WORKSHOP INSPIRES VANCOUVER CHILDREN’S BOOK

By Lorraine Chan

David Adams is going to be a published children's author on his first time out -- thanks to the workshop he took through UBC Continuing Studies.

Adams has just signed a contract for Goodnight Vancouver, a picture book he conceived, refined and sold over the course of the eight-session Children's Book Workshop.

His debut effort will join more than 35 other titles in the series called Goodnight Our World, which presents North American cities and regions through the eyes of a child. To date, the books have showcased such places as New York, Los Angeles, Montreal, Chicago, San Francisco and now Vancouver.

"Goodnight Vancouver will come out next September, just in time for the 2010 Olympics,” says Adams, a research coordinator in UBC's Faculty of Medicine’s Dept. of Family Practice.

The Goodnight Our World series is inspired by Goodnight Moon -- a bedtime classic that has lulled children to sleep since the late 1940s.

What made his success all the more sweet, says Adams, is that normally the series publisher, Adam Gamble, writes the books in-house, but in this case made an exception.

"Gamble stated that he appreciated the thought and hard work that went into the manuscript," says Adams, who has written for theatre, film and radio.

In turn, Adams attributes his success to the solid grounding he received from workshop instructor Michael Katz, publisher of Tradewind Books -- a company that specializes in children's picture books.

"The course covered all the industry and writing fundamentals,” says Adams. "I couldn't have done it without Michael's encouragement and guidance.”

At the start of the workshop, students researched the industry, focusing on titles they admired. Adams selected Good Night San Francisco, a book he purchased for his two–year old niece while
traveling in that city. "I thought, 'why not Vancouver?'"

Students explored the conventions and specific structures of children’s books. For example, a picture book for ages 3-6 would often comprise a total of 14 spreads (double-page layouts) with illustration and text.

Once they determined the parameters of their story, students tried their hand at writing a book they would like to see available for children.

"For me the challenge was how to convey the enchantment and delight of Vancouver in 250 words in language kids can understand," says Adams.

He also wrote with an eye to the Goodnight Our World series conventions -- 10 spreads, no more than 250 words, a progression through the city’s four seasons and four periods of the day: morning, afternoon, evening and night.

Adams says it was hard to narrow down the stunning choices of Vancouver sites. His book will highlight renowned scenic spots such as Stanley Park, Granville Island and Lynn Canyon. To evoke the wonders of this city, Adams says he "looked at what a child would see, the bugs in the forest, the height of the trees."

Once students finished polishing their text, they then had the option of sending out query letters to publishers. Adams was euphoric when he received the publisher’s acceptance letter, and then a bit nervous about negotiating his first contract.

"But Michael walked with me through the process so I felt quite reassured."

Adams is now working on a children’s book series with his wife. "We want to capture the wonder of a child’s world, but also address social issues, such as vegetarianism. Nothing didactic, but definitely an underlying message of respect and compassion."

UBC Continuing Studies’ next Children’s Book Workshop will be offered September 30 to December 5. For more information, visit: www.writingcentre.ubc.ca/personal/grouping3.html.