

Press Release

For immediate release

January 18, 2021

Edmonton author pens two timely children's books

Stories explore themes of courage, resilience, empathy, and mindfulness

Edmonton, AB—The past few years, and notably the past few months, have revealed that Alberta is not immune to issues of race and prejudice. In addition, research has shown that empathy is generally declining in young people. It is against this backdrop that Edmonton-based author Darrel Gregory has published two new timely children's books. Each book explores themes that are relevant and important for kids today.

Genny Faces the Green Knight—the first book in the Genny & Bug's Big Adventures series—features a black female protagonist who encounters the powerful Green Knight in her imaginary adventures. In order to defeat this fierce nemesis, Genny will not only discover courage she wasn't aware she had; she will tap into something even more important—resilience. Along the way, she displays a high sense of empathy, as she wants more than anything to help Queen Guinevere and her people.

Kirkus Reviews describes it thus: "An adventure celebrates imagination and courage with entertaining verve."

And according to *Foreword Clarion Reviews*, "In Darrel Gregory's middle grade fantasy, *Genny Faces the Green Knight*, a girl with a great imagination has an exciting, make-believe adventure in medieval times ... more than once, she shares her fun and inspiring method for handling new and unnerving situations: she tells herself, 'Feet, get moving!' Inspiring themes, including of adventure, imagination, friendship, and courage, make her tale deeper and more memorable."

Gregory's other book, *I'm Not Very Good At It*, explores the simple but profound concept of mindfulness. Inspired by the teaching of Eckhart Tolle and other writers, Gregory shows children at a young age that they don't have to accept the messages they receive from their brain. Instead, they can turn off 'thinking' and listen to the wisdom of the body.

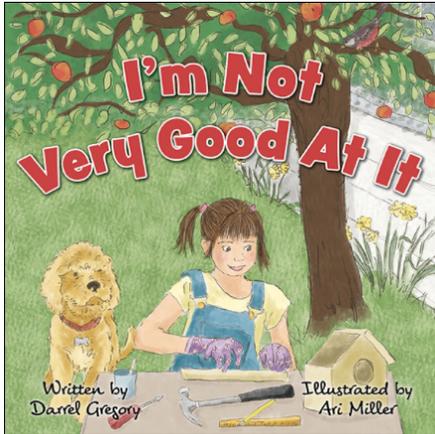
- 30 -

Interviews are available with the author and one or both of his grandchildren, aged five and three. More information about the author and the books is contained within the press kit.

Darrel Gregory
(587) 568-3843
darrelgregory@shaw.ca
dgregory.ca

The Books

High resolution images are available in The Press Room at dgregory.ca



I'm Not Very Good At It

A little girl, about four and a half, really did say to her mom one day, “I’m not very good at it” when her mom asked her to help make a birthday card. Would a two-year-old say that? A three-year-old? Who knows at what age kids start to hear that little voice sending messages of doubt, but it was definitely alive and well in that four-year-old.

On an abstract level, *I'm Not Very Good At It* is a story about achieving higher levels of consciousness, mindfulness, and potential. On a practical level, it's a simple but beautiful story that teaches children at a young age that they can tell that little voice to butt out. Instead, they can listen to or, perhaps more accurately, *feel* the wisdom of the body.

The young girl in our story realizes that there is joy in each task—in each moment—regardless of the outcome. There is joy in the “trying.” She also learns that her brain—thinking—is still required. How else would she know that she doesn't like broccoli? Ultimately, she learns the most important lesson of all—to be present in the moment and turn the brain on and off as required.

Finally, she learns one more lesson from her wise mother. She learns to be alert to the smallest of things, such as dandelions landing on grass. One can imagine that this trait serves her well throughout her entire life, as she becomes attuned to the beauty in the world around her.



Genny Faces the Green Knight (Genny & Bug's Big Adventures series)

The first book in the Genny & Bug series, *Genny Faces the Green Knight* sets the table with the main themes the author intends to explore. Primarily: courage, resilience, empathy, and emotion regulation. Secondly: the importance of ritual, saying 'yes' to the adventure (within the larger context of the Hero Journey), appreciation of the natural world, and collaboration.

Although ethnic diversity will not be explicit in the themes, the author is keenly interested in ensuring characters reflect Canada's diverse communities.

