

Q&A with Bill Harley about The Amazing Flight of Darius Frobisher

Where did you get the idea for "Darius?"

The idea for "Darius" came when I was spending time every day just writing whatever came to my head. I was thinking about writing a novel – a chapter book, but really had no idea what it would be about. One day, I wrote a scene in which a boy is surprised to discover that his bike has taken off and is flying through the air. That was the only scene I wrote that day, and I didn't know anything about it. If you read the book, you'll know that scene happens towards the end, at the climax. So in one way, I wrote *toward* that moment. I asked myself the question – "Who is that boy and how did he get to be on a flying bike?"

When I started to write the book, I was thinking of Roald Dahl – he's one of my favorite writers for children, and I've always liked how he blends reality with fantasy, and shows that the world can be a pretty hard place for kids. He writes in a very direct way to the reader, and I've tried to do that in "Darius".

How long did it take to write?

I think it took eight or nine years from the time I wrote that first paragraph to when it was published. It was rewritten many times, and it took a long time to find a publisher. Many things changed – for instance, in the early drafts, (SPOILER ALERT!) Daedalus and Miss Hastings were not old boyfriend and girlfriend, but brother and sister. And Anthony, who is so important to the plot, didn't show up until fairly late in the writing process.

There were many times I thought the book would never be published.

Why did you use Greek myths?

As a storyteller, I love myths and folktales, and find the Greek myths very compelling – the gods act like humans with real flaws in their personality. I've always loved the story of Icarus, and think it's a metaphor that is a very useful one regarding learning and living. In a way, this book is a healing of the Icarus story – Darius has every reason to be like Icarus, but makes a decision in the end about how he wants to live – and he lives differently from his father.

I've heard from a number of teachers and students who have used "Darius" in conjunction with learning about Greek myths, and that makes me happy.

Why is there a magic bike?

I love bikes – to me, as a boy, they were a symbol of freedom. With my bike I could go places I couldn't go otherwise. Children don't have a lot of power to take control of their lives, but a bike is one expression of their growing into power. As far as the

magic goes, I've always felt that it's interesting to have one thing in a story that is magic, but not a lot of things. If everything is magic, nothing is special. But I think all of us imagine having that one magic object and what we would do about it.

And of course, although it's science fiction, Darius's magic bike isn't really magic at all – it is based on some scientific principles that Daedalus has discovered. (No – I don't know what they are). I love having Daedalus there – the mad scientist who figures things out by himself.

It seems like there's more to the story. Where is Darius's dad? Are you going to write a sequel?

I didn't realize it when I first wrote the book, but you can't have someone just disappear and then not let people know if they're alive or dead. I was happy with it, but both my editor and my audience have let me know that Darius's dad's absence needs to be addressed. Where is he? Is he coming back?

I do have an idea where he is, and if I get to the next book, it will be a quest story – Darius and Daedalus, and other characters (maybe Anthony?) will travel to a very strange place in search of Rudy Frobisher. But I have a lot of other things due before I get to that story. I hope I do.