

# May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture Thirteen Studios

David Macaulay

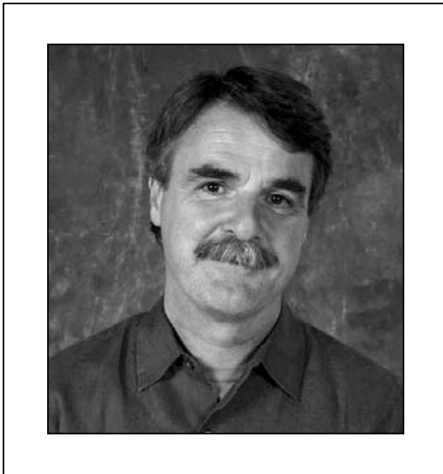


Photo courtesy of Houghton Mifflin.

*David Macaulay is the author/illustrator of many children's books, including the popular *The Way Things Work*. He received the 1991 Caldecott Medal for *Black and White* and was a 2006 MacArthur Fellow. He delivered the 2008 May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture on April 17, 2008, in Madison, Wisconsin.*

Before embarking on the creation of this little paper, I did what we all do under pressure: I procrastinated. I strolled around the corner from our house and my studio, down the alley behind the inn, and into Dan and Whit's, the local legendary general store, home to everything from plumbing supplies and crocks to digital thermometers and sushi—"If they don't have it, you don't need it"—and bought six fourteen-ounce bags of peanut M&Ms. As usual, I chose the pink bags, the ones that increase awareness of breast cancer. Might as well be doing something good for someone else's body if I'm going to abuse my own.

I've been consuming chocolate for as long as I can remember, with or without peanuts—although "with peanuts" somehow seems marginally less sinful, like drinking red wine instead of white.

I returned with my sacks of treasure, avoided the dogs whom I knew would insist on being walked, and sprinted up the stairs to my second-floor work space. I sprinted because I knew that in a matter of seconds I would be able to pay off, at least temporarily, whatever energy debt I had incurred with my little journey. I carefully poured the contents of all six bags into the large jar my enabling children had given me on Father's Day. After finding an extension cord for the computer, I placed the jar on the sofa and cuddled up next to it, ready at last to gather my thoughts.

I didn't always prefer the peanut variety.

Both *Mill* and *Ship* were completed under the influence more or less equally of "peanut" and "plain." Halfway through *Mill*, I began tacking the empty bags to the ceiling that sloped over the drawing board. I'm an inveterate collector, and what's the good of building a collection if you can't display it?

For the past six years, I've been completely immersed in the creation of a book on the human body—a subject about which I knew nothing when I started, which is the primary reason why I started. In the fall of 2006, after four years of learning as much as I could squeeze into my head and still with no

end in sight, Deborah Stevenson called to tell me I'd been selected to make "a significant contribution to the field of children's literature" in the spring of 2008. As she talked, I did some hasty calculations, realized that tonight was at least a year and a half away, thanked her, and went back to the drawing board.

While I have on occasion tried to figure out how to pronounce "Arbuthnot," all my days and far too many nights since then have been devoted entirely to human anatomy, physiology, neuroanatomy, and cell biology. For the last two years this has meant working seven days a week. I finished the last piece of art for *The Way We Work* about six weeks ago and immediately began making corrections, mostly minor, to both art and text. I still have a few to make.

Fear not however. For the past ten days, and in an attempt to justify your presence here, I've been scrambling to prepare even an insignificant contribution to the field of children's literature. For a while I thought I'd concentrate on the process I'd just survived, but my fear of turning this evening's program into either a therapy session or an outright sales pitch has caused me to shift my thinking slightly. I decided it might be more useful to put the body book into some kind of larger context, a career for example—my own in fact.

While assembling the bits and pieces has been quite a nostalgic journey, it's also been somewhat frustrating. I can't believe how much I can't remember. I've been back and forth over my résumé, the copyright pages, and through my sketchbooks trying to reconstruct as accurately as possible the sequence of events that has led me to Madison.

