

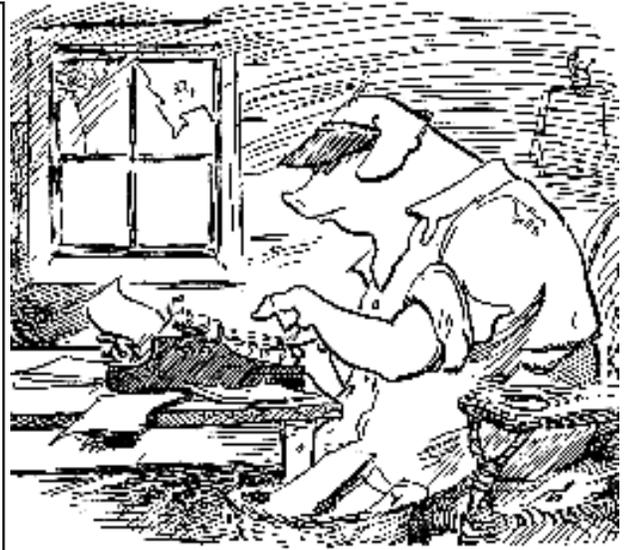
# THE BEAN HOME NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to the memory of our friend, Walter R. Brooks

Vol. 24, No. 3

Spring 2017

From the Mailbag . . . . .	2
From the Editor . . . . .	4
The Syracuse Flying Saucer Mystery, <i>by Harley Hahn</i> . . . . .	5
Accept No Imitations, <i>by Randy Cepuch</i> . . . . .	6
In Brief: The Purring Lesson; The Reading Judge; Crossword Puzzle Solution . . . . .	8
Equines and Others, <i>by Michael Cart</i> . . . . .	9
President's Corner: I Didn't Want to Like E-books . . . . .	10
<i>The Wind in the Willows</i> and Freddy, <i>by Henry Cohn</i> . . . . .	11



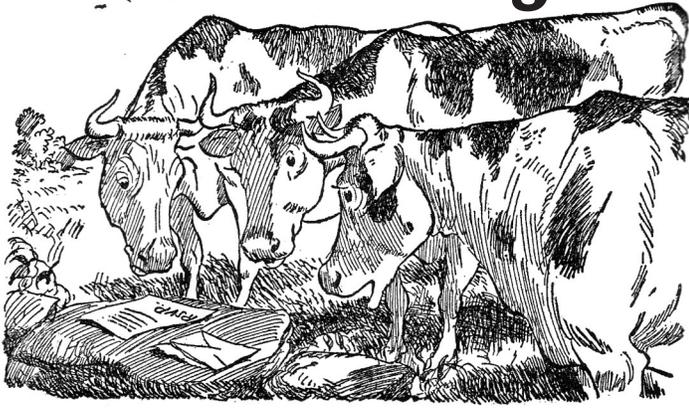
## Spreading Freddy via Little Free Libraries

See story on page 3!



*Members are already sharing Freddy books by putting them in Little Free Libraries, from Houston (top left) to Toronto (bottom left) to Spencerport, NY.*

# From the Mailbag



Thanks for the latest *Bean Home News!* While reading your good stuff about our pal there was this perfect item on today's radio news: during this cold snap some Boston-area group of women are knitting sweaters for chickens and the grateful hens are laying more eggs. Checking this out on Google, I found that others are doing the same! Can't you just imagine Mrs. Wiggins organizing the ladies of Centerboro to knit up warm winter gear for local hardworking hens and other animals!! (Not even Mr. Brooks can convince me that Mrs. W. could manage a pair of needles.)

Also, can anyone solve a question I've had since early childhood (I collected all the books with my first adult salary): What on earth does the title *To and Again* mean!?

Judy Dawes  
(Swampscott, MA)

*Walter, who was born in 1886, was fond of unusual and antique words and phrases. Indeed, the books are filled with them, some from common usage and others that he created himself. Though I can't prove it, I assume it was in that latter spirit that he came up with To and Again as the title of his first book, which was, of course, about the animals' journey to Florida and their return to the Bean farm. Thus, they went TO Florida AND came home AGAIN at the book's end; q.e.d., To and Again. And so it makes eminently good sense that his second book, about another journey, should have been titled More To and Again. While I've always liked these two old-fashioned titles there's no question that their revised and updated titles Freddy Goes to Florida and Freddy Goes to the North Pole are much more appealing to modern readers. — Michael Cart.*

About 12 years ago I subscribed to the *Bean Home News* and membership for my oldest grandson, Andrew Kafker. (now about to graduate from college). In fact, he and his mom, my husband and I attended the convention in Margaretville. I was recently looking at the pictures from the play and they made me smile.

