

Trouble

by Gary D. Schmidt

About the Book

Henry Smith's father told him that if you build your house far enough away from Trouble, then Trouble will never find you.

But Trouble comes careening down the road one night in the form of a pickup truck that strikes Henry's older brother, Franklin. In the truck is Chay Chouan, a young Cambodian from Franklin's preparatory school, and the tragedy sparks racial tensions in the school—and in the town where Henry's family has lived for generations. Caught between anger and grief, Henry does the only thing he feels he can: he sets off for Mt. Katahdin, which he and Franklin had planned to climb together. One July morning, he strikes out for Maine with his best friend and the loveable stray, Black Dog, in tow. But when they encounter Chay Chouan on the road, fleeing demons of his own, Henry learns that turning a blind eye to Trouble only brings Trouble closer.

With moments of humor, tenderness, and remarkable strength, Henry and Chay travel a path to the mountain that neither of them expects.

Praise for the Book

"... contains Schmidt's eloquent language and compelling characters, as well as compassionate examinations of the passage from childhood to adulthood and of the patters of common experience and mark and unite us as humans."

--School Library Journal, starred review

"...Henry's odyssey of growth and understanding is pitch-perfect and deeply satisfying."

--Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

"Tautly constructed, metaphorically rich, emotionally gripping and seductively told..."

--Publishers Weekly

Courtesy of Houghton Mifflin Books

About the Author

Title: Gary D. Schmidt

Known As: Schmidt, Gary David; Schmidt, Gary D.

American Children's writer (1957 -)

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2009. From *Literature Resource Center*.

Document Type: Biography

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2009 Gale, Cengage Learning

Updated:10/29/2009

Personal Information

Born April 14, 1957, in Hicksville, NY; son of Robert H. (a bank vice president) and Jeanne A. (a teacher) Schmidt; married Anne E. Stickney (a writer), December 22, 1979; children: James, Kathleen, Rebecca, David, Margaret, Benjamin. Education: Gordon College, B.A., 1979; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, M.A., 1981, Ph.D., 1985. Religion: Christian Reformed. Avocational Interests: Gardening. Memberships: Children's Literature Association, Early English Text Society, Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Alpha Chi. Addresses: Homeoffice: Alto, MI. Office: Department of English, Calvin College, 1795 Knollcrest Cir., Grand Rapids, MI 49546. E-mail: schg@calvin.edu.

Career

Author and educator. Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI, professor of English, 1985--, department head, 1991-97.

Awards

Honorable mention, Book Award Committee, Children's Literature Association, 1993, for *Robert McCloskey*; Best Books for Young Adults citation, American Library Association (ALA), 1997, for *The Sin Eater*; Newbery Honor Book designation, ALA, Michael L. Printz Honor Book designation, ALA, and Gustavus Myers Outstanding Book designation, all 2005, all for *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*; Newbery Honor Book designation, 2008, for *The Wednesday Wars*.

Writings

Juvenile

- *John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, illustrated by Barry Moser, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, MI), 1994, also published as *Pilgrim's Progress*, 2008.
- *Robert Frost*, illustrated by Henri Sorensen, Sterling Publishing (New York, NY), 1994.
- *The Sin Eater* (novel), Dutton (New York, NY), 1996.
- *The Blessing of the Lord: Stories from the Old and New Testaments*, illustrated by Dennis Nolan, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, MI), 1997.
- *William Bradford: Pilgrim of Answerable Courage*, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, MI), 1997.
- *Anson's Way* (novel), Clarion Books (New York, NY), 1999.
- *William Bradford: Plymouth's Faithful Pilgrim*, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, MI), 1999.
- *Saint Ciaran: The Tale of a Saint of Ireland*, illustrated by Todd Doney, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, MI), 2000.
- (Editor, with Frances Schoonmaker Bolin and Brod Bagert) *The Blackbirch Treasury of American Poetry*, Blackbirch Press (Woodbridge, CT), 2001.
- *Mara's Stories*, Henry Holt (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Straw into Gold* (novel), Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2001.
- *The Wonders of Donal O'Donnell: A Folktale of Ireland*, Henry Holt (New York, NY), 2002.
- *The Great Stone Face: A Tale by Nathaniel Hawthorne*, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, MI), 2002.
- *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (novel), Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2004.
- *First Boy* (novel), Holt (New York, NY), 2005.
- *The Wednesday Wars* (novel), Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Trouble* (novel), Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2008.