Since I can barely figure out the timing and order of things I did a week ago, you can imagine the challenge presented by the twenty-nine years that preceded work on the body book. I'm not sure how much of the history I will describe tonight is based on actual facts or on facts I've invented during my years of making presentations, facts I've come to trust because they either get a laugh or help tell a good story.

But then again, that's history, isn't it? A combination of facts for which there is reasonable evidence and areas of cement to hold the facts together. In the end, of course, the usefulness of the history depends on who's choosing the facts and the quality of the cement. I can't wait to read the history of the last seven and a half years—for two reasons. First of all, it will mean that the endless parade of obscene abuses performed by a barely credible marionette and his band of sinister puppeteers can at last be addressed in the past tense, even though their deeds will haunt the lives of our children for years to come, and secondly, just maybe seeing it all laid out will help me understand how they got away with it for so long. Fear, as FDR reminded us long ago, is a powerful force and we've seen it used masterfully.

Where was I? Trying to make sense of my own little history and to distinguish the facts from the cement. I don't suppose it really matters, but I still can't figure out exactly when I produced *Angelo*. I've been back and forth over the various calendars and there just hasn't been enough time and yet I know it exists. I have a copy!

Anyway, I was making serious headway through the contents of the jar before I first began to notice the growing list of places in which I've worked while producing what I am fairly sure will remain my primary contribution to the field of children's literature.

Thirteen studios in thirty-five years may not be unusual, but it's certainly inefficient.

Let's face it; that's a lot of packing between books and increasingly of books, since with each project I invariably acquire a new library. Now when I say studio, I mean dedicated work space. I'm not including the kitchen tables, dining room tables, or any other surfaces I may have commandeered while first tiptoeing toward illustrative waters way back in the mists of time.

There are many ways of choosing a career, but none as liberating as receiving a diploma with your name misspelled. My bachelor of architecture degree has a

name on it almost identical to mine. Even as I tried to figure out how I was going to explain the slip up to my parents after five years of paying tuition, I found the error both amusing and entirely appropriate. By my fourth year, I was already beginning to entertain serious doubts about my commitment to the profession for which I was being trained. And by the end of my fifth year, which I spent in Rome, the question was no longer whether I would become an architect but rather what would I do instead.

After graduating and while searching for whatever might be next, I was gainfully employed as a junior high school art teacher, a challenge for which I was totally unprepared, and as an interior designer. It was during this time, the very early seventies, that I first became aware of the field into which I would one day be asked to deposit a significant contribution. I came across books by Etienne Delessert, Tomi Ungerer, and Maurice Sendak, as well as the work of Milton Glaser, and I was fatally smitten. Not only did I love what I saw, but they seemed to be having so much fun. This appealed to me. So powerful was their influence that many of my earliest attempts at illustrating were often bad imitations of their work—so bad, in fact, that you would not recognize them as imitations—which has served all five of us well.

Although I drew a lot in high school, mostly to show off, and later at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) to learn how to see, my first attempts at something approximating illustration included a menu cover for a Chinese restaurant and an accompanying newspaper ad, three album covers, and lots of sketchbooks filled with ideas.

From these bits and pieces, I was able to extract something resembling a portfolio with which I somehow finagled a job illustrating a series of books for young readers, which, thanks to May, I now consider my own "Dick and Jane" period. Frogs, flying elevators, a hole in a tent, three guys in a sieve, I drew all sorts of things to accompany the blocks of oversized text. And the only restriction was that all the illustrations had to work with, within, or at least acknowledge the

existence of a unifying grid—a hint of architecture—which I actually enjoyed.

These books gave me my first opportunity to combine words and pictures both in terms of content and as elements on the page and then to consider the pages in sequence, and I was paid for my efforts. Earn while you learn. It was a perfect opportunity. And best of all, in a burst of what can only be described as pure common sense, the entire series was scrapped before it ever saw the light of commercial day, leaving my nonexistent reputation intact and my *tabla* very much *rasa*. On a more personal note, because the job had paid the rent, my wife reluctantly agreed that perhaps my decision to give up my interior design job to concentrate on illustration hadn't been such a reckless and irresponsible thing after all.

