

Getting to Know... *NJ* Bracegirdle



My childhood...

I was born in Montreal, Quebec. For the first few years, my family lived out in the suburbs, but then moved to the city to be closer to the hospital and the high school where my mother and father worked.

I skipped Kindergarten—or was rather put into Grade One after a couple of months of refusing to colour or sit in a circle, both of which I thought were ridiculous. I became somewhat of a loner, I have to admit. At least until high school, that is, when I first became a New Wave dude, and then a fully-fledged punk rocker. I made lots of great friends with silly hair then.

Where I went to school...

I can't remember the school in the suburbs very well, but I went to Willingdon Elementary School, and then Westmount High School. Westmount High is where singer Leonard Cohen also went. He is super famous. That's why I'm namedropping him here.

Where I live now...

I live in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce in Montreal, about four blocks from where I grew up. I left for four years however, which I spent in Scotland. It was amazing. Edinburgh feels like my second home.

My Family...

My wife is Susan Mitchell, an accomplished children's book illustrator. I met her back in 1989 when I was working in Scotland for the summer. Back then, she wasn't illustrating books, but drawing pictures on chalkboards for pubs and restaurants. She was working on one in fact when we met. We have a son, Ewan, who is about to turn fifteen. We live above my sister, her husband, and my two great nephews. I also have two wonderful nieces in Scotland, whom we visit every chance we get—in fact my character Joy Wells is based on one of them.

My favourite books for kids and young adults...

His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman really blew my mind and made me realize just how much scope and depth there can be in children's literature. I also like lots of popular writers like Neil Gaiman, M.T. Anderson, Suzanne Collins... The list goes on.

My favourite author...

You know, I don't really have a favourite author. Or a favourite color, favourite movie, chocolate bar, or vegetable. Variety, variety, variety! That's what I enjoy in life.

My favourite book by me...

I suppose SINISTER SCENES, the third in my trilogy THE JOY OF SPOOKING, is my current favourite. It made my wife cry at the end, so I think it's doing the job I originally set out to do from the very beginning. I'm also really excited about the latest book I am working on, a book for teenagers that is completely mind-bending. It's a secret for the moment though.

The space where I work...

The space where I work can be described in one word: 'HALLWAY'. Unfortunately my wife had first dibs on the studio. But I also work at a cafe in the neighbourhood a lot. I refer to the table at the very back corner as my 'man cave' and complain to the staff whenever it's occupied. They just laugh awkwardly and hand me my coffee.

My other jobs...

Other jobs? Heavens, no! Not unless loafing around has finally been recognized as a profession.

Something you didn't know about me...

I have recently become obsessed by ukuleles. Utterly obsessed! Previously I liked guitars but now they just seem like they are trying too hard...

How I got involved in children's books...

Interesting story! After getting laid off back in 2002, I decided I never wanted anyone to have power over my livelihood again. So I decided to force my wife into becoming a successful children's book illustrator. Once so established, I then tagged along with her to few lunches with important people down in New York City and cleverly steered the conversation towards how great I was at writing and stuff. Crafty, huh?

My favourite things about writing for kids...

Kids can't be bothered with books whose only purpose is to be clever. So right there, I'm happily off the hook... But they do want stories: rich ones full of interesting characters and action. I love the challenge of providing such excitement while saying something meaningful about life—which, let's face it, can be bit of a mysterious mess.

What I do for fun...

I play a lot of ukulele lately, as I mentioned. Growing a novelty moustache has been a big distraction this year. I'm sure I'll come up with something equally ridiculous next year.

My advice for aspiring writers and artists...

Don't worry about useless things, like whether or not angels are this year's vampires, or whether editors are buying more steam-punk than dystopia. Work on your own voice and your craft, making your writing and/or imagery as simple, as beautiful, and as powerful as possible.

How I get from idea to finished product...

I just keep hammering away, having breakdowns, and having breakthroughs. Then, hundreds and hundreds of hours later, presto: it's finished! More or less, that is.

Where I get my ideas...

In my experience, good ideas are usually quite shy whenever you go looking for them, so I just try to relax and trust that when my head is truly empty, one will slip in.

What influences me...

I think everything influences me: what is good about people, what is bad about them, what is ugly and what is beautiful. Books, movies, TV shows, video games also influence me, as well as music, which is an almost magical conduit to imagination and emotion.

Ways in which I hope I may have changed the world...

Hmm. I think the world is so enormous that you really have to get an awful lot of arms and legs and backs working together to ever change anything in a big way. Saying that, whenever I see someone struggling with something heavy, I try to help them out as best as I can. And whenever I do anything stupid or mean or small, I always make sure to say I'm sorry. To a lot of people, always being right is the most important thing—but I believe that admitting when you're wrong is the single biggest change a person can make in this world.