

The Top Shelf: Back to School Edition

BY BARBARA DANZA
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

It's that exciting time of year again—when the promise of newly sharpened pencils, crisp white paper, shiny new shoes, and a whole new year ahead beckon children back to school. Whether a child is just starting out in his or her first year or returning to a familiar routine, a good book can go a long way in inspiring enthusiasm for what's to come.

"We Like Kindergarten" by Clara Cassidy, illustrated by Eloise Wilkin

This classic Little Golden Book was first published in 1965 and is now out of print, but used copies can still be purchased online. It is most certainly worth the search. This charming and finely illustrated book presents beautifully the joys of kindergarten, as the reader follows young Carol through a typical day at school. The language is simple and hits all the right notes: "At kindergarten I hang up my spotted coat. Stephen hangs up his brown coat." "We Like Kindergarten" is a great choice that can help a hesitant child relate to what kindergarten will be like, and feel more calm about the new experiences that lie ahead.

"Everything I Need to Know Before I'm Five" by Valorie Fisher

This vibrant picture book delightfully runs through the basics: counting to 20, the ABCs, opposites, colors, shapes, weather. An entertaining choice to build familiarity and confidence with school subjects, a young child will want to flip through this book again and again.

"Richard Scarry's Great Big Schoolhouse" by Richard Scarry

And great and big it is! In classic Scarry form, the famed author's characters come together to present all that they learn and do in school. Getting ready in the morning, learning the alphabet, recess at the playground, show and tell,



remembering the days of the week—school concepts abound in "Great Big Schoolhouse." Best taken in small bites, children can pour over the illustrations and their labels, and marvel at finding something new each time.

"Those Shoes" by Maribeth Boelts, illustrated by Noah Z. Jones

The pressure to have what everyone else has often permeates the school experience. "Those Shoes" tells the story of a boy of modest means who yearns for the popular sneakers everyone is wearing. When he finds a pair in a thrift store, he uses his own money to buy them, even though they are the wrong size. He hopes he can stretch the shoes out to make them fit. When he sees another

boy in his class with shoes so worn that they need to be held together by tape, he gets a different idea about what to do with "those shoes." This book is a fitting back-to-school read that breaks down issues of peer pressure and materialism, and ends with an act of kindness.

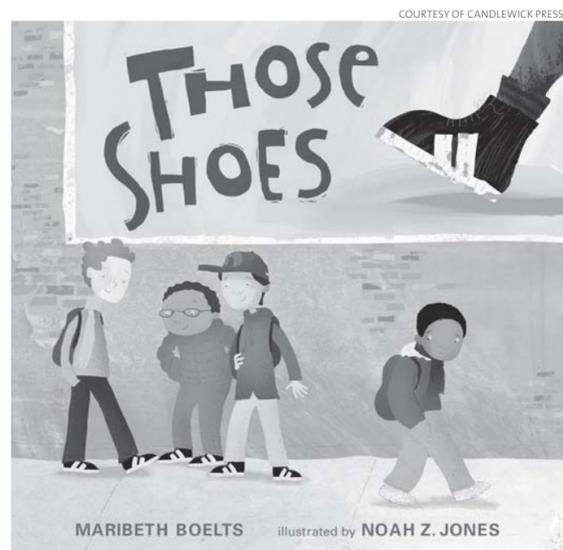
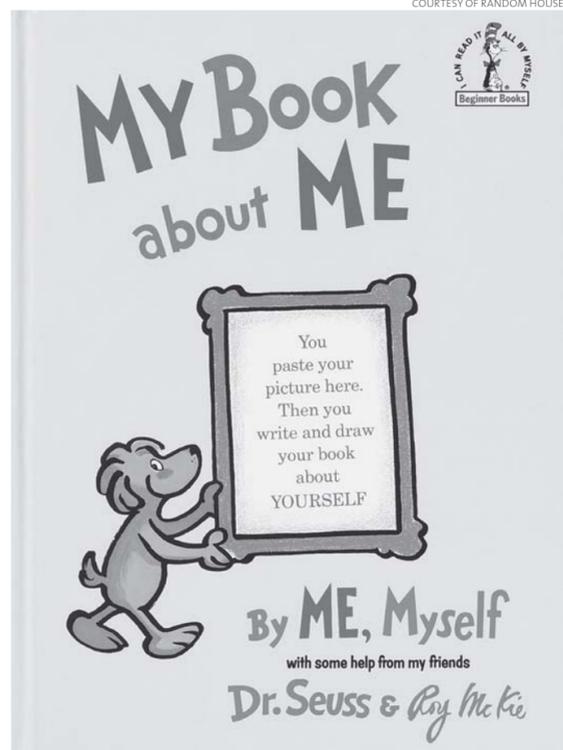
"My Book about Me" by Dr. Seuss and Roy McKie

This classic "make yourself" book urges children to chronicle all of the pertinent details about themselves, including their names; how big their hand looks when traced; the number of freckles they have; how many forks are in their house; and favorite books, pets, and colors, among many other things. It even asks children

to invent their own story. The beginning of a new school year is an ideal time for students to do a bit of self-reflection, and that is precisely what "My Book about Me" encourages. The end result is a childhood keepsake that can be treasured for a lifetime.

"i before e (except after c)—old-school ways to remember stuff" by Judy Parkinson

Appropriate for any age, this very helpful book presents creative and classic ways to remember all manners of things, including the presidents of the United States, how to count in foreign languages, the number of days in each month, the musical notations on a staff, and how to set a table. Young children will simply



absorb information as young children do, while older children can utilize these "tricks" to remember whatever information they need. The book also includes a history

of the ways humans remember things that is very entertaining to read. This unique reference book is a wise addition to a student's top shelf.