But as invaluable as the experience was, these were not the kind of picture books that inspired me, the ones I wanted to illustrate. Since I had little interest in writing my own text, I began asking friends to write for me. I was perfectly happy to make pictures, all the while hoping that one day I would see my name on the cover of a book I didn't own. The first story I illustrated from cover to cover was actually written for me by my interior designing boss Morris Nathanson. It was the story of Maxwell, a boy with a remarkable gift for drawing. As I finished each picture, I cut up the typed manuscript and with rubber cement, glued it into the space I had left for it. The finished pages were then slipped into plastic sleeves so that the entire thing could be read as a book. Years later, I realized why Maxwell had not been snapped up by a publisher. It wasn't until I came across *Harold and the Purple Crayon* that I saw we had basically created the colorized version. The fact that it was three times the size and would have been ten times the price probably had something to do with their reluctance.

Another friend who gave me stories to illustrate was glass artist Mary Shaffer. She exhaled more stories in a minute than I could come up with in a lifetime. *Little Miss Rabbit*, for instance, was burdened with very long ears and sought advice on her problem from all her woodland

friends. She, like Maxwell, soon had her own thirty-two-page book. And over time, through the plastic sleeves, I was able to witness the science experiment that is what rubber cement does to white paper. By now I was so absolutely hooked on the process I even came up with a couple of ideas of my own. The first, a fable about the resilience of nature featuring, of all things, a rainbow, grew out of my fledgling awareness of pollution, strip malls, fast food, plastic, the military, and the politicians inevitably responsible for all of the above.

In those days, if you had a book idea, you looked up the number of the closest publisher and made an appointment to deliver the good tidings in person. The first voice of Houghton Mifflin's children's book department I learned to recognize over the phone belonged to Melanie Kroupa. Eventually, I heard it in person as every few months she declined one of my classic offerings, including *Maxwell*, *Little Miss Rabbit*, and believe it or not, the rainbow story. She did so, however, with great sensitivity and always left the door open for the next idea, which turned out to be the inspirational story of a gargoyle beauty pageant.

But things didn't unfold exactly as I had anticipated. After looking over the sketches and story line, Walter Lorraine, who worked with Melanie and ran the children's book department, came back to what was undoubtedly the "excuse" for this implausible tale in the first place—a drawing of a half-finished gothic façade towering over a medieval city. He pointed out that while there was plenty of fantasy around, there wasn't much for the average young reader on building cathedrals.

I was confronted by a seesaw. At one end of it, solid and unflinching, sat rejection, while at the other perched possibility. For those of you more scientifically minded, think mammoth and villagers. But once again, the seesaw was level. It could tip either way and it was up to me. And that's how I found myself being invited into the world of children's books through, of all things, architecture. A day or so later I was in the RISD library and came across a book called *The Construction of Gothic*

*Cathedrals: A Study of Medieval Vault Erection* by John Fitchen. I read it and was amazed by it. It was full of detailed drawings showing how medieval builders probably assembled their towering structures. What it didn't do was use perspective to make the reader feel like he or she was actually there, nor did it offer any unifying story line. I saw my opportunity and immediately fired all but one of the gargoyles.

Two months later, I was back in Boston with a whole new set of sketches and this time Walter and Melanie were smiling. Six weeks and a thousand-dollar advance after that, I was on my way to France for a face-to-face encounter with the cathedral I had chosen from photographs.

Incidentally, that contract for *Cathedral* was made out to the same guy who had graduated just three years earlier from

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RISD. But since architecture had now crept back into the mix, I let the discrepancy slide and deposited the accompanying check.

While Melanie somehow escaped Houghton Mifflin before the battlements of my castle were finished, Walter remained to build what may well be the best backlist in the business. And it has been Walter who over the last thirty years has answered the phone many times to hear me say, "I'm going to be late . . . again. I think I can get it done for next fall."

