

"You have to believe in magic," says young local author



As she awaited a return to Northern Lights Public School this week, Aurora resident Chryseis Knight was keeping busy with her pen.

The seven-year-old was not getting a head start on assignments, however. Remarkably, she was working on the latest pages of a three-part novel series based on kings, queens, and four fictional kingdoms.

A hard task for anyone of any age with a passion for writing, to be sure, but Chryseis is taking it all in her stride. After all, she's been a published author for nearly half of her life.

Born in Singapore, Chryseis broke into the publishing world at the age of just three with *The Great Big Lion*, a work she wrote and illustrated herself, being picked up by Penguin Random House of India.

Having taught herself to read before the age of one, the prodigious lover of the written world was inspired to set pen to paper after a family visit to the zoo.

"My parents read to me when I was younger than a year old," she says, "and when I was a year old, I actually picked up reading. My love for reading grew so great that by the time I was three, I finished all the children's books on the book shelf. I was looking for something new to do and I realized that if I enjoyed reading so much, maybe others would too" and I decided to write a story for others."

As much as it was written for others, it was written with one specific person in mind: her baby brother, to whom the book is dedicated.

Building her story around a lion who is just a little bit different from the rest of the pride, she set out to create a story based on inclusivity, diversity and empathy.

"'Inclusivity' just means including and 'diversity' means the differences in our lives," she says. "We're just including the differences. I went to Niagara Falls and I saw a rainbow and after that, this thought struck me: could you imagine a rainbow with only one colour? It wouldn't be a rainbow. That's why inclusivity and diversity are so beautiful.

?When I think of inclusivity and diversity, I think of the colours of the rainbow, all the beautiful colours. If there was only one colour, it just wouldn't be a rainbow and it wouldn't look as nice. Empathy is the reason I read books because I get a chance to put myself into others' shoes, to walk through the authors' minds, to walk with the characters and hold their hands and understand their feelings.?

Despite her young age, Chryseis likes to include her own feelings and lived experiences into her writing. In addition to *The Great Big Lion*, her story *Capturing Thunder* was one she created to help she and her brother overcome their fear of storms, while *Why Are There Stars in the Sky*, she says, is about the bond between a parent and a child.

?Reading *Capturing Thunder* to him helped me overcome my fear and now I am not scared of thunder and my brother isn't, either,? she says. ?For people who want to become writers, I would just say go with your passion and go with what inspires you. When you're inspired, it's magic and you know what Roald Dahl says? ?A little magic can take you a long way.' You have to believe in magic.?

It is, perhaps, fitting, that young Chryseis cites a quote from Roald Dahl as his novel, *Matilda*, telling the story of a wise-beyond-her-years student who finds her outlet and passion in books despite the lack of support from her parents, has inspired generations of girls.

?I see a similarity, but I also see a difference because my parents are great! she says.

This gets a chuckle from her mother, Verin Giovanni, who says as parents they were initially taken aback that their daughter could read at such a young age.

?It has been a very pleasant journey for us discovering what she can do at such a young age,? says Verin. ?We have taken the stance of just being really supportive and encouraging her in her journey. We realized very quickly that we had to take on a very supportive role. Our children both have minds of their own and they go into creative spaces [whether it is] writing or something else. My son is into music and Lego and we support him in that journey as well. With her, it is writing and I think as parents the best thing you can do is listen in closely to what their needs are and work towards it.

?At the end of the day, she shares with us what she has written and we get to enjoy what she does. For us, it is a blessing and it is something we hope that more people can get to enjoy as they read her books.?

And we could have much more to read from Chryseis.

?I am currently writing a chapter book about four kingdoms,? she says. ?With kingdoms, you get kings and queens and conflicts in the country and across the borders. I include some haunting moments inside, so be careful not to get spooked when you read it! Can you imagine a story where they all lived happily ever after and it was so happy that nothing bad or out-of-the-ordinary happened? I want something that will take my readers on a journey of twists, turns, ups and downs.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter