

With *Courage*, beloved children's author visits Book Beat

BY ALICE KHEIM
CORRESPONDENT

Long before 9/11 happened, author Bernard Waber was crafting his latest children's book *Courage*. But when that horrific day happened, the author best known for his Lyle the Crocodile series knew that he had to make mention of those who gave their life to try to save others.

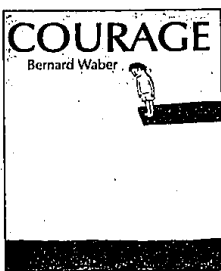
"There's a personal connection, we have friends who are firefighters," said Waber, who lives with his wife of 50 years, Ethel, on Long Island. "Having our city assaulted that way, I certainly had to have that courage resonate in the book."

On Saturday, Oct. 26 from 3-5 p.m., the author and illustrator of a score of children's books will be at the Book Beat in Oak Park to sign copies of his

well loved books including *The House on East 88th Street*, *Lyle, Lyle, the Crocodile*, and *Ira Says Goodbye*.

Courage targets 4- to 7-year-old children and explains a rather abstract emotion in very concrete terms. "Courage is riding your bicycle for the first time without training wheels," and "being the first to make up after an argument." Waber shows that it's not just heroic measures, but these little steps of inner strength that demonstrate courage.

"I wanted to demonstrate how the average person has courage," said Waber, who was an illustrator for *Life* and *People* before he retired and turned to writing books for children full time. "I've always been keenly aware of the courage children need to have, whether it's to deal with the bully in the playground or to try



something new." While Waber has written on many

subjects and characters, one he revisits every so often is Lyle the lovable Crocodile, who turns 40 this year. First introduced in *The House on East 88th Street*, Lyle has gotten deeper over the years according to Waber. He's explored family problems, like when Mr. Primm was unemployed.

"I think of him as an actor in a long-running play," said Waber. "He's gotten reflective on a lot of conflicting things."

But to kids, the crocodile with the toothy smile is just a big playmate who wants nothing more than to be a friend.

At 78, Waber continues to visit schools, libraries and bookstores to meet his pint-size — and adult — fans. "It becomes quite a love fest sometimes," said the Philadelphia

native. Waber is especially fond of visiting the independent bookstores, like the Book Beat, which are so markedly in decline across the country. "It hurts to see so many of the independent stores disappear. They are important in the scheme of things," said Waber. "It is an act of courage just to keep in business."

Meet Bernard Waber Sunday, Oct. 26 from 3-5 p.m. at the Book Beat, 26010 Greenfield, Oak Park (in the Lincoln Center). Call the Book Beat at (248) 968-1190 to reserve titles or for more information.

Also appearing at the Book Beat on Wednesday, Oct. 30 from 7 to 8:30 is Jeffrey Eugenides, whose incredibly entertaining adult fiction *Middlersex* was reviewed in the Sunday, Oct. 6 issue of the *Observer & Eccentric*.

Son of accomplished organist rediscovers father's music

BY KEELY KALESKI
STAFF WRITER

Jay Becker of Birmingham is constantly amazed at how lives touch from time to time, and how one thing leads to another.

The son of an accomplished organist, and teacher, Becker didn't know his father's music had been recorded by Dutch organist Everhard Zwart until he was contacted by a Dutch publication, called *de Orgelvriend*.

An article about Becker's father, Rene Becker, published in the November 2000 edition of the *American Organist* was picked up by the Dutch organ publication. He learned about the recording after he was contacted by the editor of the Dutch magazine.

On Sunday, Oct. 27, Rene Becker's First Organ Sonata will be featured in a concert presented by Zwart at the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak.

The music was originally recorded on LP in 1985 by Zwart's father, William, who discovered it on a concert tour in California.

"I was obviously surprised and pleased," said Becker. "I went to

ORGAN CONCERT

What: Dutch organist, Everhard Zwart, in concert

When: 8 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 27

Where: The National Shrine of the Little Flower, on the corner of Woodward Avenue at 12 Mile Road, Royal Oak

Admission: No charge, free-will offering

Information: Call (248) 649-0384 or (248) 541-4122

John Witte, who got them together.

"We went to the concert, it was standing room only, and he fit my dad's music into the concert. They introduced us and we got a standing ovation. Everyone was surprised. He was just a very nice person, we hit it off right away, we met two hours before the concert."

Afterward, Zwart spent the day with Becker in the basement of his Birmingham home looking at his father's music.

"I gave him the music for dad's second and third organ sonatas and some toccatas too," said Becker.

FAMILY HISTORY

Becker's father, born in the town of Bischheim in Alsace, immigrated to the U.S. in 1904 joining his brothers Lucien and Camille in St. Louis where they established the Becker

Conservatory of Music. Lucien later moved to Portland, Ore. and started a music school. Rene moved his family to Michigan in 1930 after being appointed the first organist of the newly built Blessed Sacrament Cathedral in Detroit. He held that position for 13 years and continued to



This photo of Jay Becker's father, Rene, is from the March 1918 edition of *The American Organist*.

teach music at home in Highland Park and in area schools. He and his son Francis also founded the Palestrina Institute to teach area organists

Gregorian chant and liturgical music. In 1943 Rene accepted a position at St. Alphonsus Church in Dearborn and served as organist there until he retired in 1952 at the age of 70.

"Everhard's dream is to come back and play an all Becker concert at the Blessed Sacrament Cathedral," said Jay Becker, "but right now it's undergoing renovations."

Jay Becker was raised in a musical atmosphere, but unlike his father who made music his career, Jay studied business at the University of Wisconsin after serving in the Air Force during the Korean War. After graduating he went to work for Manufacturers Bank and retired in 1989 as vice president of the loan control department.

He's been a member of the bass section of the Rackham Symphony Choir since 1977, and is an active member in the choir at Holy Name Church in Birmingham. A baby grand piano fills part of his living room and music definitely plays an important role in his life. He's also had a couple of small roles with the Michigan Opera Theatre.

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