For me, deadlines are crucial, even when I miss them, even when I miss them more

than once. You know what people say about inspiration. A lot of this so-called creative process stuff has to do with simply working every day until you're done. Without deadlines, I wouldn't always be able to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

*Maxwell*, my "Dick and Jane" series, *Little Miss Rabbit*, the rainbow story, all the sketches and most of the finished art for *Cathedral* were produced in one room of a small third-floor apartment in Providence, Rhode Island. Most of the space beneath the sloping ceiling was occupied by a huge wooden drafting board on an adjustable, though not particularly portable, cast-iron base. The surface of the board was filled with thumbtack holes from years of use before I got it. Along with the table, and equally heavy for its size, came a slightly worn upholstered swiveling stool. This space was studio number 1.

*Cathedral* was written in a kind of blissful ignorance, "What did I really know about book making?" and it was well received—both an exhilarating and slightly unnerving way to begin a career. Walter and I were in a taxi in New York having attended some kind event in honor of my fledgling effort when he turned and asked what I was going to do next. The fact is that Roman city planning was the only other thing, historically speaking, about which I remembered much from school.

*City* was produced in studio number 2, the apartment downstairs into which we and our new baby moved the moment it became available. Ah, the lure of vertical walls. I don't really need much space for drawing—the truth is no matter how big my drawing board, once I start working, my tools close in around me. My actual work space is ultimately defined by my reach, and I have short arms. Next to a drawing board, vertical walls are the most important surfaces a book maker can have. On the drawing board, I produce one thing at a time. But on the walls, I can see how they all go together. This is true from the earliest sketches to the finished art.

I sensed even back then that a truly successful book has a lot more to do with

how images work together than how they stand alone. Even so, I spent far too much time trying to make one perfect drawing after another. To this end, after drawing on tracing paper, often for days, I would transfer the final sketch onto a piece of expensive three-ply paper. I would also put down my easy-to-handle, completely submissive markers and pencils and move to the time-honored and fiendishly frustrating medium of pen and ink. How else could I become Maurice Sendak? How else could I make “serious” art? It took me a very long time to shake those old counter-productive habits. Every illustration from *The Way Things Work* is on three-ply Bristol. Every illustration from *The Way We Work* is drawn on the same nonarchival crappy tracing paper on which all of the preliminary sketches had been developed. And with very few exceptions, very little of the finished art is outlined, and absolutely none of it was done with a dip pen.

Studio number 2 was a corner room with lots of light and a spider plant. With baby in the next room, however, I decided to wear headphones while I worked. Using a fine dip pen called a crow quill, I drew several views of a growing colonial Roman city in excruciating detail while listening to Simon and Garfunkel. I remember the selections because I couldn’t adjust the volume on my reel-to-reel tape deck, the only audio equipment we had that took earphones. So I traveled with the boys full blast as I scratched my way hectare after hectare across the imaginary Po Valley landscape.

Things must have been going well enough because after a few months we were able to buy our own house right in the middle of the city’s East Side. I set up shop at one end of the third floor—sloping ceilings and all. I don’t think we ever used the other rooms up there. *Pyramid* and *Underground* were born in what became studio number 3. Both books went down to the wire, leaving no time for cleaning up along the way. Besides a couple of bookshelves, the only other pieces of furniture to join the drawing board and chair were a yellow plastic tabouret to hold all my supplies, and during *Underground*, a small television so I could watch Dorothy Hamill.

*Pyramid* afforded me the opportunity to visit Egypt, climb the great pyramid, travel to Luxor, Aswan, and even Abu Simbel, but it didn’t offer much in the way of creative challenge, or at least I didn’t let it. The formula for those early architecture books was pretty much set, and I just plugged in bald-headed workers and palm trees where previously there had been togas and pines. I must have been feeling that it was time to shake things up a little because, for the next book, I changed not only the kind of subject but the format and even added a second color.

Unlike the other books, which relied heavily on what other people had written, much of *Underground* was put together from conversations with people who actually work underground. Of the first five books, it remains the most satisfying to me.

By the time I reached the end of *Castle* and simultaneously my first marriage, I was pretty much a wreck. The excitement that had accompanied much of my first four years of book making, and had also allowed me to ignore my personal life, was gone.

