

Grandfather and grandson make writing a family affair

Phil Renzoni and Adam Vanderkolff are bubbling over with excitement.

In fact, they're not only bubbling over with excitement but buoyed by an unbreakable bond.

The grandfather and grandson team have a love of words and have turned that love into a new children's book, *The Belly Button Bandits*, which they hope will get young readers buzzing over the written word as well.

Yes, alliteration is a key theme in *The Belly Button Bandits*, which the duo recently published.

Centred on Brian, Brent and Belinda Bigalow who have had their belly buttons plundered by the dastardly pirate Barnacle Bill, the story was first told to Adam by Phil on a family vacation to Cuba.

'When Adam was about six, we went to Cuba and saw a statue of Christopher Columbus,' Phil explains. 'I was telling Adam there once were pirates in Cuba - he was really infatuated with pirates at the time - and we started pretending we were pirates. Back on the beach, we started making up a story about these pirates who came and stole kids' belly buttons and held them for ransom.'

'We wrote the story down and then forgot about it.'

In the meantime, Phil went on to write and illustrate the children's book *The Baby Who Started a Revolution*, about a giggly child who helped the kingdom of Newfrownland (don't worry, you'll get it) learn to turn their perpetual frowns upside down.

Eventually, however, Adam started studying communications at Wilfrid Laurier University - and doing some freelance work with *The Auroran* - and they both thought this was the perfect opportunity to pool their talents - burgeoning and well-honed, respectively - on a book they can call their own.

'My grandfather has always been extremely artistic and creative,' says Adam of Phil who also inked the book's illustrations. 'There are a lot of things I do as a young student. You like to think you're creative, you shoot for the stars, but I realized my grandfather is right there, still has the same drive, and that creative energy that you would think a younger person aspiring to get to that level would have.'

On Phil's part, he saw a new side of his grandson as they worked together.

'I learned that Adam is a very passionate person and can get really interested in something,' he says. 'I guess I always knew that he was, but he really grabbed onto this, loved it, and wanted to do more and more. At first, I said, 'Hey, we should do this together,' but I wasn't necessarily going to do it, but I got so passionate about it that I figured I gotta do it.'

It is a passion they hope will translate to audiences, kids and parents alike, and inspire young readers in the process.

'It's a really fun story, just really good hearted,' says Adam. 'It is a fun read and perfect for kids. It's not just a children's book, it is also something that we worked on together, a memory of when I was little and of our relationship and how it has grown over the years - and we actually made this together. We had fun making it and it's about having fun with words.'

Adds Phil: 'We just want [readers] to get very interested in words and stories, and the fact the words themselves can be fun. That is the main takeaway.'

As for future collaborations, they won't rule in out. Together, they chuckle over such potential titles as *'Adam, The Apple-Eating Alligator'* all the way to *'Zelda, the Zany Zebra'*, but neither one of them dismisses the idea.

Until then, The Belly Button Bandits will have to suffice ? and it may just be the start of something more.

The Belly Button Bandits is published by FriesenPress and is available to order now from Amazon and Indigo, and directly from the authors for \$15 by emailing philrenzoni@hotmail.com.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter