

MAX'S SCOUT GUIDEBOOK

An illustrated children's book about one Guinea Pig Scout's quest to find his Owner and earn his Pet Badge.

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December 13, 2011

Autobiography

My name is Christine Grove and I am a Master of Fine Arts candidate at Academy of Art University. My concentration is in traditional illustration. My undergraduate degree is in Communications and I have held various jobs while freelancing on the side. Upon commencement I plan to further pursue children's book illustration, paper product and greeting card illustration, licensing, establishing an online shop, and teaching at the collegiate level. I am currently working on my first children's book Esme's Egg with Red Robin books, a small independent UK book publisher. I have a true passion for the illustration industry and am particularly children's illustration. One of the things I enjoy the most is creating characters with a lot of personality and vulnerability. It's important to me that my illustrations appeal to both adults and children and that audiences can relate to and believe in them. I currently have an established online presence through my website www.christinegrove.com, blog and other social media. I am in the process of revising my site design and will be including an online shop, as well as defining what illustration services I will be offering. I operate under this philosophy: Pursue what you love with tenacity and bravery.

Stay the course. Our circumstances do not have to define who we are and how far we go but can propel us to be something greater.

Synopsis

I chose to create a children's book titled Max's Scout Guidebook. I wrote the manuscript and created 15 illustrations, including single and double page spreads, in an 8 x 10 format. I worked on this thesis project over three semesters and have achieved my goal of 15 finished illustrations for my final project.

Idea Exploration

I wanted to create a book that was both fun to read and fun to look at. One in which the illustrations offered a kind of secondary information on their own. I liked the idea of a scrapbook-type journal, which evolved into a scout's guidebook. This format would allow me to use the manuscript as text but also add information in a visually interesting way. The secondary text (hand painted part of Max's guidebook) would help tell the story on another level. I let the idea germinate for a bit and decided on a guinea pig as the main character. I chose a guinea pig since it is a common pet for a child, both cute and vulnerable in size. My goal was to create the main character (Max) that would reflect that vulnerability and infuse him with personality. As the idea of the story

developed I decided to tell the story from the pet's point of view. The scout guidebook would document Max's search for an Owner. The guidebook format gave me the opportunity to pursue my initial concept, a book that told a story on multiple layers. The book would be the actual guidebook, would include the manuscript of the story as read aloud text, and would allow me to add pieces of Max's journey along the way. Max would treat his guidebook as a sort of scrapbook. It would give the eye a lot of variety to look at and give the reader the feeling that he or she was holding Max's actual guidebook. I felt it would allow the reader to connect even more with my concept and manuscript. I felt that the combination of creating a vulnerable and relatable character as a common childhood pet and creating the book in a guidebook format would lead to a successful final product.

Creating the Characters

Creating the characters is the part I most enjoy. My goal was to create Max as an irresistible and loveable character, one that would make the reader want to join him in his illustrated world. I wanted the reader to identify with him and his dilemma and see a glimpse of themselves in him. Cleverly designed characters and books have the amazing ability to

allow a reader to transcend their own circumstance via their imagination. Max is a character who has been left out of a group he very much wants to belong to. And he sets out on a journey to make this happen. This sense of wanting to belong is felt by everyone at some point, but I think can be particularly strong with young children as they make their way in the world. The scout guidebook empowers Max with tips and information he can use along the way. And is a sort of record of his journey. I began sketching Max using reference pictures of real guinea pigs on the Internet, as well as observing our own family pet guinea pig. I pictured him as quite a round fellow, smaller than the rest of the group and almost always dressed in his scout uniform. I did quite a few character sketches during my first semester's directed study, creating character pages of Max in different poses as well as other guinea pigs that could be part of his scout troop. Max initially looked too cartoon for my liking. As I continued to sketch and paint I learned a lot about color temperature and using the paint to create form. This gave Max more of the illustrative quality that I wanted. I also tried different combinations of media. For one study, I did four examples of Max: colored pencil line and watercolor, ink line and watercolor, Micron ink pen and watercolor, and a combination of colored pencil, Micron pen

and watercolor. I settled on the latter. I painted different color uniforms and sketched different uniform styles. I used reference pictures of boy scouts from the 1930's and 40's since I really liked the look of the vintage uniforms. The more I sketched and painted the more I got to know Max and the more alive he became. In the second part of my directed study I created a model of Max in clay. He evolved even more during the third and last part of my directed study as I became more comfortable drawing him and thinking of him in terms of a real thing. At this stage I was able to ask myself questions like "How would Max stand here?" or "How would Max react to this, what would his expression be?" and predict the answers.