For Adults

- *Supplementary Essays for College Writers*, Prentice-Hall (Englewood Cliffs, NJ), 1988, third edition, 1993.
- (Editor, with Charlotte F. Otten) *The Voice of the Narrator in Children's Literature: Insights from Writers and Critics*, Greenwood Press (Westport, CT), 1989.
- *Robert McCloskey*, Twayne (Boston, MA), 1990.
- *Hugh Lofting*, Macmillan (New York, NY), 1992.
- (Editor, with Donald R. Hettinga) *Sitting at the Feet of the Past: Retelling the North American Folktale for Children*, Greenwood Press (Westport, CT), 1992.
- (Editor, with William J. Vande Kopple) *Communities of Discourse: The Rhetoric of Disciplines* (includes instructor's manual), Prentice-Hall (Englewood Cliffs, NJ), 1993.

- *Katherine Paterson*, Macmillan (New York, NY), 1994.
- *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century*, Susquehanna University Press (Cranbury, NJ), 1995.
- *Robert Lawson*, Macmillan (New York, NY), 1997.
- (With Carol Winters) *Edging the Boundaries of Children's Literature*, Allyn & Bacon (Boston, MA), 2001.
- (Editor, with Susan M. Felch) *Winter: A Spiritual Biography of the Season*, illustrated by Barry Moser, Skylight Paths Publishing (Woodstock, VT), 2003.
- (Editor, with Susan M. Felch) *Autumn: A Spiritual Biography of the Season*, illustrated by Barry Moser, Skylight Paths Publishing (Woodstock, VT), 2004.
- *A Passionate Usefulness: The Life and Literary Labors of Hannah Adams*, University of Virginia Press (Charlottesville, VA), 2004.
- (With Lawrence Kushner) *In God's Hands*, Jewish Lights Publishing (Woodstock, VT), 2005.
- (Editor, with Susan M. Felch) *Summer: A Spiritual Biography of the Season*, illustrated by Barry Moser, Skylight Paths Publishing (Woodstock, VT), 2005.
- (Editor, with Susan M. Felch) *Spring: A Spiritual Biography of the Season*, illustrated by Mary Azarian, Skylight Paths Publishing (Woodstock, VT), 2006.
- (Editor, with Susan M. Felch) *The Emmaus Readers: Listening for God in Contemporary Fiction*, Paraclete Press (Brewster, MA), 2008.

Contributor to books, including *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the Pearl Poet*, edited by Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Miller, and Julian Wasserman, Whitston (Troy, NY), 1991. Contributor of articles, essays, stories, poems, and reviews to journals, including *Christian Home and School*, *Lion and the Unicorn*, *Studies in American Humor*, *Christian Educators Journal*, and *Martha's KidLit Newsletter*. Guest editor, *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 1989.

Media Adaptations

Several of Schmidt's works have been adapted as audio books.

“Sidelights”

Gary D. Schmidt has blended a career as a professor of English with one that involves writing for both children and adults. Schmidt's fiction and nonfiction children's books span genres from young-adult and middle-grade novels to picture books, and they deal with topics from biography to suicide. His novels include *The Sin Eater*, *Anson's Way*, and *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, while in other books, including *The Blessing of the Lord: Stories from the Old and New Testaments* and *Saint Ciaran: The Tale of a Saint of Ireland*, Schmidt mixes religious themes with biographical tales and retellings.

Schmidt's first books were for adults, but after writing a few biographies of children's writers, including *Robert McCloskey* and *Katherine Paterson*, he turned his hand to writing his own children's books. Ilene Cooper, reviewing Schmidt's biography of Paterson in *Booklist*, commented that he does "an excellent job of chronicling" the life of the two-time Newbery Award-winning author. Schmidt once commented: "My first two children's books, the retelling of *Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Sin Eater*, both came out of my own past. *Pilgrim's Progress* had been with me some fifteen years before I finally turned to a retelling. It seemed to me that there were strong reasons why children would have turned this into a child's story back in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and I was not convinced that those reasons no longer pertained in the late twentieth century. I wrote the retelling thinking of my own early responses to the book, cutting out the parts that bored and that struck discordant notes."

