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“Publishing’s peculiar little beast”
FIFTH PAW PRESS



The Fifth Paw Press Interview with Author Jon Bozak

FPP: What motivated you to write *Demo: The Story of a Junkyard Dog*?

Jon: Dogs, both real and fictional, have always played an influential role in my life. As a kid, I adored Snoopy and read the Peanuts comic strip religiously. Charles Schulz captured so much of what makes dogs fun and fascinating. When Schulz passed in 2000, I thought it was a great loss for everyone, especially kids. I wanted to step up and create a decidedly modern canine character that would appeal to today’s more complex child. Most importantly, I wanted to give readers a unique hero to root for.

“*Demo is a book we want kids to return to many times, as each time they’ll uncover more to the story.*”

FPP: You’ve based the character of Demo on your real-life dog of the same name. Why?



Jon: Because I’ve found his ability to take the worst of situations and rise above them inspiring. I rescued Demo over 12 years ago from a scrap yard where the owner cared so little for him that when the scrap yard closed up, he left Demo behind. Demo’s tough looks scared people away but once I heard about his situation I went down and grabbed him. From the start he was a big mush – probably why the owner left him behind. He’s been the best dog I’ve ever been around. The interesting thing is many people have been intimidated by his appearance over the years, which brings out some pretty extreme reactions on their part, but never a change in his happy-go-lucky attitude. I thought there was an interesting story in that. What happens when we place too much value on appearances – and nothing on what lies beyond them? What’s the effect of making decisions based on misinformation? From there *Demo* the book was born.

FPP: The book has a rather rich story, with many layers. Are you worried it’s too advanced for kids?

Jon: Not at all. We ran focus studies with an extensive online community of parents and their children as the book went through its final stages with our editors. What we came away with was that a lot of kids around 7-9 are bored with the content of picture books out there – they craved more story, but still wanted the excitement of pictures. We weren’t surprised that kids enjoyed the challenge of a deeper story and parents relished the opportunity to see their kids embrace the activity of reading. *Demo* is a book we want kids to return to many times, with each reading they’ll uncover more to the story. For really young kids it’s a bold adventure about a heroic underdog but for older kids it’s a layered story with topical life’s lessons that they can take forward as they grow older.

“*We weren’t surprised that kids enjoyed the challenge of a deeper story and parents relished the chance to see their kids embrace the activity of reading.*”

FPP: So, you think children today are more complex than when you were young?

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The Fifth Paw Press Interview with Author, Jon Bozak

(continued)

Jon: Oh, absolutely. The world today is far more complicated and so are our children. The stimuli that kids encounter nowadays are infinitely more varied than when I was young. I just had books, network TV, and I played out in the yard for fun. Today's kids have *everything* at their disposal. They're so wired into technology and the wealth of information that comes with it, it's mind blowing. They're more savvy to the world around them than my generation ever could have been.

“ Recycling possessions and giving abandoned animals second chances is important in this day and age.”

FPP: Let's talk about the artwork – it's *amazing*. Scott's illustrations really stand on their own.

Jon: I can't give Scott and his art enough compliments. He captures so much of the emotion and personality of each of the characters, and his background details are spot-on. It's very important, as you said, that the pictures draw readers in and tell the story on its own, especially for our youngest readers, which again is about appealing to a wide age-ranged audience.

FPP: Add to that audience pet lovers of all ages?

Jon: Having an abandoned dog as your hero will do that! There're over 45 million households in the US with at least one dog in it, and a good number of those were adopted from a shelter or rescue. **Demo** is about a dog that's been thrown away, basically, and for pet owners who are 'recycling' homeless pets, it's a story that speaks to them.

FPP: That recycling theme runs throughout the story.

Jon: We live in a throwaway society. The town in the book, Newton, is full of people who spend all their time shopping and then throw it all away without a thought. Everything is disposable to them once the newness is lost. When Demo's appearance scares them they want to dispose of him too, because it's all they know how to do. I want to show how connected it all is. Recycling possessions and giving abandoned animals second chances is important in this day and age and I really believe it's important that kids be taught that.

FPP: What are your hopes for **Demo: The Story of a Junkyard Dog**?

Jon: Honestly, I just hope that it inspires kids to see how much fun it can be to take a second look at the world around them. Many details can be missed the first time around but if they dig deeper they can uncover so much. I hope that there's a boy or girl who reads the book and wants to carry their own message forward in a book or project of their own. It's a cycle – Snoopy inspired me to create the character of Demo, perhaps **Demo** will inspire a kid out there today.

FPP: That'll certainly keep with the recycling theme!

Jon: Bingo!