIC: The process usually begins with a great deal of procrastination. When we get together, we end up talking about the news of the day or anything other than what we planned on writing. At some point, we realize that we need to get started and then begin discussing what we want to accomplish on a given page.

When we have a general idea of where we are headed, it starts getting typed. When we have a certain amount written, we read it out loud and start to make revisions. We often share what we’ve written with others and, based on their responses, make additional changes. While the rewriting process seems never-ending, at some point we get to a place where it just feels right.

It’s a give-and-take process in which we don’t always agree on where we are in a given scene, but we always manage to work through those differences and come to a compromise that we both can live with. Together, we combine our efforts, and voilà, we have a book or a script—or a trash-can full of crumbled paper.

continued . . .



Michael, you recalled “Everyone I passed seemed to know I was up to no good.” Do you think that was due to your guilty conscience for tricking your grandmother, or were people suspicious of a young boy—specifically an African-American boy—walking on his own?

MICHAEL: In the real-life event, I was already in town with my grandmother when I snuck over to the fountain and took a drink. In the story, it was my character’s guilt that made him feel as though everyone knew he was up to was no good.

White Water is a great story about a boy persevering and discovering something about himself, but it is also a vehicle for recalling a part of our history that many might prefer not to discuss. How do you hope teachers, librarians, and parents will share this book to convey both messages?

MICHAEL & ERIC: Our goal was to tell an inspirational story within a historical context. We never intended for it to be a history lesson. But we hope that through this adventure, kids will become more aware of our past and appreciate where we are today.

You have written in many different genres. How does writing a picture book differ from writing a script or screenplay?

MICHAEL & ERIC: From our perspective, writing a children’s book is much more challenging than writing a film script. In a picture book, you have to say a lot with very few words. But in our case, when that picture book originates from a script, which is made up of dialogue, action, and scene descriptions, you have to pare all those elements down without losing the essence of the story.

But after having spent months writing a script, it’s difficult to part with so much of what you have put on the page. In our first drafts of the picture book, we felt we had made significant and painful cuts, only to find that they weren’t nearly enough—we had only scratched the surface.

Since we aren’t artists and don’t do our own illustrations, we don’t have the luxury of knowing exactly how the artist will render our story visually. So we have to make sure that we give the artist enough of a sense of what we are trying to convey, without prejudicing or limiting their vision. We were lucky to have the incredible talents of Shadra Strickland, who did a wonderful job illustrating our book.

What do you hope readers take away from White Water?

MICHAEL & ERIC: It would be wonderful if our readers begin to feel more comfortable surveying and questioning the things around them. That they know it’s OK to challenge ideas, institutions, and values that don’t make sense. And to realize how important it is to voice their opinions and understand just how powerful their voices can be.

Our wish is that this process of discovery opens a sense of hope and inspiration.

What is your next project?

MICHAEL & ERIC: We are now focused on bringing *White Water* to the big screen. We wrote the feature-film script and are now working with a director on its development.



CANDLEWICK PRESS
www.candlewick.com