In terms of creative challenge, *Castle* was *Cathedral*, just closer to the ground and with much smaller windows. Ironically, it was also a Caldecott honor recipient. I would have gladly traded that silver medal for a second chance at my marriage, but life doesn’t always work that way. So, confronted as I was by the inevitability of new things in my personal life, I decided to follow the same tack in my professional one.

I’m not good at vacations, but occasionally they are thrust upon me. Of course you may define vacation differently, but for me it is having the opportunity to do something different. Judith York Newman, an architect and gallery owner in New York City, offered me a show. She wanted to exhibit and sell some of the drawings from the first five books. Since I wasn’t ready to sell them and didn’t know whether I ever would be, I offered instead to make an entirely new set of drawings that would have nothing to do with a book. The exhibition was to be called *Great Moments in Architecture*

and would feature anything but. The drawings were all done in pen and ink with lots of crosshatching, always a big selling item for a couple of reasons. First of all, the “Gee whiz” factor, “How do you draw all those lines?” and secondly it gives them an automatic credibility, a historical weight, which in this particular case could only heighten the absurdity of the content. Once the drawings were done, however, I saw the possibility of cranking the joke up to eleven.

Why not combine all these images into a serious-looking art book?

For the first time, I worked with the grownups at Houghton Mifflin and specifically Austin Olney to produce the book named after the show. It had three sections, Plates, Drawings, and Studies, and each image was carefully numbered and labeled. The entire oeuvre was prefaced with a suitably pompous and generally incomprehensible piece of text written one evening over wine by my friend Kevin Barry and me.

Incidentally, for those of you keeping score, both *Castle* and *Great Moments* were produced in studio number 4—my between-marriages, wall-to-wall carpeted, charm-free apartment. I remember the carpet because it became my display wall since the real ones were way too smooth to dare blemishing with push pins.

Plate VII, called “Roman wall painting, 115AC, AD 200,” depicts a fragment of Pompeian wall painting in the little-known eighth style and shows both a natural scene and a duplex outlet—also painted. I originally called it “Roman wall painting from the Motel of the Mysteries, AD 79.” But something about the title appealed to me, so I withheld it from the book and let it rattle around in my brain. I also remarried and moved into studio number 5, another third-floor space under a sloping roof, attached to an entire house that soon had a new baby in it.

I was still, professionally at least, on vacation, and so it turns out was King Tut. He was visiting a number of American cities in his very own blockbuster show. As we received catalog after

catalog of Egyptian-looking coasters, ties, bookends, furniture, cufflinks, etc., all produced to help offset the cost of the exhibition, I was also wandering around the country, speaking in schools. In both hotels and motels, I began to observe some of the nationally shared traditions that make us feel at home wherever our travels may take us.

The inevitable yet mysterious point at the end of the toilet paper, the stainless steel racks into which towels, wadded up under huge pressure, were somehow wedged. With images of Tut and of course Howard Carter dancing in my head, and “sanitized for your protection” straps wrapped around the toilet seats, it wasn’t long before a story, or at least a collection of ideas, began to emerge. *Motel of the Mysteries*, that free-floating title, soon had a home.

From this studio also came *Help? Let Me Out!* written by my friend David Lord Porter. It was my first real book in full color. *Unbuilding* was next, followed by *The Amazing Brain*, and finally *Mill*. But desperate once again for vertical walls, I packed up my drawing table and carted it off to a cold and drafty factory space on the other side of the city. In studio number 6, inspired by the election of a second-rate actor to be president of the United States, I went to work on my most lighthearted book to date, *Baaa*. I’ve always been more optimistic about the past, but still I couldn’t imagine how things could possibly get any worse.

This black-and-white picture book was published once again by the adult division of Houghton Mifflin but reviewed as a children’s book because it had so many pictures and sheep are cute. Of this book, Judith Viorst, writing in the *New York Times*, said, and quite rightly so, “I would not give this book to a child I loved.” The story line was cobbled together from notes scribbled on a hotel message pad. In my generally depressed state, I’d been thinking about making a series of drawings of popular places around the world, all of them deserted and with a haunting de Chirico kind of silence.

