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## An Interview with Don M. Winn: The Eldridge Conspiracy

*Jan 19, 2018 by  
Michael F. Shaughnessy EducationViews Senior  
Columnist*

### An Interview with Don M. Winn: The Eldridge Conspiracy

Michael F. Shaughnessy –

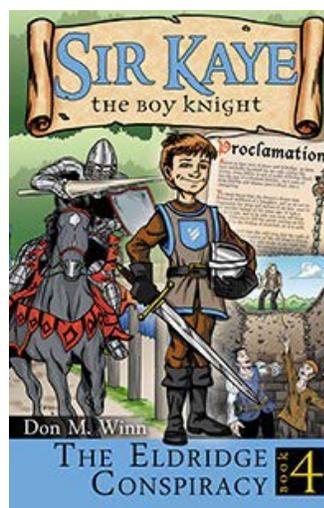
#### 1) Don, you have a bunch of amazing books about Sir Kaye- First tell us what got you started in writing?

I've written poetry for many years, purely as a personal hobby. Eventually, I realized I was using poetry to tell stories, and from there, I began telling stories and modern fables for children through poetry. These turned into my current collection of Cardboard Box Adventures picture books. When I'd visit local elementary schools to give writing workshops and read from my books, the third-graders always begged me for a "chapter book." So I embarked on the Sir Kaye Series. I took inspiration from a writing exercise I had done many years ago and developed the idea of a young knight named Kaye. It grew organically, and now Kaye's story has become a four-book series.

#### 2) Why this genre?

I've always loved a good adventure story. When I was young I longed for my own adventures that never quite happened for me—unfortunately, I never rescued anyone or found any buried treasure as a child. Of course, there were a couple of pop bottle rockets that caused wee problems with grass fires, but those weren't the kinds of adventure I was hoping for! However, through my books, I can have all the adventures I want!

I also find history fascinating, so when I conceived the idea for a story about a child knight, a medieval setting just fell into place. I have learned quite a bit about the Middle Ages throughout my research for the development of the Kaye series. I found the era so interesting that I developed some supplementary historical information for teachers to share with their students. The information is available on my website on the [Resources](#) page or can be found as an appendix in the [study guide](#) I helped develop to go along with the



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series.

### 3) Now, who is Sir Kaye modeled after? Anyone in particular?

Kaye isn't modeled after any particular person, living or fictional. Kaye is one of those characters who materialized on the page nearly fully fledged. One aspect of Kaye that does echo my experience is that he idolizes and wants to emulate his father. My dad was my hero at that age as well, and I was thrilled when he was proud of me, just like Kaye and his father. And although I didn't model his best friend Reggie after myself, Reggie and I do have a lot in common. We're both dyslexic, and know what it's like to always be playing "catch up" with everyone else when it comes to reading or writing and always comparing ourselves negatively to others' abilities. I know well the self-doubt and anxiety that can result from dealing with those issues throughout childhood. I tried to let Reggie "live" some of those feelings because I know there are so many dyslexic students out there going through the same thing today. I wanted them to have a hero with whom to identify.

I find the relationship dynamic of Kaye and Reggie to be the most interesting. They are very much opposites, but they have so much to offer each other. Kaye is a type A personality—driven, motivated, confident, goal-oriented, a perfectionist. He is used to excelling and is stunned when he fails. Reggie, on the other hand, despite his extremely likable personality, is accustomed to failing and never expects to succeed. The two of them balance each other out. Reggie teaches Kaye how to survive life's inevitable failures, get back up, and keep going, and Kaye shows Reggie how to accept personal success.

### 4) You are now on your fourth book. To what do you attribute its success?

The books are a success because the boys are authentic characters—they all have their likable and less likable moments, times of strength and times of weakness. They deal with issues that are universal and timeless, and throughout all their adventures, loyalty and friendship triumph every time. They get into crazy situations, but through their wits, their courage and hard work, they succeed. These are the skills real people need in real life, and I see it as a success that the boys (and girls) in my stories model them for kids today.