So, now our youngest 2 grandsons, Elliot and Lucas, love Freddy too. They listen to many of the books on audible which are delightful to hear narrated by John McDonough. He sounds just like Mr. Bean should sound.

They will enjoy receiving membership correspondence, just as their cousin Andrew did.

Thank you, Kevin, and all those who are keeping our Freddy alive and well for more generations of readers.

Warm wishes,  
Dianne Brooks 🐷

# Mini-Con'17 Canada!

Remember we're getting together up north this year (see later in this issue for more information about the area):

November 10-12, 2017

Gananoque Inn, 550 Stone St. South, Gananoque, Ontario K7G 2A8 CANADA. 1.888.565.3101x398

We have booked the Cedar House as our get-together location and encourage members attending to ask for rooms in the adjacent Waterfront Building. Be sure to mention the Friends of Freddy so they know you're part of our group and get the best rate. Note that cancellations are subject to a C\$50 fee.

Note also that as a mini-convention we are only planning one day of activities (Saturday). The rest of the time we will spend on member-led outings or just getting better acquainted. Hope to see you! 🐷

The *Bean Home Newsletter* is published quarterly by the Friends of Freddy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and perpetuation of the writings of Walter R. Brooks and his literary alter ego, Freddy the Pig. Print memberships are \$25 for two years or \$45 for four. Electronic memberships are \$9.50 for two years or \$18 for four. (US funds only, please.) Overseas members please add \$12 additional for airmail delivery. Please make your check or money order payable to Friends of Freddy and send it to the official address given below.

Address changes may be sent to either the email or postal FoF address.

Newsletter submissions should be sent to Michael Cart at the address below.

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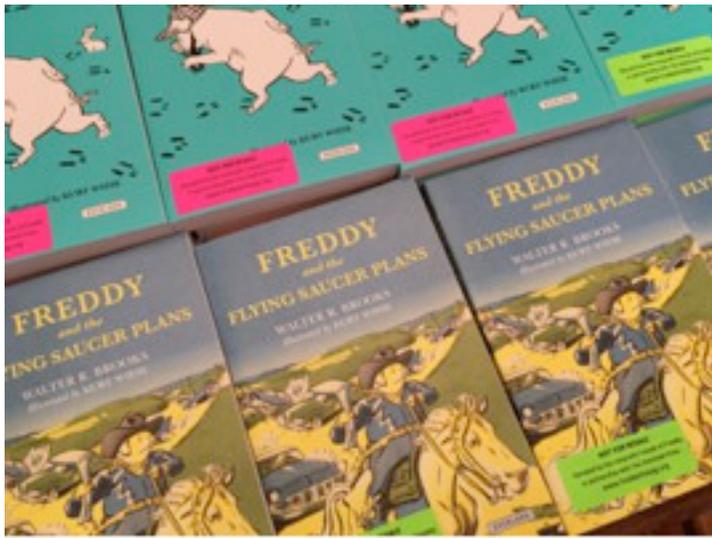
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## **Embassies of Centerboro, on a stick – Spreading Freddy far and wide via Little Free Libraries**

by *Randy Cepuch*

Two years ago, visiting Stockholm, I was intrigued by how those clever Swedes had converted many old phonebooths into tiny “take a book, leave a book” free libraries. When I came home I started noticing similar things in the US, often in the form of birdhouse-like structures on poles near roads or sometimes in grocery stores.

It took our own Dusty Gres to point out the wonderful opportunity for Friends of Freddy. At our 2016 convention, Dusty mentioned Little Free Libraries and suggested that placing Freddy books in LFL boxes might attract new readers and further the mission of Perpetuating Our Pig. Not long after that, I spoke with our friends at The Overlook Press to explore partnering with them. They asked for an explanation of how the LFL program works; our former president, Connie Arnold, kindly took on that task.

**Bottom line: Overlook has given us 225 brand-new Freddy paperbacks to distribute!**

What’s more, the titles are among those often considered to be good “starters” for new Freddy readers – *Freddy the Detective*, *Freddy the Magician*, *Freddy Plays Football*, *Freddy and the Flying Saucer Plans*, *Freddy Goes Camping* and *Freddy and the Baseball Team from Mars*.

Several members of the Executive Committee have already agreed to personally place books in LFLs (or unregistered but similar roadside libraries) near them – usually two different Freddy titles per box. Our founder, Dave Carley, is traipsing around Toronto, for example, distributing 50 books!

### **Can you help?**

While supplies last, it’d be wonderful to have members of Friends of Freddy help find (there’s a map at [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org)) and feed little libraries near where they live. To make shipping books to you for distribution easier on those of us doing it and cheaper overall,

please think in terms of at least a dozen books and don’t hesitate to aim higher!