Schmidt's retelling of *Pilgrim's Progress* in *John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress* "is much more accessible than the original version," according to *School Library Journal* contributor Kate Hegarty Bouman, voicing a common response to the work. Bouman noted that Schmidt's "mix of both historical periods and ethnic groups is a fascinating way to extend the text spatially and temporally." A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* similarly praised Schmidt's "masterly rendition" as "a treasure sure to delight young and old."

Schmidt's first young-adult novel was *The Sin Eater*. "For *The Sin Eater*, I reached back into my own family's past and that of my wife," the author later explained. "The house is not the same as, but is like a real house in Brunswick, Maine. Though the action of the novel itself is not based on real events, the responses of the characters mirror responses that I have had in my past to not dissimilar events and people. The places around the farmhouse are all real, though drawn from sites in upper New York state, the Catskill Mountains, the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and Cape Cod."

In *The Sin Eater*, middle-schooler Cole and his father move in with Cole's maternal grandparents in rural New Hampshire after Cole's mother dies of cancer. Cole delights in his new surroundings and in the village lore and tales of ancestry told him by his grandparents and other locals. His father, however, remains grief-stricken and ultimately commits suicide. "A work laden with atmosphere and meaning, this is a promising debut from an author who captures with admirable accuracy both the dark and light of life," asserted a *Kirkus Reviews* critic. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer also found Schmidt's novel "engrossing," adding that the plot forms a "point of departure for a profound and lyrical meditation on life and the importance of shared history."

The Blessing of the Lord includes retellings from "unusual perspectives," as Shelley Townsend-Hudson commented in *Booklist*. Schmidt retells the stories of Jonah, Deborah, Barak, Peter, and others, with a twist that gives the "often tired old tales ... new life," according to Townsend-Hudson. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer praised the "dramatic spin" Schmidt gives to these tales.

More religious and spiritual matters are served up in *William Bradford: Plymouth's Faithful Pilgrim* and *Saint Ciaran*. The former biography, intended for older readers, looks at the guiding light of the Plymouth Colony, painting "a warm and cohesive picture of William Bradford's role in that colony's foundation and growth," a critic for *Kirkus Reviews* observed. Bradford, an orphan from early childhood, embraced Puritan ideals as a teenager and ultimately led a group of Separatists on a perilous mission to found a colony in the New World. Schmidt uses Bradford's own writings as well as contemporary journals and prints to take the reader back into the religious beliefs of those early colonists. "The author clearly presents Bradford's religious views and shows how those beliefs affected his life and actions and those of the Pilgrims," wrote Elaine Fort Weischedel in a *School Library Journal* review.

Saint Ciaran is a picture book intended for younger readers. "In mouth-filling cadences of Gaelic ... Schmidt tells the story of the sixth-century Irish saint," noted GraceAnne A. DeCandido in *Booklist*. Having grown up a spiritual child, Ciaran went to Rome and discovered the Catholic faith in the city's churches. Sent back to Ireland by St. Patrick, he founded a religious community that attracted Christians from all over the island. DeCandido called *Saint Ciaran* a "beautiful picture book for older children," and Kathleen Kelly MacMillan, writing in *School Library Journal*, deemed the book a "gently moving tribute to a lesser-known saint."

Schmidt demonstrates the variety of his prose styles in the novels *Anson's Way* and *Straw into Gold*. Again using Ireland for a setting, this time in the eighteenth century, *Anson's Way* features a young Anson Granville Staplyton who follows his family calling and joins the Staffordshire military, the Fencible. Dreaming of glory, he is sent to Ireland as a mere drummer to help keep the peace. When he sees his fellow soldiers persecuting the locals, Anson begins to have mixed loyalties. When he meets an Irish hedge master--a person who illegally teaches the Irish their forbidden language and culture--he soon befriends some of the Irish rebels. Ultimately, Anson is forced to choose between his comrades in arms and his new Irish friends. This book "realistically portrays not only the tragedies of war but also the battle between the heart and mind of a young soldier," *Booklist* writer Shelle Rosenfeld remarked. Janice M. Del Negro, reviewing the title in *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, praised this "complex action/adventure novel" with its "shifting moral center." "Replete with drama and action," wrote Hilary Crew in *Voice of Youth Advocates*, "Schmidt's story presents a side of Irish history that is frequently marginalized in textbooks."