But it was actually a loud noise that got the ball rolling. I was awakened in the middle of the night in a hotel somewhere

by some idiot who’d gotten his room mixed up with mine and insisted on trying to kick the door down until he was dragged away to the correct room. I couldn’t get back to sleep and so began devising a story line that might explain those well-known empty spaces.

The earliest sketches for my next book, one which would involve the interactions of mammoths, logs, rocks, and cave persons, were also done in studio number 6.

It was finished, however, in a narrow two-story building a few miles south of Providence, in the town of Warren. With its ornate false front, studio number 7 appeared to have fallen out of a Western movie set. *The Way Things Work* was a brilliant idea, and I can say that with complete humility because it wasn’t mine, nor did I recognize that brilliance at the time.

In 1983, I was having dinner in London with my friends Linda and Christopher

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Davis. Linda ran the children’s book department at Collins and was responsible for first bringing *Cathedral* and *City* to the United Kingdom. Christopher, who had named my motel “The toot ‘n’ come on,” was part of a successful London packaging operation called Dorling Kindersley (DK). He asked if I would be interested in joining them in the creation of a book about machines that had been requested by a German book club. I don’t know whether it was the idea of working with a team—I’d become such a one-man band by this time—the scale of the project, or the subject matter, but in any event, I declined.

A year later, DK had matured from packager to publisher and they were planning to produce *The Way Things Work* on their own. Christopher asked me again if I’d be interested in joining the team along with Neil Ardley and David Burnie, neither of whom I knew. Perhaps it was just later in the meal, I don’t know, but this time I said yes. Over the next four years, I made frequent trips to the Covent Garden offices of DK and worked through my jetlagged haze to learn about four hundred pages worth of machines.

Neil, who wrote the text, seemed to know everything about everything. David served as project editor. Both of them patiently taught me what I needed to know to produce accurate and hopefully engaging pictures.

A word or two on drawing . . .

One way of really getting to know something is by drawing it. The act of drawing forces a person to really look at the subject matter, to understand it inside and out. This kind of drawing may or may not have anything to do with making art, but it has everything to do with learning.

To make sure that no one, child or adult, is truly left behind, all avenues to learning need to be open and available. Whether through drawing, writing, or performance, a person can eventually be lead by his own growing enthusiasm to science, mathematics, history, or whatever it is he might need to know. My career is the proof.

One of the many wonderful slogans to emerge from Washington over the last few years in lieu of sensible policy comes from the National Endowment for the Arts. They apparently believe that a great nation deserves great art. Like all slogans, it sounds terrific until you start to think about. What defines a great nation? What exactly is “great art” and why does one “deserve” the other?

Without going into it too deeply, doesn’t this slogan at least imply that a country that cares about its citizens will teach them not only how to recognize art, great or otherwise, but more importantly how to use it, and then maybe even how to make it? And wouldn’t this require, let’s

say, “art classes” in all schools?

By the time I left studio number 7, I had also made *Black and White, Ship, Shortcut, Rome Antics*, and *The New Way Things Work*. It was a highly productive period marred only by the collapse of my second marriage somewhere along the way.

Although I didn’t realize it until it was finished, *Rome Antics* is not only a love letter to Rome, the city in which I will always feel at home even though I barely speak a word of Italian, but also a love letter to my third and final wife, Ruthie. I don’t learn the important things quickly, but I do learn them.

While still living in Warren, we bought a severely neglected 1848 carpenter Gothic cottage in the adjacent town of Bristol. When we finally moved into this house, after almost a year of construction, we sold the Warren house and along with it studio number 7. I moved into a large sunlit space in the Herreshoff museum just a short walk along the water from our new house and set up camp in studio number 8. Here I pulled together *Building the Book Cathedral*, a twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of my first book, and created *Building Big*, a companion book for the PBS show of the same name. To get it done in time for the airing of the show, the entire thing had to be written and illustrated between February and early July. We were on press by August, and I was signing copies of the book in early October. Even more astounding than the highly compressed schedule are the facts that Donna McCarthy, the production goddess at Houghton Mifflin, was still speaking to me, and I was still happily married.

