

Bob Staake

Female Speaker:

From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Jennifer Davin:

This is Jennifer Davin at the Library of Congress. Saturday, August 30th will mark the 14th year that booklovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, D.C. to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival, which is free and open to the public, will hold evening hours for the first time ever this year at its new location, the Water E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. Hours will be from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. For more details, visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. And now it's my pleasure to introduce author and illustrator Bob Staake, whose latest book is titled "My Pet Book," published by Random House. Bob, thanks so much for joining us.

Bob Staake:

Jennifer, thank you so much.

Jennifer Davin:

Bob, you designed the frankly wildly popular poster for the National Book Festival this year. What gave you the idea for the man in the moon staying up late with a good book, and how did that emerge from idea to finished art?

Bob Staake:

Wildly popular, I love that. You know, the thing is, what I -- I liked it as an author and a creator, I like to work off of a concept that someone has. So when the Library of Congress said the idea is, stay up late with a book, right?

Jennifer Davin:

Yeah.

Bob Staake:

My first thought was like a moon, and you know, can we find a way to go ahead and have a moon reading a book? That was like the first thing that came to mind, and it was just so obvious, and it just made sense, so --

Jennifer Davin:

How long does it take to put something like that together? Were there many takes and many revisions of it?

Bob Staake:

No, I mean, it's one of those things where it's like, you know, I mean, I do a lot of sketches a lot of times, but you know, I kind of know from the beginning what's going to be a -- what's going to work, what isn't going to work. It's like when I do a New Yorker cover or something like that, it's like, you know, I may do 12 different sketches, but I know that this is going to be that cover, you know?

Jennifer Davin:

Uh-huh.

Bob Staake:

And the same thing with the Library of Congress poster. It's like, well, you know, I really want to play off of the moon thing. And I kind of knew immediately, so I'm glad that, you know, people like it.

Jennifer Davin:

You've done a lot of art for kids of course, and also a lot for adults. You mentioned your New Yorker covers, which are quick well-known and popular. Are there big differences in the way you go at art depending on who it's aimed at, or would you say that art is art, and it basically depends on what the viewer brings to it?

Bob Staake:

I really think it's the latter. I mean, what you say -- I mean, I like to create art that would not exist were it not for the reader, whether that's the child, the adult, the grandparent, whatever, looking at that image. I like to create art that would not be fleshed out were it not for the adult or child or whoever, going ahead and saying, you know, "I see a hieroglyph here," and you know, "there's something deeper here." And they can breathe something into the experience. They can look at the entire image and bring their own knowledge of what has occurred in their life, and find some way to go ahead and flesh it out. That's what really intrigues me most about, you know, really good, communicative art.

Jennifer Davin:

Sounds fascinating, and I know that, you know, looking on your website, I've looked at a lot of the different art you've done, and you can tell it's your art, but it's all -- there's a great range to it. A lot of it is very different, one thing from another.

Bob Staake:

Right.

Jennifer Davin:

Tell us about your latest book, "My Pet Book."

Bob Staake:

Well, "My Pet Book" is -- well, it's really a story about, you know, I just basically sat it down one day and I thought, you know, my kids wanted to, you know, they had been pressuring me to get like a dog or a cat. And I said, no, it's too much of a hassle. And then, and I kind of thought about, you know, what can you have that would be like a really hassle-free pet?

[laughter]

Bob Staake:

And I sat there and I thought, you know, a book, why not? Why not a book, you know.

[laughter]

Bob Staake:

So, the idea is this child goes into a bookstore and he can't possibly pick out any book, any single book that would be great, but he sees a frisky, red, hard cover, and --

[laughter]

Bob Staake:

-- that became his pet right there. And of course his mother and father love this idea, because, you know, you never have to walk it, you never have to, you know, take it out at night, clean up after it, blah, blah, blah. So -- but I love that sort of stuff where I can, you know, create like an image in my head. And I had this image of a kid walking down the street with a book on a leash. I just thought that's a fun image.

[laughter]

Bob Staake:

So can I go ahead and write a story about this? So, that's what I did.

Jennifer Davin:

Well, I'll say this, every year at the book festival for several years now, we've had somebody come to the LOC Pavilion with a cat on a leash. Maybe this year somebody will show up with a book on a leash. [laughs]

Bob Staake:

Really? This is a -- it's a book about people who love books. What's not to love, right?