In his middle-grade novel *Straw into Gold*, Schmidt spins a new twist in the old Rumpelstiltskin tale, extending it to see what could have happened. In Schmidt's rendering, young Tousle leaves his forest cottage with his magical father, Da, to travel to the city and view the king's procession. He becomes separated from his father and then surprises himself by calling out for mercy for some rebels facing execution. One other voice raised against the execution is that of the queen herself. The king will spare the lives only if Tousle and a blind young rebel, Innes, are able solve the riddle the king sets for them: "What fills a hand fuller than a skein of gold?" "So begins a suspenseful quest that adds surprising twists and turns to the traditional fairy tale," wrote *Booklist* critic

Frances Bradburn. *School Library Journal* reviewer Ginny Gustin was also beguiled by the tale, calling *Straw into Gold* a "fantasy-flavored quest."

Based on actual events, *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* was named a John Newbery Honor Book and a Michael L. Printz Honor Book. Set in 1912, the novel centers on Turner Ernest Buckminster III, the son of a minister in Phippsburg, Maine, and his unlikely friendship with Lizzie Bright Griffin, who lives on nearby Malaga Island, which was settled by former slaves. Fearful that the impoverished community will hurt tourism, the town elders force the island's residents from their homes, despite Turner's efforts to intervene. Writing in *Booklist*, Hazel Rochman called *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* a "haunting combination of fact and fiction that has a powerful and tragic climax," and *School Library Journal* contributor Connie Tyrrell Burns remarked that the "novel will leave a powerful impression on readers."

In *First Boy*, fourteen-year-old Cooper Jewett decides to stay on his family's New Hampshire dairy farm after the death of his grandfather, who had raised Cooper. Soon, however, the teen is followed by black sedans, a barn on the farm burns to the ground, and a U.S. presidential candidate takes a strong interest in his life. "Cooper is an entirely appealing protagonist," noted Vicky Smith in *Horn Book*, and Rochman described *First Boy* as "a poignant account of one boy's search for home."

The Wednesday Wars, set in 1967 against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, concerns Holling Hoodhood, a seventh grader who spends every Wednesday afternoon alone with his demanding teacher, Mrs. Baker, while his schoolmates attend religious classes. The two find common ground when they begin reading the plays of William Shakespeare, and the educator becomes a positive force in Holling's life, in contrast to his often neglectful parents. Writing in *Kliatt*, Paula Rohrlack called *The Wednesday Wars* "a marvelous read, both achingly funny and deeply affecting," and *School Library Journal* critic Joel Shoemaker stated that the author "explores many important themes, not the least of which is what makes a person a hero."

The members of an affluent New England family find their privileged lives irrevocably altered by tragedy in *Trouble*, a work that examines loss, responsibility, and reconciliation. When Franklin Smith, a rugby star, is struck and killed by a car driven by his classmate, a Cambodian refugee named Chay Chouan, the residents of Blythbury-by-the-Sea react with anger toward the nearby immigrant community. According to Kate McClelland in *School Library Journal*, Schmidt's novel contains "compassionate examinations of the passage from childhood to adulthood and of the patterns of common experience that mark and unite us as humans."

Discussing his inspiration for the novel in a *Powells.com* interview, Schmidt explained: "I was in Concord, Massachusetts ... staying in a lovely bed and breakfast in that lovely town. One morning, I met a kid who, over breakfast, was receiving his final coaching from his mother and his grandmother. ... That morning he was to interview for admittance into a local prep school." He added: "This interview, they told me, would make his future. He would eventually go into law, and then into politics. ... They had no doubt he

would be accepted. He had no doubt that he would be accepted. He was ten years old." This incident stayed with Schmidt, and he stated: "I have wondered about this kid over the ten years since that morning. ... I have wondered how his privilege and rank has affected him. I have wondered if he came to believe that his status was an entitlement--or if he had ever imagined another kind of life. *Trouble* comes out of that wondering."

The novel was such a success that additional critical praise for the novel continued to appear in print periodicals and on the Internet. The word "rich" was used to describe the book by several reviewers. *Kliatt* contributor Ashleigh Larsen remarked that "a friendship and level of trust flower among unexpected people" and went on to commend Schmidt's "rich attention to detail." Robin L. Smith, writing in *Horn Book*, also applauded the book, noting that "rich secondary characters enhance a 1970s-set story that adds much to the discussion of how tragedy and racism affect individuals, families, and whole communities." To a *Publishers Weekly* writer, the novel is "tautly constructed, metaphorically rich, emotionally gripping and seductively told."