Studio number 8 turned out to be a little too sunny, so I converted the three-car garage behind the cottage into studio number 9. Part of it for me and part for Ruthie so she could work on her jewelry without burning down what we had so painstakingly restored. There, I somehow produced *Angelo* and then began work on the body project. I started to assemble the necessary books, charts, and models. I read and sketched every day, excited by what I was learning, but increasingly aware of the size of the

task I’d taken on. I was just beginning to make a little progress when September 11 happened.

Suddenly, it seemed far more important to learn something about the culture from which that handful of fanatics had emerged than it did to explain digestion. On September 15, I called Walter and told him I thought it was time to go back to the architecture books and make one about the building of a mosque—and not just a mosque, but all the buildings that went with it—the school, the soup kitchen, the baths, and so on. It was the most logical contribution for me to make, and I felt that even this one little book would be more useful than all the saber rattling. The ink on the body contract was still wet and that book would now be delayed for at least a couple of years. But I didn’t hesitate to propose the change. Walter has always put the convictions of his authors ahead of corporate constraints, so he agreed, and I was off to the library and to Istanbul.

A year and a half later, it was back to the body, and, not surprisingly, I’d forgotten everything I’d read before September 11. So to make this project even more challenging, we moved again. Not once, but twice. We loved our house, but it did have two minor drawbacks. The front door was about twenty feet from a busy road and the back door less than a hundred yards from the waters of Narragansett Bay. As our children became increasingly mobile, we became increasingly fearful that they would either be flattened or drowned.

The first move took us about half a mile to a house on a wider but much quieter street closer to the center of town. It came with a large grassy yard surrounded by a high hedge and sidewalks. Thanks to the forgiving nature of the lawn, bike riding was mastered the first day and in no time the kids were off meeting and greeting a host of new neighbors. We never loved this house, but it was the right move. I gave up my garage and moved back into a third-floor space, sloping ceilings and all. [It was] toasty in the winter months and really toasty in the summer.

Working in studio number 10 was basically drawing in a sauna. As you finished

each drawing, you peeled it off your arm. But summer heat wasn’t the only problem. As I cranked out sketch after sketch trying to get to grips with body material, I was increasingly frustrated by the lack of vertical wall space and storage space in general.

So I moved into a vacated real estate office near Bristol harbor. Studio number 11 had two plate glass windows and a leaky roof, neither of which I needed, but it also had a long uninterrupted wall. Very few people knew what was going on in that corner space. A guy drawing body parts would have seemed all too appropriate behind the stained gauzy curtains that acted like one-way mirrors during the daytime. I could see out, but no one could see me, or my frequently unshaven face, or the various anatomical models and scattered bones. This was just as well when I stop to consider the clients of the ice cream parlor next door.

I continued reading and sketching, day after day, week after week, but I was becoming increasingly worried about where I was going and whether or not I would ever understand enough to confidently produce a book. I was not alone. My wife was worried, my parents were worried, and a whole group of people at 222 Berkeley Street in Boston were worried.

As my advance for the body book dwindled—not surprising since the book was already two years behind schedule and would take another two at least—I gave up studio number 11 and moved back to the house to save on rent. This time, however, I landed on the second floor in what became studio number 12, and moved the kids upstairs. They didn’t seem to mind sloping walls.

By this time, I had been introduced to Anne Gilroy, a clinical anatomist at the University of Massachusetts in Worcester. Without knowing exactly what she was getting into (how could she? I didn’t!), Anne offered to advise and guide my efforts. I took her anatomy course and watched her eager med students dissecting in the lab below. Thanks to Dana Andersen, chair of the department of

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## MAY HILL ARBUTHNOT LECTURE, continued from page 15

surgery, I also attended a couple of major operations. For one, a pancreatectomy, I stood against the wall for about seven hours and tried to absorb not only the process but the colors and textures. My slowly dwindling energy level was not helped by the smell of barbecue created by the necessary cauterizing of countless blood vessels before the pancreas and spleen could be safely removed.