A theme of particular importance to Darrel in Genny & Bug is resilience. It's one thing to bravely don the mantle of courage at the start of an adventure. It's quite another when you've fallen and the outlook is grim and desperate. Darrel has witnessed this personally several times in coaching young athletes. Anyone can play with fire in their belly when they're ahead. When the game isn't going your way, children often get discouraged, souring the mood of the entire team.

When Genny falls, it's not enough for her to think she can get up and keep going. Thinking is never enough. It must be felt deep inside the body. Accordingly, when Genny needs to tap into resilience, there is a loud, vibrational thunder of some kind. Well, at least as much as there can be in a book. When Genny falls, she imagines the heavy pounding of a hammer forging a newly made sword. Boom, boom, boom! It vibrates through her body, from the tips of her toes to the hairs on her head.

What's Next for Genny & Bug?



Genny Saves a Sea Turtle

The arc of the Genny & Bug's Big Adventures series is structured to alternate between Arthurian and modern settings. Why Camelot and Queen Guinevere and the Green Knight as opposed to some other time or setting? Namely, the Grail legend. The Grail legend in King Arthur represented a deeply personal and unique quest for each knight. The legend says of the knights: "Each entered the forest at that point which he himself had selected, and where there was no trail or path, at its darkest point." Similarly, Genny will learn to forge her own path, as scary as it might be. But like all hero journeys, she will have her trusty companion, Bug, to help and guide her along the way.

In *Genny Saves a Sea Turtle*, Genny will tap into the courage and resilience she gained from her encounter with the Green Knight to save Maggie, a Loggerhead Sea Turtle, trapped in netting and garbage.

The Author



Darrel Gregory

Darrel spent most of his career in communications. Writing, planning, issues management—that sort of thing. For the past 15 years of his career, he was a director with a national health charity. Budgeting, strategic planning, performance management, donor relations—that sort of thing.

Then a strange, deeply unsettling thing happened. He woke up one morning experiencing a sort of Jungian crisis of identity. The big questions floated (although that hardly seems like the right word) through his consciousness. Who am I? What have I been doing? As Joseph Campbell might ask (whose work on the hero journey is the basis for Genny & Bug) is my nature (small ‘n’) aligned with Nature (the universe, consciousness, being, whatever you want to call it)? The answer to that last question was a resounding ‘no.’ He was a fraud and was living a lie. What else was there to do but quit his job? Nothing says “all in” quite like quitting your job and turning your life upside down. After spending the last five years of his so-called normal career in Calgary, he is now back in Edmonton, close to his children and grandchildren.

Darrel can be contacted at:

(587) 568-3843

darrelgregory@shaw.ca

dgregory.ca

Q & A

Where did the idea come from for *Genny Faces the Green Knight*?

For a long time I've been interested in Joseph Campbell's work on the hero journey. George Lucas was heavily influenced by Campbell when he created Star Wars. I adapted it and simplified it for children. The hero receives the call to adventure; the hero answers it; the hero undergoes tests and trials, the hero returns having gained certain boons i.e. knowledge, courage, resilience.

Another characteristic of the hero journey is the guide. The hero always has a helper. Since she was very little, my granddaughter had a plush toy bug. So basically, I wanted to write a story for her and my other granddaughter, combining the things that I was interested in.

But why the Green Knight? What's that all about?

The hero's ultimate task is to set out on a quest, to find his or her own path. By the way, Campbell said if you find a path before you, it's not yours. Your path is made with every step you take. That's why it's scary. You don't know for sure where it's going.

The ultimate quest is portrayed in the Grail legend, when King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table set out to find the missing Grail. It's said that the knights, when beginning their quest, entered the forest where they themselves chose, where there was no path, at its darkest point.

I've always found the story of the Green Knight, as part of Arthurian legend, fascinating. It's so full of magic and wonder. When Gawain undertakes this adventure and smotes the Green Knight's head clear from his body, only to watch the Green Knight pick it up and ride off, he knows he's in trouble. He has promised to meet the Green Knight one year from this day to bend his head and await a similar blow. Does he back down? Does he run? He doesn't. As he finds out, there's more magic and mystery at play than meets the eye. If Gawain can stay true to his adventure, his quest, is there a lesson there for all of us?