Booklist contributor Ian Chipman found that *Trouble* "focuses on the serious stuff, but handles teen levity well enough to keep readers involved." A *School Library Journal* reviewer was also impressed, remarking upon the "powerful narrative." In *Kirkus Reviews*, a writer stated that the book "stands as a deeply moving and pleasurable read," on the Web site *And Another Book Read*, a reviewer observed that "this book took my breath away! I felt like laughing, crying, and shouting for joy all at the same time." Applauding the novel on the *Reading Zone* Web site, a reviewer declared: "I loved this book" and added: "I would recommend this to an older audience. The story is beautiful and I couldn't put the book down! I wouldn't be surprised to see this novel on most shortlists for the Newbery in 2009." A critic for *Reading Rants* proffered additional applause, calling *Trouble* a "smart, literary character study" and adding: "Whatever you do, don't let the humdrum earth-tone cover dissuade you from digging into the crackin' good story underneath." On the *Teen Library Blog* Web site, a reviewer noted that "when I really like the characters in a book, I know I'm going to like the story. I know you will too."

"Teaching children's literature as I do, I have the opportunity to read many of the extraordinary children's books published each year," Schmidt once noted. "But teaching also means that I need to balance each day between my family, my writing, and my students. This, especially when the care of a 150-year-old farm is thrown into the balance, becomes a delicate act. It means that I can spend one to three hours a day on my writing, but that's all. Afterwards, there are other worlds to turn to.

"Working at a college also means that I combine several levels of writing. ... At the same time [as writing for children], I work on books that are slightly more arcane: a study of the medieval image of the mouth of hell and a biography of an eighteenth-century female historian. For me, these two very different kinds of writing (both creative, but one more scholarly than the other) help keep each project exciting rather than burdensome, even though there are the days when neither seems to have much energy.

"In thinking about my own work in children's literature, it seems to me that I am interested in showing the beatific and terrible complexities of our lives," Schmidt concluded. "I have had one reader tell me that *The Sin Eater* was sadder and funnier than he thought it would be. It seems to me that our lives are just that: often sadder and funnier than we ever thought they would be. They are also more beatific than we have any reason to expect, and my hope is to show that in the context of a world that is often dark."

Further Readings About the Author

Periodicals

- *Booklist*, May 1, 1994, Ilene Cooper, review of *Katherine Paterson*, p. 1611; December 1, 1994, Hazel Rochman, review of *Robert Frost*, p. 669; November 1, 1996, Ilene Cooper, review of *The Sin Eater*, p. 491; November 1, 1997, Shelley Townsend-Hudson, review of *The Blessing of the Lord: Stories from the Old and New Testaments*, p. 469; April 1, 1999, Shelle Rosenfeld, review of *Anson's Way*, p. 1428; April 1, 2000, GraceAnne A. DeCandido, review of *Saint Ciaran: The Tale of a Saint of Ireland*, p. 1459; August, 2001, Frances Bradburn, review of *Straw into Gold*, p. 2108; October 1, 2002, Kay Weisman, review of *The Great Stone Face: A Tale by Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 327; May 15, 2004, Hazel Rochman, review of *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, p. 1629; September 15, 2005, Hazel Rochman, review of *First Boy*, p. 60; March 1, 2008, Ian Chipman, review of *Trouble*, p. 61.
- *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, May, 1999, Janice M. Del Negro, review of *Anson's Way*, pp. 327-328.
- *Horn Book*, November-December, 2004, Betty Carter, review of *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, p. 717; September-October, 2005, Vicky Smith, review of *First Boy*, p. 589; July-August, 2007, Betty Carter, review of *The Wednesday Wars*, p. 403; May-June, 2008, Robin L. Smith, review of *Trouble*, p. 326.
- *Internet Bookwatch*, March 1, 2009, review of *Pilgrim's Progress*.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, September 1, 1996, review of *The Sin Eater*, p. 1328; June 1, 1998, review of *William Bradford: Pilgrim of Answerable Courage*, p. 816; April 1, 2008, review of *Trouble*.
- *Kliatt*, September, 2005, Paula Rohrlick, review of *First Boy*, p. 14; May, 2007, Paula Rohrlick, review of *The Wednesday Wars*, p. 19; March, 2008, Ashleigh Larsen, review of *Trouble*, p. 19.
- *New York Times Book Review*, December 16, 2007, Tanya Lee Stone, "Starting Out in the '60s," review of *The Wednesday Wars*, p. 23.
- *Publishers Weekly*, December 19, 1994, review of *John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, pp. 54-55; October 14, 1996, review of *The Sin Eater*, p. 84; August 25, 1997, review of *The Blessing of the Lord*, p. 66; March 1, 1999, review of *Anson's Way*, p. 70; April 10, 2000, review of *Saint Ciaran*, p. 95; March 31, 2008, review of *Trouble*, p. 62.
- *School Library Journal*, December, 1994, Kate Hegarty Bouman, review of *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 130; October, 1997, Patricia Pearl Dole, review of *The Blessing of the Lord*, p. 154; April, 1999, Starr E. Smith, review of *Anson's Way*,

