



Author Spotlight: PaleoJoe

WHAT FIRST GOT YOU INTO READING? WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE KINDS OF BOOKS?

My heritage is Czech, my first language was Czech and my earliest memories of books were the European fairy tales my parents read to me. I still have my very first fairy tale book—in Czech. I really first got into reading when I was nine years old after traipsing through the woods and fields around my home in Lewiston, New York. I was a nature freak back then, looking at all the plants, animals, butterflies, insects, and of course fossils that were common in the woods near my home. I found these things interesting and the first books I read and purchased were several of the Golden Guide series of identification books. Needless to say nature books are still my favorite—though I do muddle through dozens of technical publications related directly to paleontology and the fossils I study.

HOW DID YOU COME TO CHOOSE DINOSAURS AS A SUBJECT? WHAT ASPECTS OF TEACHING KIDS/WRITING ABOUT DINOSAURS APPEAL TO YOU?

My interest in dinosaurs began back then in Lewiston. I spent countless hours in the woods along the Niagara Escarpment, part of an ancient coral reef. I didn't find dinosaurs, but what I found were fossils—remains of those ancient salt water creatures. My interest never wavered. I bought books on dinosaurs, went to the library and checked out dinosaur books and never really lost that interest. Over the last fifteen years I have been providing programs to schools and libraries across the United States on dinosaurs and fossils. The joy I see in the kids' faces as I describe these ancient creatures, the awe on their faces as I show them actual specimens, and the fantastic questions they ask make it all worthwhile for me. Kind of brings me back to my childhood.

WHAT KIND OF RESEARCH DO YOU DO WHILE PREPARING FOR A BOOK? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR WRITING PROCESS?

I use actual events that have happened to me at dig sites or on fossil or dinosaur digs as the catalyst for the stories. Once I decide on a type of prehistoric creature—as you may have seen two of my recent books deal with Ice Age Creatures, not dinosaurs—I begin to research some of the discoveries and information that is available. When I describe dig sites, that's what dig sites really look like. When I describe the jacketing process of bones, that is how we do it.

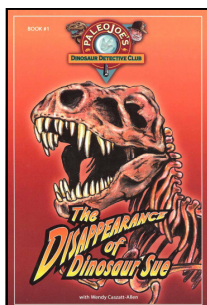
YOU OFTEN PERFORM AT ASSEMBLIES AND DEMONSTRATIONS IN SCHOOLS, AS WELL AS LEADING PRIVATE FOSSIL DIGS FOR FAMILIES. WHAT SORT OF IMPACT HAVE YOUR EXPERIENCES HAD ON YOUR WORK AS A PALEONTOLOGIST AND AUTHOR?

I recently concluded a tour of Missouri and Michigan libraries. I did programs at 56 libraries in 60 days—whew. It was wonderful. This topic never gets old. After each program I interact with the audience answering questions the audience poses. Some of the questions are pretty detailed, showing me that the kids really do understand what I have been saying and that they already know more than I did at their age. The comments I get from teachers telling me that I have covered all of their Geoscience vocabulary words, the parents telling me how interested the kids are in dinosaurs and how much they love my books has a profound effect on me. I have had many kids come up to me and tell me they want to be paleontologists. Yea, yea I know they all say that, but I have a PaleoJoe clone in Wisconsin and in Michigan—young boys that dress like I do, all the way to having a hat like mine. And finally, as I write this I am leading two separate families with two students, thirteen and fifteen years of age on a dig and will be giving them every benefit of my expertise in an effort to enrich their desire to be paleontologists. I have let them use my specialized tools on several occasions—and they are hooked.

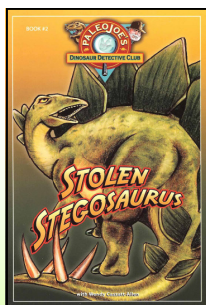
YOUR BOOKS ARE WRITTEN IN DIFFERENT STYLES – RHYMING COUPLETS, AND NOVEL-STYLE PROSE – HOWEVER BOTH ARE CHOCK-FULL OF DINOSAUR FACTS. WHICH IS EASIER FOR YOU?

I have written many articles and other works and I try to write in a novel style. I also do include lots of facts. I also try to keep everything at a level that people can easily understand. My aim is to educate, inform, and entertain the public. The best way to do that is to keep it simple. The two adult books I have written are basic guides to the subject—beginner guides really. My first book on Trilobites, the ancient salt water creatures that crawled on the ocean floor is an informational guide as well since the second half is a pictorial identification guide. My children's books, including *Hidden Dinosaurs*, are meant to entertain and educate and I hope that is the result.

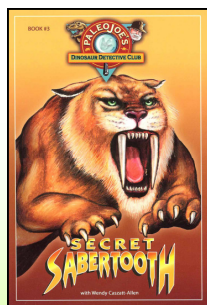
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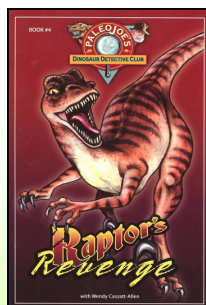
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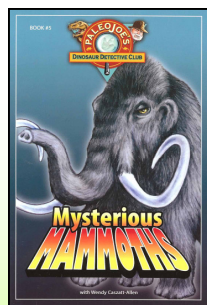
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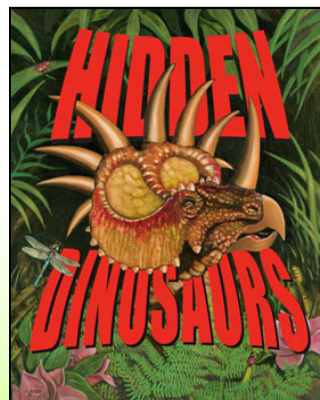
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