

Meet the Author & Illustrator

Diana Maliszewski

In this issue, we've been talking about the importance of "Speaking and Listening@ the library." Authors David Bruins and Hilary Leung are well familiar with the need for communication—they are the team responsible for the creative and playful book, *Ninja Cowboy Bear*. Here's what they had to say...

Teaching Librarian - How did the two of you meet and come to work with each other?

David & Hilary - We met while working together in the creative services department of a high tech company. We had found that we worked well together and so we decided it might be fun, and more rewarding, to work on something other than engineering marketing materials - which can be rather limiting creatively. Hilary had always wanted to illustrate children's books, and David was making up stories for his young children and had a fondness for the genre.

TingL - The way your book was published was an unusual one. Can you tell the readers a bit about it? How did it come to pass that you connected with your new publisher?

D&H - We self-published our first book. Initially we thought about using an online print-on-demand service, but we found that both the cost and quality didn't make sense for us. Instead, we ended up investing in a short print run (2K copies) and hit the local bookstores to introduce ourselves and our book. We were well received and some stores gave us a lot of support and exposure. Maria Martella from Tinlids, Naseem Hrab

from Canadian Children's Book Centre and Chris Reed from Pages were amazing supporters! Our prominent window displays at Pages Books and Magazines led to us meeting our publisher (Kids Can Press).

We were invited to take part in the TINARS for Tots series that Pages Bookstore was organizing at the Gladstone Hotel. This was a monthly series and Hilary attended the event prior to ours in order to get an idea of how this event was run and what to expect. It was during this event that he was introduced to KidsCan Press and the rest is how we say... history!

TingL - "Ninja, Cowboy Bear" hits several "hot points" in school-based literature: it has "boy appeal" and deals with "character education", among other things. How much of the demands of the school audience influenced your writing and drawing, if at all?

D&H - To be honest, we were not thinking in terms of school audiences at all. We just wanted to make something that both of us felt was good and that we could stand behind. Both of us being boys likely influenced the "boy appeal" in that we were looking to amuse ourselves with both the writing and illustration.

TingL - Why a ninja, a cowboy, and a bear?

D&H - The seed for this project actually started with only the ninja. Hilary had designed a ninja mascot for his ultimate team's web site. David approached him about writing some stories about the ninja when Hilary introduced the cowboy and the bear as a set. Hilary explained that *Ninja Cowboy Bear* is a game that is used sometimes to determine the start of an ultimate game. We decided that the origins of this game could make a good basis on which to make a children's book.

TingL - Which of the characters best describes you?

D&H - David is most like the Ninja, because he prefers to hide in the background.

The bear describes Hilary best, because he eats a lot and has hairy armpits.

TingL - David, how would you describe your writing style? Who are your influences? Hilary, how would you describe your illustration style? Who are your influences?

