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Published by Clarion, 2009

Writing THUNDER-BOOMER!

I love thunderstorms! Living in the Midwest, there are often great storms that shake our old farmhouse. I love the noises a storm brings. In the spring of 2003 I started work on a book about a thunderstorm and a farm family. (2003 was a great year for thunderstorms here in Michigan.) The book, after all its editing, and illustrating came out in May of 2009. 6 years from start to finish . . . that may seem like a long time and I know there were many months that I waited impatiently to see the results. However, when I think back to the very first scratchings on paper of a number of my books, the time frame was about average. Each step is interesting and, of course, a writer doesn't just wait out each step. He or she is busy writing new books.

The actual writing of this book was a lot of fun! And in some ways, very different from other books I've written. The book is written in verse and it started out very terse—terse verse.

Part of the job of a picture book writer is to peel away excess verbiage to get to the elegant, simple story. I thought I'd start out short with this one. And guess what? They asked me to expand it—to expand the line and form! Rarely do we writers get asked to do that. This meant the process was almost the reverse from how I've written my other picture books.

Below is the first very terse version (only 295 words). At about half-way through editing the process I had one version in which the lines were longer at the beginning and ending, and short in the middle to resemble a storm moving in from a distance and then moving off again. But my editors thought it needed to be longer yet. The final story ended up being a little over 1200 words (counting the sounds I'd created for the illustrations). I ended up adding almost 900 words! That's long for a picture book, but I love how melodic the lines are now. It reads well aloud, and I hope you enjoy it! Moms and dads read it out loud to the family.

Read this first version and compare it to the book. Which do you prefer?

Thunder-Boomer! (1st draft)

Ah-h-h, a breeze!

Um-m-m, feels good . . .

Wind kicks up.

Cold rolls in.

Birds sweep past.

Corn stalks bend.

Anvil-headed

cloud above.

Tractor's off.

Barn door's shut.

Feathers fly.

Chickens penned.

(All, but one who runs off.)

Thunder-boomer's

moving in.

Z-s-s-s-t!

Lightning flash!

Yank the clothes

off the line.

Thunder roars.

Cr-a-a-ck!

“Stop that, Scooter!”

Oops! Too late.

(Wind whips shorts away.)

Rumble-brum-brum . . .

Hurry, Dad,

grab that hen.

Rain is here.

Down it pours!

Maizey grumbles,

“Squawk!”

storm’s no fun.

“Run, Dad, Run!”

Z-s-s-s-t!

Cr-a-a-ck!

Dad is drenched.

Soggy shoes.

Rumble-brum-brum . . .

Squish! Squish! Squish!

Maizey slides.

Mother’s shouting,

“Shoes by door!”

In the house,

windows slammed,

flashlights found.

Scooter hides

Z-s-s-s-t!

behind Mom's back.

CRA-A-A-ck!

Storm is here!

Z-s-s-s-t!

CRA-A-A-ck!

Rumble-brum-brum . . . brum . . . brum . . .

Z-s-s-s-t! Rumble . . . BOOM!

Gusting rain

pelts the walls.

On the roof

branches bang.

What's that whipping

through the air?

"Underwear!"

Z-s-s-s-t!

CRA-A-A-ck!

Comes the hail.

Bouncing hard;

all around.

Loud—Ping! Pang!

Rumble-brum-brum . . .

Thunder-boomer's

sounding off.

Ping! Pang!

Ping-ping!

Z-s-s-s-t!

Rumble-brum-brum

PANG! Ping . . . ping!

Then . . . a . . . hu-sh.

Wind dies down.

Ping!

Rain plip-plops;

storm's . . . worn . . . out.

Maizey's happy,

Scooter, too.

Rumble-brum-brum . . . brum . . .

Sun comes out.

Chickens loosed.

Scooter runs.

"Hey!" we shout.

"Scooter's dragging

Dad's best pair!"

"Give it here!"

(Dad chases after shorts.)

"Run, Dad, Run!"

Then we hear,

By the porch,

A quiet sound.

. . . c-o-o-w . . . o-o-w . . .

"Cluck!"

(Maizey finds him.)

Something's huddled,

Cold and wet!

“Gentle, now.”

“Dad! Come quick.”

“Dry him off.”

Kitten found!

PUTT-UM-BOOM-BOOM . . . PUTT-UM . . . BOOM

Little thunder?

Needs a name . . .

“Thunder-Boomer!”

Thunder-Boomer’s

moving in!

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