- p. 12; June, 1999, Elaine Fort Weischedel, review of *William Bradford*, p. 153; August, 2000, Kathleen Kelly MacMillan, review of *Saint Ciaran*, p. 175; August, 2001, Ginny Gustin, review of *Straw into Gold*, p. 188; November, 2002, Grace Oliff, review of *The Great Stone Face*, p. 135; May, 2004, Connie Tyrrell Burns, review of *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, p. 157; October, 2005, Connie Tyrrell Burns, review of *First Boy*, p. 173; July, 2007, Joel Shoemaker, review of *The Wednesday Wars*, p. 110; April, 2008, Kate McClelland, review of *Trouble*, p. 148; October 1, 2008, review of *Trouble*, p. 71.
- *Voice of Youth Advocates*, June, 1998, Kathleen Beck, review of *The Sin Eater*, p. 103; August, 1999, Hilary Crew, review of *Anson's Way*, pp. 185-186.

Online

- *And Another Book Read*, <http://andanotherbookread.blogspot.com/> (August 12, 2008), review of *Trouble*.
- *Calvin College Web site*, <http://www.calvin.edu/> (October 1, 2009), author profile.
- *Miss Erin Blog*, <http://misserinmarie.blogspot.com/> (May 23, 2008), "SBBT Interview: Gary D. Schmidt."
- *Publishers Weekly Online*, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/> (May 3, 2007), Sue Corbett, "Children's Bookshelf Talks with Gary Schmidt."
- *Random House Web site*, <http://www.randomhouse.com/> (September 10, 2008), "A Conversation with Gary D. Schmidt."
- *Reading Rants*, <http://www.readingrants.org/> (June 15, 2008), review of *Trouble*.
- *Reading Zone*, <http://thereadingzone.wordpress.com/> (February 6, 2008), review of *Trouble*.
- *Teen Library Blog*, <http://ellibraryteens.blogspot.com/> (August 3, 2009), review of *Trouble*.*

Source Citation: "Gary D. Schmidt." Contemporary Authors Online. Detroit: Gale, 2009. Literature Resource Center. Gale. Kent District Library. 3 Dec. 2009 <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=LitRC&u=lom_kentdl>.

Gale Document Number: GALE|H1000123728

Author Interview

Kids' Q&A - Gary D. Schmidt from Powell Books Interview

Describe your latest project.

Sometimes books begin with a deliberate image, or idea, or event; sometimes they begin without anything at all, out of the blue, without the writer doing anything but pay attention.

Trouble began this second way. I was in Concord, Massachusetts, researching a book on the American writer Hannah Adams, and staying in a lovely bed and breakfast in that lovely town. One morning, I met a kid who, over breakfast, was receiving his final coaching from his mother and his grandmother — who had flown in the previous evening from Paris. The event? That morning he was to interview for admittance into a local prep school. He was certainly ready. He had on a suit with the appropriate school colors, and a silk tie with the appropriate school colors, and a handkerchief (I am not making this up) with the appropriate school colors. He carried a briefcase — leather, with gold clasps. (I am not making that up, either.)

This interview, they told me, would make his future. He would eventually go into law, and then into politics. I would hear his name someday, they assured me. They had no doubt he would be accepted. *He* had no doubt that he would be accepted.

He was ten years old.

I have wondered about this kid over the ten years since that morning. I have wondered what his huge wealth has done to him. I have wondered how his privilege and rank has affected him. I have wondered if he came to believe that his status was an entitlement — or if he had ever imagined another kind of life. I have wondered how he could ever hope in a rich prep school surrounded by others only like himself to develop empathy for anyone unlike him. I have wondered if he was strong enough to become more than what he was destined to become.