There's a part in *Genny Faces the Green Knight* where a hammer is pounding a sword on an anvil. What's that all about?

Just as trauma lives in the body, so too must courage, resilience, and our own heroic qualities emerge from the body. We must imagine these qualities and feel them. To "believe in yourself" is not enough. That's a function of mind. If we can imagine ourselves as heroes and feel it vibrate in our bodies, there's a better chance it will stick. So the hammer pounding the sword is an attempt to create a visceral reaction, as much as is possible in a book.

In *I'm Not Very Good At It*, the young girl claims that her brain is telling her she's not good at things. Do you think young children hear that little voice?

Let me tell you a little story. I was driving with my three-year-old granddaughter and she was singing. I asked her if she likes to sing and she said 'yes.' I said I like to sing too but I'm not very good at it. Her response was, "You mean you don't remember the words?" This was one of those wonderful moments that you just never forget. There was no concept on her part that I might self-judge. My older granddaughter, who was almost five at the time, actually did say "I'm not very good at it," when her mom asked her to make a birthday card. That hit me like a ton of bricks. I don't know at what point that little voice creeps in, but it certainly does in young children.

Are you suggesting that children should meditate?

All I'm saying through this book, at the very absolute minimum, is that kids can be aware that they don't have to listen to the noise their brains make, those little voices which are often not constructive. They are not their thoughts. Isn't meditation non-thinking? I don't want to put any labels on anything because that's where the trouble starts. I just want kids to be able to think (because we still have to think), "Oh, that's just my noisy brain. That's what it does. Don't pay any attention to it."

Reviews



Foreword Clarion Reviews

<https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/genny-faces-the-green-knight/>

A plucky girl sets herself on an imaginary quest in this fun fantasy for young readers.

In Darrel Gregory's middle grade fantasy, *Genny Faces the Green Knight*, a girl with a great imagination has an exciting, make-believe adventure in medieval times.

Genny is the narrator; she speaks to the audience, introducing herself and some of her favorite toys. Then, making use of her amazing imagination, Genny goes on an escapade in her mind. She daydreams about crawling through a magical tunnel; when she emerges from it, she sees Camelot.

In her new medieval setting, Genny encounters Queen Guinevere, who is in full armor. Guinevere reveals that the green knight is challenging her kingdom, but that no one feels brave enough to face him. Genny takes on the task. She is outfitted in full armor. With the encouragement of her ladybug friend, Bug, Genny fights the green knight, who admires her daring and strength of character. After she succeeds, Genny returns home and promises to undertake future adventures.

Exciting illustrations complement the story throughout. They depict the action and movements of all of the characters; among them, a fight scene is the most rousing image. All are colorful and realistic, with the exception of Bug's depiction; he is the same size as Genny and wears a red cap, and seems more like a cartoon character than others in the story. Still, the pictures convey as much of the story as the text itself, stimulating the imagination and encourage the audience to replicate Genny's creativity and make-believe play. Thus, even though Genny's tale is compact—the limited text means that some pages only contain a sentence or two—it has a strong impact.

Fonts vary throughout, helping some words to stand out; some sentences curve above the book's illustrations, becoming akin to illustrations themselves. However, the series title and the book title are confused on its cover because of the sizes of each and because of their placement.

Fast, tidy, and pleasing, Genny's narration is direct and repeats challenging words to help with retention. Also more than once, she shares her fun and inspiring method for handling new and unnerving situations: she tells herself, "Feet, get moving!" Inspiring themes, including of adventure, imagination, friendship, and courage, make her tale deeper and more memorable.

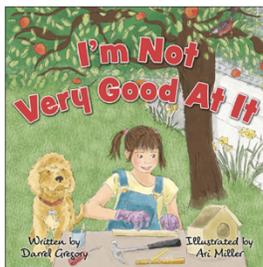


Kirkus Reviews

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/darrel-gregory/genny-faces-the-green-knight/>

An adventure celebrates imagination and courage with entertaining verve.