Developing the Book

Developing book's best format, or environment was an important part of the book's process. The format went through several revisions. The basic concept (a scrapbook-type journal format) stayed the same but how to express that became refined. In my directed study I learned about the hierarchy of information in a book and how to present it. This was important to this project because of the text and subtext and other information that was included. I needed to give the reader a clear

picture and eliminate any confusion by presenting the material in an organized way. In the initial stages of developing the environment Max looked as if he had jumped into his scout guidebook. He was scaled down in size to fit on a guidebook page. My directed study advisor suggested I place the illustrated guidebook at an angle as background rather than shrinking the main character. This worked better and seemed less confusing than my initial idea. We also discussed printed text vs. hand drawn text for the scout guidebook's information. The scout guidebook subtext is secondary and a hand drawn look was necessary to show that. On the book's pages the manuscript is in type. This shows the reader the correct words to read to tell the story. We also discussed not having each page look the same to visually break up the story. Therefore, some of the illustrations look like the scout guidebook and others do not. The process also involved creating thumbnail sketches and drawings that showed the flow of the book. This led to the creation of intermediate sketches. At this stage my advisor asked me to print my sketches at 60% and tape them to sheets of paper as a visual map for me. This gave me a more detailed quick-take of the story all at once. When it was time to move to the final illustrations I sketched the intermediates onto hard-pressed watercolor paper using

the light through my window as a light box. Initially I was asked to paint first and do the line work second. This way was opposite of how I usually worked. I did this on a couple of finals but then switched back to my normal way of working. It went faster and placing lines first gives me more control of the illustration. All of the final illustrations were completed and text was added.

Artistic influences

I feel like creating compelling and believable characters should a priority when illustrating children's books. Therefore, I gravitate towards illustrators that are able to show this quality in their work. One illustrator is Lynn Munsinger. Her line work alone has so much character to it. She has a refined style that I very much admire. Her characters are humorous and captivating. The majority of her characters are animals. Her style allows for a lot of personality and she does an excellent job of giving them human qualities. Emily Gravett is another illustrator that creates adorable and vulnerable characters. She uses different graphic elements in her books as well as hand drawn illustration to present the material in an unconventional way.

Challenges Faced and Overcome

My initial challenge was organizing my idea in a way that would allow me to create a successful final project. My concept needed to be refined in order to create the vision I had of a scrapbook-type scout guidebook. I wanted to create “extras” or tchochkes because I enjoy looking at such things in books myself. I feel they add a lot of visual interest to a story. I learned about hierarchies of information and how to organize the story with the text and subtext along with my illustrations. I believe this knowledge allowed me to create a more organized and less confusing final project. Another challenge I faced was perfectionism. I tend to be very critical of myself and learned some techniques to overcome this. My advisor told me to set a time limit to my initial sketches so that I had 20 minutes to complete one. He also suggested I write out an overly positive affirmation and tape it somewhere where I’d be able to read it daily. Perfectionism is something that will likely always be there but recognizing it, putting it into perspective and applying those little exercises make it more manageable.

Reflection on the Final Product

I learned a lot through out this process. One of my goals was to get a solid idea about what was involved in creating a children's book. This process gave me a taste of that. I have a better understanding of all of the "background" work that goes into the book-making process. I also got to know the main character very well. I have a good understanding of Max's personality and am very comfortable drawing him. I feel like the book is organized well and is understandable. This book format is something I want to continue to explore and refine. This particular concept could be expanded on and applied to other projects as well.