Trouble comes out of that wondering. It is set in an old moneyed town on the east coast of Massachusetts, and its protagonist, Henry Smith, believes that his wealth makes him immune to anything that might mar his happiness and ease. He attends a prep school that is Anglo-Saxon to its core. He rows crew and plays rugby. He will be wealthy and successful. Everything in his experience affirms this.

A few miles away is an old industrial town, saved from the demise that affected so many New England industrial towns by the influx of a vital and vigorous Cambodian community that has known more trouble than Henry Smith can even imagine. They are refugees from the Vietnam War, and are seeking a new life, and the hope that had always eluded them in their faraway land. They have come on refugee boats, through church

relocation programs, having lost everything except their memory of the stars that shone over Cambodia.

Henry cannot even conceive of their experience. He cannot even imagine trying. He cannot imagine anyone in his family, or even community, trying.

But someone does, and the result jars two hemispheres.

When those two worlds collide, Henry is forced to think about a world where money and power and tradition and prestige do not insure happiness and immunity from Trouble. Trouble comes anyway, and it is powerful, and threatening, and almost overwhelming. In this new world, Henry must discover what those in the Cambodian community have known for a long time: That one lives with Trouble near the door, and no matter how thick the door or how strong the lock, Trouble is still there.

For Henry to understand this new world — or at least to learn that he has to live in it — he leaves home and travels up the coast toward Katahdin. He had intended this to be a lonely pilgrimage, but he is joined by two unlikely others, who are themselves facing Trouble. Together they journey to the mountain, and there they hope to find something, anything, that will show them some sort of clarity in this new world. What they find is, of course, quite different from what they had imagined. Henry heads up toward the Knife Edge on Katahdin, never knowing that Trouble is following, that Trouble carries a shotgun, and that the shotgun is the least of his worries.

Introduce one other author/illustrator you think people should read, and suggest a good book by him/her.

For a novelist who isn't read much anymore in North America — though he still remains very popular in Europe — I'd recommend Giovanni Guareschi. He wrote a series of novels about Don Camillo, beginning with *The Little World of Don Camillo*. They focus on a small town in Italy after World War II, in which Don Camillo governs the church, and Peppone, the Communist mayor, governs the town. That first novel stays on my desk whenever I'm writing. It is, for one thing, the funniest book I have ever read; I rarely laugh out loud during a reading, but with this novel, I cannot help it. But it's not only a comic read; the book is laced with powerfully poignant scenes of belief and doubt, faith and despair. Life, the book suggests, is a constant mix, with the unexpected at every turn. That's something I want to explore as well.

Offer a favorite sentence or passage from another writer.

Here's my favorite line from a novel: "Reader, I married him." It comes from Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, and is the line opening the final chapter. Finally, finally the two have come together, and Jane has come to Mr. Rochester on her own terms: The sentence says "I married him," an assertion of Jane's own identity and purpose.

What is your favorite literary first line?

Here's my favorite opening line from a novel: "Call me Ishmael." This is the opening of

Moby Dick — which is very far from being my favorite novel. Very, very far. But I love the opening. I love the assertion of the person, and the sense of command. (Is his name really Ishmael, or does he just want us to call him this?) I love, too, the rhythm Melville gets: the book opens with three stressed syllables in a row; it demands that we pay attention.

How did the last good book you read end up in your hands?

The two last good books I came upon, Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy* and Edward P. Jones' *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, both came to me on the recommendation of a colleague. I held the Hansen for a time, since it did not seem to me the kind of book that I was eager to begin. The cover alone put me off. But once started, I was caught by the concreteness of his vision, and of his language. On the Jones, one only need read only the first page top become hooked. That's all. No one can put down work by someone who writes like this.

What was your favorite story as a child?

My favorite stories as a child came from a collection of books edited by Olive Beaupre Miller, named *My Bookhouse* — the title coming from the fact that the books were marketed literally in a wooden house. There were six dark volumes, and they showed that wonderful Edwardian sense that you could, in an anthology, bring together all of the world's wisdom — which meant, in 1929, mostly British wisdom. The books introduced me to N. C. Wyeth's illustrations, to the Norse myths, to James Fenimore Cooper, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Browning, Longfellow, Whittier, and tales of faerie, of myth, of British fantasy and history, and told of a world where anything was possible. I still remember the smell of the pages, even the texture of them.

