

# Worthy of Storytime



Written by Mary Anne Carroll

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Every parent knows that nightfall is a special time. As the last pastel shades of dusk slip from the room, you settle yourself on the edge of your child's bed and read a favorite book. It is a ritual so tender, and so fleeting in years, it is sacred.



Grady Thrasher writes children's books that are worthy of that hallowed ritual. His carefully chosen words, coupled with illustrations that are equal to his writing, result in books that both parent and child can read and savor and delight in for years of nighttime snuggling.

Thrasher's latest book, *Tim and Sally's Year in Poems*, is the third book in the Tim and Sally series. This book, however, has a different twist.

"The first two books had an actual story, but in this book, I had the kids write out poems about the year," Thrasher explained. "The storyline is Tim and Sally are studying poetry in school, and they write rhymes about the seasons."

Another twist to the book is that Tim and Sally's parents write a couple of the poems. One of the parent's poems, *I Meant to Drive to Work Today*, will strike a chord with every mama or daddy who ever longed to slow down for just a few precious moments and savor the simple joys of watching the sun rise or listening to the sweet song of a bird.

"I could see my own personality coming out in that one," Thrasher said. "My own personality as a parent came out."

With two grown children and four grandchildren, Thrasher's position as a parent is secure. But, in his heart, there is still plenty of childlike exuberance.

"I think of myself as a parent, but, more than anything, I think of myself as a child," he said smiling.

A child's perspective comes in handy when writing a children's book, but Thrasher said you must strike a delicate balance when creating a story for young readers.

"You don't want to dumb the story down, but you also don't want to make it too complicated," Thrasher said.

When creating a children's book, Thrasher said, you must also keep the parents in mind. After all, it is often the adult who picks the book, and parents tend to choose books they deem worthy of the nighttime reading ritual. In that respect, the author said, the illustrations of the Tim and Sally books definitely come into play.

Like the first two Tim and Sally books, the illustrations for *Year in Poems* were done by Athens artist Elaine Hearn Rabon. Her illustrations are reminiscent of children's books from earlier decades, done in intricate detail and with warm pastel tones. The pictures are thoroughly modern, but have enough of a vintage feel to appeal to parents and grandparents who grew up reading books painstakingly illustrated.

There is no doubt that Thrasher has found that perfect balance of appealing to both parent and child. His first book, *Tim and Sally's Vegetable Garden*, won an Independent Publisher Book Award and Georgia Author of the Year Award for children's picture books.

Thrasher, who lives in Athens and writes from a farm outside of Watkinsville, has always been a writer, but for years his writing was light years away from the children's fiction he now writes. Before retiring, Thrasher lived in Atlanta and worked as a lawyer.

"I was a securities lawyer, and if you have ever read one of those dense, thick prospectuses, well, they are mind numbing," he said.

If the jump from practicing corporate law to writing children's stories seems like a pole vault, then a visit to Thrasher's farm helps explain that leap. While he is celebrated as a children's author, he must be hero-worshiped as a grandfather.

Open pastures would be playground enough, but Thrasher and his wife have created a virtual wonderland for their four grandchildren. There is a zip line that allows the youngsters to glide past a farm pond. And, there is the newest addition to the property – a barn that doubles as an office for Thrasher and a play area for the younger ones.

The first floor is divided into an office and a room complete with enough art supplies and building materials to tackle any creative project. Upstairs, one wall is a chalkboard for further creative musings, and there is plenty of room to relax and watch favorite movies or television shows. A small kitchen, complete with an old-time popcorn stand, supplies all the necessary culinary accouterments for movie nights.

Perhaps the greatest feature of the barn is a tunnel slide, allowing children to exit the top floor, slide through a twisting tunnel, and land outside on a soft pad of fresh hay. No surprise, the young-at-heart author admits he often indulges in using the slide to get from top floor to ground level.

The public will soon get a first-hand chance to see how Thrasher perfectly understands the mind of a child. On Sunday, September 12, on the grounds of Ashford Manor Bed and Breakfast, Thrasher and illustrator Rabon are throwing a party, picnic, and book signing. Pam Blanchard and the Sunny Side Band will provide the music, celebrity readers will share passages from *Tim and Sally's Year in Poems*, and plenty of kid-friendly food will be served.

"We will have a picnic out on the grounds with food like pigs in a blanket, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, iced tea, lemonade and punch," said Thrasher, showing he understands not just the mind of children, but also their taste preferences.

The party will include goodies for the kids, fun favors like beach balls and *Tim and Sally* coloring books. The event, which will run from 4 to 6 p.m., will also allow children to meet the author.

"I'll be there to sign the books, but you certainly don't have to buy a book to come to the party," the author said. "We just want families to come out and have some fun."

The party is free of charge, but requires an invitation so Thrasher and Rabon can plan on the amount of food that will be needed. Invitations can be picked up at Books Galore, Ashford Manor and Oconee Cultural Arts Foundation (OCAF) in Watkinsville, and Home Place Gifts and Toys in Athens.

While the picnic and party will be the official launch of *Tim and Sally's Year in Poems*, the books are available for purchase

now at Books Galore and Home Place.

Twenty percent of all proceeds from Year in Poems will go to OCAF, a non-profit organization that has found a huge fan in Thrasher. Thrasher and his wife, Kathy Prescott, earlier this year gave OCAF the funds to transform a cluttered old bus garage into studio space for artists.

In between being a cultural benefactor, writing children's books, and spoiling his grandchildren rotten, Thrasher stills finds time to enjoy the simple pleasures in life. For example, on his Watkinsville farm, he enjoys tending a summer garden and doing necessary outdoor chores like mowing the grass.

And, of course, every once in while, he takes the time to indulge his childlike side by gliding down the zip line or traveling down a winding slide.

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