

Merlin Magic

By Colette Caprara
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T.A. Barron is a writer with a simple but powerful message that has resonated with thousands of young readers: “There is a hero inside every child.”

On Sunday, Barron will meet with area children for a discussion of his writing and a book-signing at Jabberwocky, a bookstore dedicated exclusively to youngsters.

Two of Barron’s widely popular book series feature adventures in imaginary realms where young protagonists must meet and conquer threats to the world they love.

The Lost Years of Merlin, a five-book series, opens as Merlin, then a young boy, is washed ashore, half-drowned, with no memory of who he is. From that point, it traces his self-discovery and the internal and external challenges he faces as he develops to one day become the great wizard of Camelot.

Barron’s most recent series, *The Great Tree of Avalon*, is a three-part epic fantasy about three young people living in a wondrous magical world of peace and harmony and their quest to protect that realm from invasion by a wicked warlord.

“These imaginary worlds resemble a fun-house mirror,” Barron said. “They reflect the issues that we have to deal with in the real world, but they allow me as a writer to enlarge some features and diminish others.

“There are real problems in our world, and these stories provide a terrific way to impart what we have to do to face and solve them,” he said. “In all my books, no matter how much struggle and difficulty there may be, there is always hope. Ultimately, it comes down to the power of every person to do something to help the world.

“This power is a kind of magic – call it Merlin magic – we all have. There is Merlin magic in every one of us.”

Barron’s celebration of the hero in each person is featured in his nonfiction writing as well. *The Hero's Trail* presents profiles of more than 100 children whose efforts have made a positive difference in the lives of others. The stories range from that of a child who initiated a local recycling effort to one about a youth who raised funds to provide water wells for peers in Africa.

Many of the children profiled in *The Hero's Trail* have been recipients of an award Barron established to honor youths who have exhibited “quiet acts of greatness, heroism and beauty.”

Barron’s own decision more than 15 years ago to dedicate himself to writing could be seen as an act of the kind of courage he celebrates in his works: It meant walking away from a successful career as the president of a venture-capital corporation.

From that experience, Barron cites the steps that can lead to a rewarding life. “Find what you love to do. Find something that the world needs. Then put the two together.”

That’s valuable advice for children, as well as for anyone who has ever been a child.