Jennifer Davin:

Mm-hmm, sounds good to me. To move to one of your other art forums, you were the talent behind one of the most iconic covers of the New Yorker that ever was put on it, and that was the full moon shining over the reflecting pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial right after President Barack --

Bob Staake:

Right.

Jennifer Davin:

-- Obama was elected. Talk about that a little bit. There's -- I know, a lot of people have ordered that apparently to hang on their wall. It really struck a chord with people.

Bob Staake:

Well, I mean, very, very kind for you to mention that, because it is, I think, at the end of the day, it's like that is going to be the image that I'm going to be most known for, even though it's a most anti-Bob Staake image that I've ever done, because it looks like a photographic image of the -- with a memorial. But it's basically, you know, the Lincoln Memorial, with the New Yorker logo at the top, and the ubiquitous "O" for Obama, and the logo on top.

Jennifer Davin:

Mm-hmm.

Bob Staake:

Basically, breaking down from Obama to the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln Memorial, down to what looks like the bars of slavery in the reflecting pond.

Jennifer Davin:

Yeah.

Bob Staake:

It was one of those images where, you know, I mean, you know, I came up with the idea, gave it to the New Yorker, and they just said -- you know, I kind of knew immediately that was going to be the cover. They called back in like 10 minutes and said, "That's the cover. You've got, you know, five hours to get it done."

[laughter]

Bob Staake:

I work fast.

Jennifer Davin:

Yeah. Well, it really is, when you see the representation of it, I guess you can go to your website and see this cover, if you haven't got it hanging on your wall already. But it's really quite lovely, and it's a night shot, of course, with the moon, so it's got that extra kind of mystery about it.

Bob Staake:

Well, I mean, I lived in D.C. I mean, I, in the 1970s, I interned at the [unintelligible] Memorial, studying student press -- Student Press Law Center, Bushmond and Reichsburg [spelled phonetically] for high school and college journalists, so I mean I really know the city, and I love the city. So I know those views of -- all over town, so --

Jennifer Davin:

On that note, sort of, you know, life as an artist, do you have any words for any of our listeners who might be thinking of art as a career?

Bob Staake:

Well, you know, I don't say -- I don't like to -- it's only -- I just -- you know, I can tell you right now that there's a fine line between, you know, you liking to write, liking to draw, and liking to paint, and you know, finding a market for it. Boy, I would love to say something as simple as, you know, be true to yourself, and do that, but it's a lot of hard -- it's really a lot of hard work. You really have to know your art, because you have to know -- you have to really basically create a market for yourself. I think I've been very fortunate, you know, I've kind of, you know, I've done a certain thing, but I've kind of been able to go ahead and branch it out into a lot of different areas, but always finding a place for me in the marketplace. And I'm just so happy that, you know, that I can do everything from magazine work to newspaper work to advertising to children's books to animation, and whatever. I mean,

I'm very lucky to have that sort of diversity, because otherwise, I would be bored.

Jennifer Davin:

Well, it's good words of advice, and I guess the bottom line on that would be, if this is really what you want to do, think broad. [laughs]

Bob Staake:

Well, I mean, you know, love what you do, you know. I mean, be forceful as far as, you know, your commitment to it, but also be realistic. I mean, look at what the marketplace is bearing and, you know --

Jennifer Davin:

Okay. I got similar advice from my dad, who I followed into journalism earlier in my life. He said, you'll never get rich, kid. You notice I'm not still a daily journalist, so --

Bob Staake:

Well, but, you know, but, you know, you love writing stories, right? You love reporting, right?

Jennifer Davin:

Yeah, I've gotten --

Bob Staake:

You love telling a story, you love looking at a situation and just telling that story. That's a very noble thing, it's a wonderful, noble thing. It's not compensated the way that it really should be, but that's a -- you enrich all of our lives by writing stories about what you see happening in the world.

Jennifer Davin:

Well, I got --

Bob Staake:

It's a really noble thing.

Jennifer Davin:

-- I got lucky and got to come to the Library of Congress where I still get to write sometimes. [laughs] So, I'm not unhappy --

Bob Staake:

Well, [unintelligible].

Jennifer Davin:

-- not unhappy with the outcome. We've been hearing from author and illustrator Bob Staake, who will appear on Saturday, August 30th, in the new Picture Books Pavilion at the National Book Festival at the Washington Convention Center. Bob, thank you.

Bob Staake:

Thank you so much. It's been great to be here.

Female Speaker:

This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at
loc.gov.

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