### 5) Now, the Eldridge Conspiracy—What are the main challenges that Sir Kaye and his compatriots will encounter?

Kaye, Reggie, and Beau have learned from a reliable source that Kaye's father, Sir Henry, is in danger. So they enter the neighboring country of Eldridge to look for the only man who can save Sir Henry. Unfortunately, this man's family is being threatened, and until his family is safe, he can't share any information about the threat to Sir Henry's life. So the boys have to find a way to rescue the man's family, find the information about the plot against Sir Henry (and the king of Eldridge), and then race to stop the assassination, all while eluding an evil Baron and his henchmen.

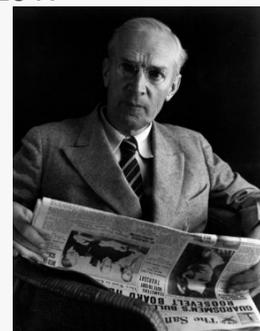
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Internally, Kaye and Reggie also face personal crises. Reggie struggles to cope with his dyslexia, and the impact it has on his self-esteem, as well as the stress of their situation. These make him question both his own value as a person and Kaye's friendship. Kaye himself struggles mightily with his desire to make his father proud, thinking that the only way to do that is to become a knight exactly like Sir Henry. Sadly, Kaye has earned a disgraceful nickname as a knight through no fault of his own, and the shame of it torments Kaye as he tries to live up to his father's reputation. There are some valuable lessons in this story about how people can be successful by doing things in their own unique way rather than by copying others.

### 6) I know that you have a few other books out there- can you briefly

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### describe them?

In addition to my Sir Kaye chapter book series, I currently have a collection of 11 picture books. My goal with the picture books is not only to entertain but to help establish a good pre-literacy foundation from a very early age. Long before I started school, my grandmother spent time with me in shared reading—or lap reading. I would sit in her lap and follow along with her as she read from a large children’s dictionary. She would then ask me questions about the words, and in turn, I would ask her questions. Looking back, I realize the dictionary was less important than the interaction I had with my grandmother.

All of my picture books are designed to engage young minds and to open a dialog between parent and child. Each book features a successful learning experience for the main character that adults can use to help children develop effective coping skills and to help build a good pre-literacy foundation. All but two of my picture books are written in rhyme, which means that even the very youngest children will enjoy the rhythmic cadence as the books are read aloud.

You can go to my [Picture Books](#) page to view my catalog of award-winning picture books.

### 7) I understand you have a radio show. Tell us a little bit about it.

In February of this year (2017) I started my Cardboard Box Adventures Radio Show. The monthly radio show is broadcast on [Podfire Radio](#), with topics and interviews about raising readers. I discuss a broad range of topics about fostering imagination, developing a love of story, embracing learning diversity, and current teaching methods for challenged readers.

You can see a [list of archived shows](#) on my website.

### 8) Do you have a website and what would I find there?

My team and I work hard to make my [website](#) a dynamic resource for parents, homeschoolers, and teachers. Dyslexia/reluctant reader topics are easy to find in the archive, and teaching aids, activities for each book, coloring sheets, and more are available free at the click of a mouse. Videos, news archives, current and past articles in [periodicals](#) and reviews are available as well. My website is also the portal where readers can communicate with me. I love questions and feedback from readers and do my best to answer each query personally.

All of my books are available in softcover, hardcover, and eBook format. The first two Sir Kaye books are also available as audiobooks and can be purchased from most online resellers: [Amazon](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), [Audible](#), etc. The third and fourth Sir Kaye book will be available in audio soon.

All of my picture books are available for significant discounts to schools, libraries, non-profits, retailers, and vendors directly from [Cardboard Box Adventures Publishing](#) or [Ingram/LSI](#).

The Sir Kaye titles are available for significant discounts to schools, libraries, non-profits, retailers, and vendors through [Progressive Rising Phoenix Press](#) or [Ingram/LSI](#).

You can find additional information and links on my website, [www.donwinn.com](http://www.donwinn.com).

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