

## **A story's power:**

Author aims to show kids what it means to be a hero

**By Lori Cumpston**

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In Tom Barron's make-believe world, a young, heroic person is thrust into the eye of the storm only to discover courage and wisdom he or she never knew existed. "When I say hero, I don't mean celebrity," says the author who lives on a farm north of Louisville with his wife, Currie, and five kids ranging in age from 5 to 14. "A hero is somebody who may not be famous at all but has a crisis to deal with and they reach deep down to find something special about themselves."

Barron, 49, was so inspired by his fictional heroes, he established the Gloria Barron Young Heroes Prize, named after his mother. The awards, symbolized by the resilient glacier lily, are meant to recognize heroic kids who make a difference. Ten recipients were named earlier this month.

"There was a wonderful girl from Pueblo who started a rodeo for disabled kids," Barron says. "A boy in Denver raised over \$100,000 for burn victims...nobody knew about these kids. I think that heroic young people are our future."

Barron, who writes as T. A. Barron, is one of the featured speakers at 2001: A Readers Odyssey on Saturday, October 20, sponsored by the Mesa State College Foundation and the American Association of University Women. He will speak on the power of story for children.

Barron is working on a book about what it means to be a hero. The book, "The Hero's Trail: A Hiking Guide To A Heroic Life," will be written in essay form told through the voice of someone sitting around a campfire telling stories mixed with real-life tales of heroes. It is scheduled to be released next spring.

His new book, "Tree Girl" is on store shelves.

### **NEW YORK BACK TO COLORADO**

Barron hasn't always lived the life of a writer — make that a paid writer. Publishing his own magazine as a kid, which sold a whopping five copies — including the ones bought by his parents — doesn't count.

But the magazine ignited a spark in Barron that would take him on a journey of self-discovery.

As a kid living on a ranch north of Colorado Springs near the Air Force Academy, Barron walked a mile-long ranch road to catch the school bus. He learned to write by stealing spare moments after school holed up underneath a ponderosa pine whose ancient roots were undercut by a meandering creek.

“I would sit and write in my journal,” Barron recalls, “or make up some wild and crazy story or a poem...I loved writing and it got into my blood, leaning up against the tree, blue sky, pad of paper in my lap. It was the very best place to create.”

Barron continued to write during his years at Princeton and Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar. However, early writing efforts were met with a stack of rejections from publishing houses.

By day, Barron whittled away the hours as a young executive managing a fast-growing venture capital firm in New York City. Sometimes he would find himself scribbling character sketches during business meetings.

Predawn hours were spent in his make-believe world creating characters for his books.

He quit his job in New York City and moved back to his native Colorado to pursue his dream of becoming a writer.

“Writing is a lot of work,” says Barron, whose works include “The Lost Years of Merlin” and “The Ancient One.” “It has to come from your inner passion. If writing is powered by your inner passion, it will be beautiful, inspiring, and true.”

In addition to his children’s books, Barron has also collaborated with nature photographer John Fielder on two books, “To Walk In Wilderness” and “Rocky Mountain National Park: A One Hundred Year Perspective.”

An avid outdoorsman, the former trustee of The Nature Conservancy of Colorado often weaves an environmental message into his novels.

“It’s important that we think about the future and we make choices that allow us to protect our water, air, and open space for future generations,” Barron says.