

TRICK OR TREAT ON MONSTER STREET
Author Q and A with Danny Schnitzlein



Q: Why did you want to write a Halloween book?

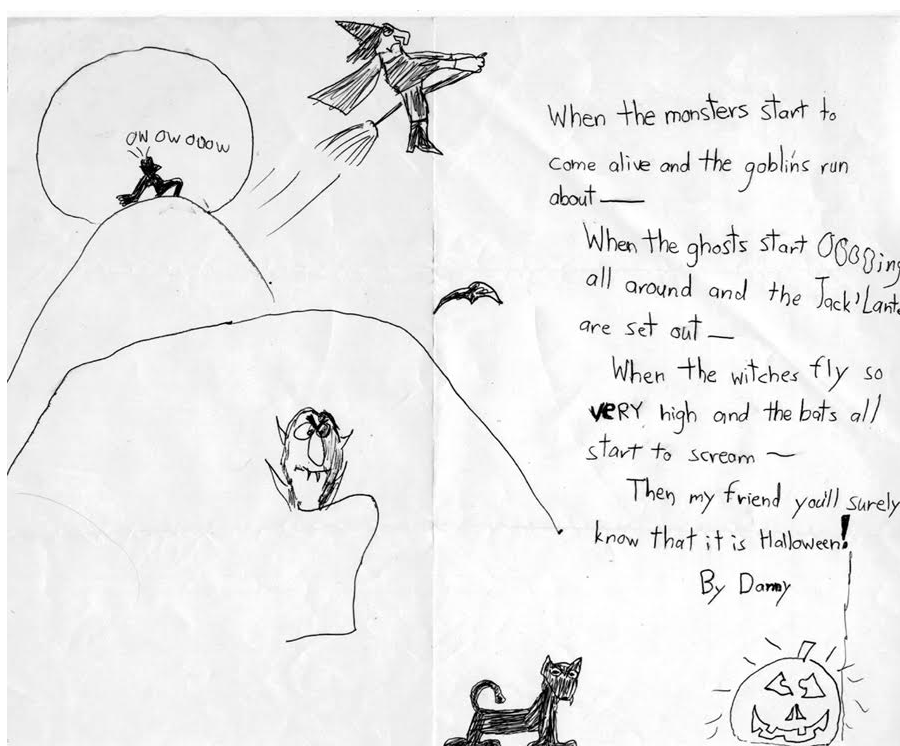
A: As a kid, I was crazy about Halloween. It had everything that I liked. You used creativity in making your costume, decorating your house, and drawing and carving a jack-o-lantern. You got to spend the evening hanging out with your best friends eating candy and treats. I used to dress up as one monster, go around my neighborhood and get candy, go home and put on a different costume and go around my neighborhood again hoping that none of the neighbors recognized me. I won a few costume contests, as a kid, and also in college.



I'm the witch doctor in this pic.



I'm the mad scientist. My brother is Dracula



I wrote this Halloween poem in Elementary School.

Q: What inspired you to write the book?

A: It started with a “what if?”. I wondered, “What if there was a town of monsters who celebrated Halloween backwards from humans. That led to more questions: “Why would monsters be afraid of humans?” “What else would monsters be afraid of?” As I answered my questions, the story took shape. Asking questions about parts of your story is a good way to get deeper into it, and to understand the fictional world you’re creating.

Q: Do you think the book has a message?

A: After the boy in the story meets monster kids, he realizes that they’re friendly and fun-loving, just like him. We’re often afraid of other people because we don’t know or understand them. But when we take the time to get to know them, they’re not scary. Prejudice is harmful and dangerous. We’re all the same on the inside, regardless of gender, skin color, religion, culture, or social standing. Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

I think this book also speaks to children with social anxiety. Many kids (and adults) are afraid to meet new people and venture outside of the comfort zone of family and familiar friends. I hope this story might help them too.

Last but not least, I think the book is useful to help kids who are afraid of monsters. Reading it before bed could help them sleep better.

Q: Why do you like monsters so much?

A: I grew up in Tampa, Florida. Channel 44 had a wonderful Saturday afternoon tv show called Creature Feature. The host was named “Dr. Paul Bearer.” He would show two monster movies. He also included a lot of humor and silly segments during the breaks. Creature Feature was something I watched with my dad and my friends, and it was something I talked about with friends at school on the following Monday. So monsters were kind of a fun social thing. I love gothic horror movies, the old ones filmed in black and white. Creature From the Black Lagoon, Frankenstein, The Mummy, The Wolfman, and The Invisible Man are favorites of mine. In those old movies, the viewer feels pathos and sympathy for the monster. The monster is often misunderstood, judged only by its appearance, or forced to react against people who are trying to hurt it. You don’t find that pathos in most modern horror movies. I like reading monster stories, especially ones by Ray Bradbury, and I collect books of ghost stories from around the world.



Every year I go to Atlanta's Monsterama convention. It's a great place to meet other monster fans and buy monster merchandise.

Q: In the book *Trick or Treat on Monster Street*, a full moon on Halloween opens a portal between the human world and the monster world. In reality, how often does a full moon occur on Halloween?

A: Every 19 years or so. I did some research when I was writing the book and was happy to discover this fact. It worked perfectly for my story. It makes the opening of the portal more special due to the fact that it doesn't occur very often.

Q: Do you have any plans to adapt the book?

A: I have written a fifty page script that could be used for the puppet stage or regular theater, including six original songs. I really enjoyed writing it and exploring *Monster Street* and its characters a little further. I'm hoping to find a puppet theater or animation studio that would produce it.

Q: Do you like haunted houses?

A: I like the Haunted Mansion at Disney World. Locally run haunted houses tend to be a little too gory for me and have too many jump scares. Also, I don't like the scary things being too close to me. Movies and books are a lot safer.

Q: I've heard that you collect monster toys. What are some of your favorites?

A: Anything really. I like the kaiju from the *Pacific Rim* movies. I like toys from classic monster movies. I had a chance to buy a life-sized version of Sulley from *Monsters Inc.*, but I passed it up because it was so big I didn't have a place to put it. I also collect monster movie posters. And I enjoy collecting and painting miniatures for *Dungeons and Dragons* which I play weekly.

Pacific Rim kaiju toys



Q: You often draw monsters with children at your school visits. Why do you think kids like drawing monsters?

A: There's no wrong way to draw a monster. The uglier and weirder, the better. Kindergartners usually draw the most inventive monsters because they don't have any filters or preconceived ideas about what a monster should or shouldn't be. I sometimes ask students to put two or three animals together into one monster and that gets some interesting results. I think the fun of drawing monsters is that there is beauty and art to be discovered in ugliness. When I was writing *The Monster Who Ate My Peas* I did some research on monsters. I discovered that many monsters are combinations of humans and animals. We're not afraid to look at pictures of humans or animals, but if you combine human and animal features into one creature, it suddenly becomes scary to our eyes. I'm not sure what this says about humans, but there's probably something to be learned from it. I wonder if animals would also be afraid to look at monster pictures. :-)

