

Steven Kellogg - About the Author

Picture this: A young Steven Kellogg and his wife invited to lunch by Maurice Sendak. Among the other guests in the select gathering are Ruth Krauss and Crockett Johnson. "I was in the pre-dawn of my career," recalls Kellogg, "and she was in the late afternoon." The young and hopeful picture book illustrator reveled in the "wonderful conversation" of the afternoon. At the conclusion of that magical meal, the great Ruth Krauss left with this parting wish: "Steven, I hope one day you and I will do a book together."

Forty years later, her hope has been fulfilled as Scholastic published *And I Love You* by Ruth Krauss and Steven Kellogg. The idea of pairing the two came from Editor Grace Maccarone just after Steven completed *If Ever I Go to the Moon*. Steven remembers the editor saying that she had something different that she hoped would interest him. The illustrator was bewitched by Ruth Krauss' "tender and wise" text. "Big forests/love little trees" begins the journey and Steven found "an enormous field to explore and illuminate" as he celebrated "the magic of story" in his illustrations.

Yet inspiration came from other sources as well. Steven happened to see a documentary about Jane Goodall and was struck by her statement that in her experience--both in her field work and her life--all love comes from the love of a mother for a child. "It's the most powerful force in nature," affirms the artist.

The "big" and "little" of the text became a mother and a kitten. "One generation nurtures the next: This is the cycle that the text celebrates," explains Steven. He also acknowledges the brilliance of his editor. "Grace asks subtle questions that help the author and illustrator bring out the best in themselves—thanks to her support, the book took some turns that it might not have taken otherwise." And because of the generous nature of Ruth Krauss' text, "there was lots of room for subplots and themes that relate to the power and beauty of words."

In looking over Steven Kellogg's extensive catalog of work, it is no surprise that many of his protagonists come from the animal world just as they do for *And I Love You*. "I think there is such an affinity between ourselves and our natural world," he comments. Fans of *Pinkerton* will note that *Pinkerton* is still very much a dog rather than an anthropomorphized being. The ever-curious Kellogg cites a recent episode of the PBS series *Nova* on the relationship between dogs and people. The canine-human connection goes back much further than originally believed, even to the extent that it is theorized that one could not have existed without the other. "Animals enrich our emotional vocabulary," says the Great Dane whisperer.

Steven Kellogg's ability to express feelings through his art is both celebrated and undisputed. Some of his earliest memories center on his sisters asking him again and again to create what they called "stories on paper." "It was deeply satisfying," muses the artist.

One thing that does concern him is the "destructive fascination" children have with money. Any author who visits schools knows that one of the first questions asked is bound to be a variation on a theme of cash. Steven has an answer ready for them that he hopes will make them think: "I am lucky because I have a job I love and I make just enough money to make my life happy." He goes on to add "I'm glad I don't make too much."

When Steven Kellogg was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design fifty years ago, he might not have envisioned his venerated status in the world of picture book art. However, he was one of the very first students at RISD to participate in a European study program. RISD recently hosted a reunion and celebration of the program and Steven was asked to participate on a panel on the future of the book. At a time when even

picture books seem to be leaping into a virtual existence, Steven Kellogg has faith that the traditional book and the e-book can co-exist. “The book is a perfect technology—it has qualities that new technology cannot duplicate. It is also the perfect introduction to so many art forms.” In addition to growing an appreciation of art and language, he also likens the picture book to theatre. “With every page turn, kids are making associations and predictions.”

Perhaps that is why Steven Kellogg thinks of libraries—the places that house these thousands of theatres—as “noble, beautiful spaces that belong to us all. There is something so magical about that.” As an artist who can create an entire world in a single spread, Steven Kellogg knows magic.

Ruth Krauss would be proud.

-- Interviewed by Ellen Myrick, December 2010

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