Genny, a young Black girl, loves going on pretend adventures. Wherever she goes, Genny always brings her favorite toy, a stuffed ladybug called Bug, as helper and companion. Coyote and Raven, two other toys, often show up and try to wreck things. Journeying in the world of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, Genny accepts a challenge from the Green Knight. He may be powerful, but “I am powerful, too,” says Genny. A fierce fight ensues, and although Coyote and Raven try to distract her, Genny gets help from a mysterious ally called Phoenix. After the two collaborators win, the Green Knight praises Genny’s valor, and Phoenix gives her a magical amulet that will call him when she needs him. In his book, Gregory tells a charming story that vividly captures the wild magic of imagination. Poetic images enrich the tale, as when Genny gets stronger “like a new sword pulled from the fire is made stronger each time the hammer strikes it.” Dialogue, too, is striking and effective. Duvenage provides somewhat stiffly modeled but varied, well-detailed pictures.



Kirkus Reviews

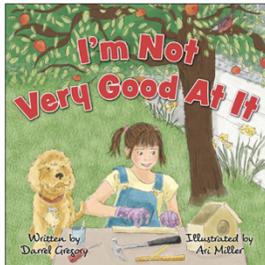
<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/darrel-gregory/im-not-very-good-at-it/>

Gregory’s picture book demonstrates ways kids can counteract negative thoughts.

An unnamed girl’s mom asks her to complete tasks, like making a card for her grandfather and baking muffins for school. Although the illustrations show her reticently partaking in the activities, the girl responds to her mother, “Okay, but I’m NOT very good at it.” When Mom (who is absent from the illustrations) asks why she feels that way, the child says, “Because that’s what my brain said.” Her mother implores her to listen to her heart instead, explaining “It speaks very softly, like dandelion seeds landing on grass....Your BRAIN might try to BUTT in, but don’t pay any attention to it.” The girl attempts to complete more tasks, but she tries to alter her immediate negative thoughts. For example, as she builds a model airplane, she “talks back” to her brain (“You don’t get to be the boss all the time.”) The child explains that now she listens to her heart: “It doesn’t matter if I’m NOT very good at something...the most important thing is to just try.” Miller’s colorful pencil illustrations mostly echo the text, offering interesting background scenes such as grassy fields and dandelions. Some offer subtext. For example, the child is shown smiling alongside her completed projects, as when she gives a thumbs-up while holding a tray of baked muffins. The child has dark hair and eyes and presents

White. Gregory offers actionable, kid-friendly tools to help readers enhance their self-esteem in a plausible and positive way.

A relatable, constructive story emphasizing elements of positivity and mindfulness.



Foreword Clarion Reviews

<https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/im-not-very-good-at-it/>

Sincere in its depiction of growing past self-doubt, the picture book *I'm Not Very Good At It* encourages positive outlooks.

In Darrel Gregory's encouraging picture book *I'm Not Very Good at It*, a mother suggests a means for her daughter to handle her low self-esteem.

The story centers on a downcast girl, who, when asked to do anything, tells herself, "Okay, but I'm not very good at it." This refrain is voiced aloud whether she's making a birthday card, baking, or helping her mother with a bird house. When her mother asks her why she responds in this manner, the girl replies, "Because that's what my brain said." Through a series of playful explanations, her mother advises her to listen to her heart instead. After a few attempts at practicing this new habit, the girl realizes that being good at something—or not!—is not as important as trying.

The story's focused, repetitive structure reinforces its therapeutic message about halting self-denigrating talk and about practicing stillness, the latter of which is likened to listening to "dandelion seeds falling on grass." Though perfectionism and fear of failure are possible explanations for the girl's behavior, the specific reasons and context for her self-doubt are absent. The effect is a depersonalized story whose heroine is generic, nameless, and tough to connect with. She is preschool-aged, but is asked to possess great self-awareness about her own metacognition, and to shift her own internalized script; her rapid turnaround is precocious, if not idealistic. And the abstract heart-versus-mind concept is shared through wordy conversations that are too didactic.

Ari Miller's soft, pastel illustrations elevate the text. Their detailed domestic scenes portray the girl's activities, and their alternating backgrounds emphasize the metaphor of falling dandelion seeds. They are faithful depictions of the story that track the girl's emotional change through subtle facial expressions. The girl's mother is left out of these images, though her advice and support is one of the main features of the story; her visual absence diminishes the idea of a close family bond. The book's busy typography mixes italicization, boldface print, and font styles; this detracts from the otherwise crisp layout.

Sincere in its depiction of growing past self-doubt, the picture book *I'm Not Very Good At It* encourages positive outlooks.