I also discovered, in the school's store, a wonderful book called the *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, and on the bottom shelf, almond M&Ms (small bags only). Unlike *Gray's Anatomy*, which I think is written for people who already know everything about the body but like heavy books, *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, all fourteen hundred pages of it, is written by scientists who really want people to know how cells work. Although I found the book incredibly accessible, I have not been able to locate larger bags of almond M&Ms.

Over the next couple of years, Anne and I would meet every few months, usually on Saturdays. I'd lay my sketches out on the floor and around her dog and whine about not knowing enough, about never knowing enough. All the whining and worrying that happened in between these meetings was tolerated with remarkable patience by my dear wife even when it seeped out on our increasingly less frequent date nights.

By this time, our kids were both in the early years of private school, chugging along a somewhat rarified and increasingly expensive path. Ruthie and I, both products of public school, decided for educational and practical reasons to enroll them in the best public school we could find, but it had to be in a real town and not a suburb. So, with the end of the book still nowhere in sight, we headed north. Norwich, Vermont (also known as 1950), is part of the school district that includes Hanover, New Hampshire, and therefore Dartmouth College.

Needless to say, education is pretty much a priority. It's a one-industry community

after all. We take the fact that the kids are generally off around 7:30 in the morning for the very short bike ride to school and don't have to be there until 8:15, as a sign that we made the right decision.

Studio 13 is a large airy space attached to the house. A two-minute walk from Dan and Whit's [General Store], five minutes from the bookstore and post office, seven from the library, and ten from the school, and directly over Ruthie's studio so coffee and conversation can be easily and frequently shared. It also happens to be the finest work space I've ever had. Vertical walls, windows with a view, and plenty of storage.

With the kids all sorted out and an ideal work environment to play in, the only thing now complicating my ability to concentrate on the book, besides the subject matter, was the fact that we hadn't been able to sell the house in Rhode Island. Since we'd been clever enough to buy it at the height of the market, we now had two hefty mortgages. It was empty, which required more expensive insurance. And it was heated by oil, which is like attaching a vacuum cleaner to your bank account and leaving it on.

I wondered if Sisyphus had ever found time to illustrate.

By mid-summer of 2006, and still just settling into Vermont life, I approached Houghton Mifflin about the possibility of finding an experienced writer to work with me. I had learned a lot by this time, and with Anne's help had even worked out a reasonable flow for the book, but I still lacked the confidence, not to mention the time, to produce both the words and the pictures single handedly.

By November, through various connections, they had located a fellow with a PhD in Biology and a string of accessible body books to his name. Richard Walker was hiding out in London, minding his own business and completely unaware of the Wagnerian opera that had become my life. Although we had never met, he knew my work and was intrigued

enough to shelve a couple of contracts and join me in the campaign. It was absolutely the right decision.

Roughly sixteen months after our first meeting in Boston, and much to everyone's great delight and enormous relief, the book was finished. And incredibly, I think it works, and this October you will be able to judge for yourselves.

At the moment, studio 13 is more or less clean and quiet. The jar is empty, my books are shelved, and even my toy soldiers are finally unpacked and on display. But the calm, though much appreciated, is only temporary, and the next six-year adventure is already beginning to take shape. How could it not be and how could I not welcome it? This life is simply too much fun.

My thanks to Deborah Stevenson and her committee for selecting me in the first place.

To Shawn Brommer and everyone at the South Central Library System for bringing us together in Madison.

To everyone at Houghton Mifflin, whose names I have not mentioned but without whose help over the years I wouldn't be here.

Also my thanks to the independent booksellers who actually know books even when the computers are down.

To all those teachers who know that real learning comes from asking questions, not from checking off standardized answers.

And finally to the true guardians of homeland security—the dedicated librarians—who fight ignorance and fear with information and protect freedom through their commitment to literacy.

We're all in this together, and there is so much to be done.

Thank you. ☺