Name the best *Simpsons* episode of all time, and explain why it's the best.

I think I may be the only person in North America to believe this, but here it goes: I don't think *The Simpsons* is all that terrific. Sorry, but we are who we are.

Gary D. Schmidt is the author of the Newbery Honor and Printz Honor book *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*. He is a professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Powell Books, *Kids Q&A*, Retrieved on 8/24/2011 from:
<http://www.powells.com/kidsqa/garyschmidt.html>

Discussion Questions

1. “Is it possible for everything to change, and for nothing to change?” (p.14) How does everything—and nothing— change for Henry and the Smith family? Have you ever had a moment that felt like it could define your family from then on? How difficult is it to define yourself after an event like this?
2. Discuss Henry’s relationship with his parents and siblings. How does the accident complicate them? Would you consider Henry and Louisa close? Do you think Henry was close to his brother, despite his cruelty sometimes? How do each of them react to the tragedy?
3. What does the arrival of Black Dog do for Henry and his family? How important are pets in your own life? What purpose do they serve people? How do people serve animals?
4. Compare Blythbury-by-the-Sea to the town of Merton. How do these two places complicate the tragedy? Do you think that people would have felt as strongly about pressing charges if Chay had been a typical kid from Longfellow Prep? Should Chay have been charged with leaving the scene of an accident or not? Why?
5. After a storm, Henry and his mother discover a wreck in Salvage Cove. Why do people take such an interest in ship wrecks? What does Henry eventually discover about the ship and come to realize about his family and Trouble?
6. Why do you think the author decided to tell Chay’s story at the end of chapters? How does it add to the conflict and suspense of the novel? How long did it take you, as a reader, to develop empathy for Chay? Why?
7. Why does Henry decide to climb Mt. Katahdin? Is he trying to prove something? Why is Mt. Katahdin so important to him? If you could do one last thing with someone you lost what would it be? What happens en route to the mountain?
8. How are the acts against the Chouans regarded by the community? Why is the arsonist considered a hero who served justice? Do you agree? Why do you think the two communities dislike each other so much?
9. What does Chay know about his own parentage? How does it change everything for him? His parents expected disappointment because of it. Does that make disappointment inevitable? Are family secrets ever justifiable?
10. Describe the Cape Ann Coastal Invitational. How does Henry perform during it? Why? Do you think he deserves to be dropped from his position on the team or not? Would you be able to concentrate under similar circumstances?
11. Discuss Henry’s friendship with Sanborn. How does Sanborn prove his loyalty to Henry? Is the way the two boys tease and thump on each other typical of their age and sex? Do you think male friendships are quite different from female ones? How?

12. Discuss the following quote: “There was no need for any words. A heart that has lost knows every other heart that has lost. Late and soon, loss is all the same.” (p. 221) Do people who have suffered a great loss have an affinity? What other things do you think people recognize in each other?
13. The privacy of family is weighed against the public right to know. Who has jurisdiction for the truth of public events? How is this issue of public knowledge and privacy rights revealed in the tragedy, the shipwreck, and the arson? How do you think it would feel to have the public looking in on your family’s private matters?
14. As the novel unfolds, the reader learns not only Henry’s story but also the stories of Chay, his family, Sanborn, and Louisa. Do you think everyone has a story that makes him or her sympathetic? Why do you think the author decided to tell Chay’s story as well as Henry’s?
15. Explain Chay’s reaction to any police officer. Is this because of the guilt he feels for his previous acts, or because of his past in Cambodia, or simply the result of him being a minority in this country? Do you fear or try to ignore the police in your community?
16. What happened to Chay and his family in Cambodia? How did they survive the ordeal? Does it remind you of any other historical or contemporary atrocities? What can be done to help displaced families?
17. Describe what happens between the boys and the fishermen in the diner and out in the woods. Do you think the racism Chay faces is typical? How open to immigrants is your community? What happens to Henry?
18. What revelations are made about Chay, the accident, and the wreckage in Salvage Cove? Which one surprised you most as a reader?
19. In the end Henry decides, “The world is Trouble . . . and Grace. That is all there is.” (p. 331) Do you agree? What does he mean by this? What are examples of trouble and grace in your own life?

Courtesy Houghton Mifflin