Remembering Our Elders Through Country Music

Deric Ruttan talks of his award-nominated single

BY LINA BEREZOVSKA
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

It started with a title.

One day, country music artist Deric Ruttan thought of six words that this summer earned him a Single of the Year nomination by the 2011 Canadian Country Music Association (CCMA). "That's How I Wanna Go Out," from the album "Sunshine," is a song that has connected with the hearts of many with its depiction of an old man reflecting at the end of his life.

The song stayed in the Top 10 on Canada's top single's and

Mediabase country charts for 14 weeks in 2010.

Ruttan, who garnered five CCMA nominations, says many of his fans could see their own grandfathers and parents in the song—a common response he received via mail, Twitter, and Facebook.

The Epoch Times chatted with Ruttan recently about the success of "That's How I Wanna Go Out."

"I always wanted to quote an old Willie Nelson phrase, which is "when you write a song you start with the truth and go from there," Ruttan said.

"What that line interprets to me

is drawing on your own experiences and also experiences of others, witnessing the world around you and channeling that through your mind, through your heart and song. That's kind of what I did with "That's How I Wanna go Out."

"It's not based on a specific person, but when I was writing the song—I wrote it with my friend Miller—I was sort of thinking about my grandparents who did not spend very much time apart from each other and never got very far from home. So that's sort of the type of love that I was thinking about when I was writing the song."

It's rare to hear a song today that mentions WWII.

"When Lee and I wrote the song, ... we wanted to write a second verse that would work to show the character of this old man, the character in the song and the guys of his generation," Ruttan said.

"It says in the song, 'I was fortunate I lived to see an angel at the altar,' meaning his bride,

whom he's still married to all these years later. I think the guy in the song is thinking, 'You know what, I was lucky enough to live through all of this calamity and all of this catastrophe, I finally made it through to a point where I can die on my terms in the arms of a woman who loves me.'"

In speaking about the writing of the song, Ruttan explained that the title came before the music or the lyrics.

"I can still remember I was walking up the stairs in my home in Nashville, probably carrying a load of laundry or something. And the title literally fell out of the heavens and into my head somewhere between the bottom step and the top step.

"It's quite mysterious to me even still. I've been a quote-unquote professional writer for 15 years and have been writing songs for probably 25 years. And it's still a mystery to me—the process. Like where the thoughts come from, where the lines come from. I think a

lot of it is from God, that's my own personal belief. I think He was in the room with us that day for sure."

The Music Video

The music video for the song came from a collaboration with Warren Sonoda, the director of "That's How I Wanna Go Out."

"I was excited to work with Warren because he's done some fabulous videos. He did the Johnny Reid 'Thank You' video, which was a great moving piece. What Warren does in video is what I think 'That's How I Wanna Go Out' does in the lyrics, which is paint great pictures. He's a great storyteller in video.

The video shows a photo album with old, black and white photographs, and some of the photos in it are Ruttan's.

"There are several specific photos that we show in the album and in several of those shots [there are] a few special things. My grandparent's wedding picture is in the album. On my other side of the family, my grandmother on the other side—her brother, who fought in World War II—we show him in his uniform. Another cool thing is, there are letters that two of my great uncles wrote



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—Deric Ruttan

home to my great grandfather during World War II."

In 1994 Ruttan moved to Nashville to learn the music business. Producer Steve Bogard gave him his break in 1999 and by 2003 he had released his first album.

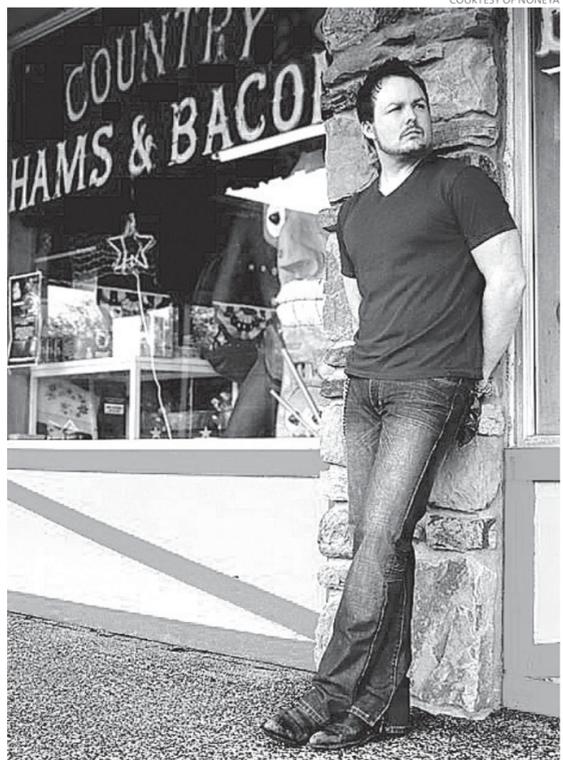
He won his first CCMA award, Songwriter of the Year, in 2007, and is happy to be nominated again.

"It's always nice to be nominated for the work that you do—especially the work that you're quite serious about and that you put a lot of energy into, which I do.

"The funny thing is, Canadian country music—it's certainly small. I've written with every one of the people who I am in the category with for Male Artist [of the Year]. The day when all those nominations came out, 15 minutes later I got a text from Johnny Reid [saying], 'Hey man, congrats on your nominations.'"

"I don't think there's a time in any other genre where the people who are nominated for an award actually call each other to congratulate each other on their nominations," he said.

The CCMA awards will take place on Sept. 12 in Hamilton, Ontario, during Country Music Week.



COUNTRY SINGER AND SONGWRITER: Deric Ruttan has been nominated for five 2011 Canadian Country Music Association awards, including for his song "That's How I Wanna Go Out."



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