If you can identify LFLs likely to be frequented by 9 to 12-year olds, terrific. If you want to monitor the LFLs you choose to see how quickly Freddy books are snatched up, that’s fine, too.

But don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Our goal is to get Freddy books into the hands of potential future Friends of Freddy – and LFL users, young or old, are almost certainly a likely audience. Please note these books are stickered with a “Not For Resale” message.

Let me know how many books you will distribute (remember, two per little library) by sending me an email at [randycepuch@gmail.com](mailto:randycepuch@gmail.com). Feel free to ask for any of the titles listed above but we may substitute others when supplies run out.

**ONE REQUIREMENT: WHEN YOU PLACE BOOKS IN LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES (OR SIMILAR BOXES), TAKE PICTURES ON YOUR CELLPHONE OF THE BOOK IN THE BOXES!** Then send the pics – and a list of the box locations – to me ([randycepuch@gmail.com](mailto:randycepuch@gmail.com)).

The boxes are often quite attractive, so we’ll feature some of the better pictures in a gallery right here in a future issue of *The Bean Home Newsletter*. They’ll also be a wonderful way to reassure The Overlook Press that this is no pork barrel project and we’re putting their extraordinary gift to extraordinarily good use! 🐷



*Dan Meiller takes up the cause in Phoenix, AZ.*

# From the Editor

by Michael Cart



Ah, the deerstalker cap, the clever disguises, and the omnipresent magnifying glass. Sherlock Holmes, right? Wrong! It's Freddy the detective on this case. Yes, Walter R. Brooks' talking pig was a clue stalker to rival the famous Holmes. Although he was only a supporting character in the first of Brooks' stories, *To and Again*, Freddy took center stage in the third book, *Freddy the Detective*, when he decided to become an investigator. He explained his new venture to his friend Jinx the cat: "I got the idea from a book I found in the barn, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. It's the best book I've come across in a long time . . . there are a lot of mysteries on a farm like this, and I'll solve 'em all. Maybe I can write them up in a book: *The Adventures of Freddy the Detective*."

Freddy actually never got around to writing his book but, thankfully, his faithful Boswell, Brooks, did and the story is widely regarded as the best in the 26-volume series. Indeed, the book, which has been reissued by the Overlook Press and Puffin, was a finalist for a 2002 Book Sense Book of the year award in the Rediscovery category.

Brooks disingenuously claimed to be clueless about why Freddy became his "permanent hero" but there's a good explanation for the pig's becoming a detective. It was simply because Brooks doted on mystery novels. They were his forte as a nationally prominent reviewer for *The Outlook and Independent* magazine, published in the 1920s. In fact, Brooks was one of the first to discover the work of famed mystery novelist Dashiell Hammett. In his review of Hammett's *Red Harvest* (1927) Brooks enthused, "We recommend this one without reservation. We gave it an A+ before we'd finished the first chapter." Hammett was laconically appreciative. In a note to Brooks he wrote, "Many thanks for your kindness to *Red Harvest*" and signed himself "Gratefully yours." One of the saddest might-have-beens in literary history ensued when Alfred A. Knopf, publisher of both Brooks and Hammett, contracted with the latter to write an introduction to the forthcoming *Freddy the Detective*. Alas, Hammett, a procrastinator to rival Freddy himself, failed to deliver despite notes from an increasingly impatient publisher, such as the following, written April 2, 1932: "We have to have that Introduction of yours immediately . . . do you think you can manage this?" Then again on April 5<sup>th</sup>: "Just to remind you again that I need the Introduction to *Freddy the Detective* badly." And yet again on April 12<sup>th</sup>: "I have been trying to get you

on the telephone as you had promised me the introduction to *Freddy the Detective* last week. Do you think you could manage it for me?" All too clearly the answer was no.

Happily the book's author was more reliable. *Freddy the Detective* was published in 1932 and from that first case (solving the theft of a toy train) to the last, *Freddy and the Dragon* (1958) in which he uncovers a crime-committing Headless Horseman (shades of Washington Irving) Brooks always managed to create new and diverting cases for Freddy to investigate. In fact, "the games afoot," as Holmes would have put it, in 16 of Freddy's 25 adventures.

In some ways Freddy was an unlikely detective: he was a poet, an often illogical thinker, and much given to flights of fancy. Fortunately he recognized this and took Mrs. Wiggins the cow into his investigative partnership. "It was an excellent combination," Brooks notes. "He supplied the ideas and she the common sense, neither of which is of much use without the other." As the firm of Frederick & Wiggins Detectives (Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2-4 p.m. Not a loss to a client in more than a century") grew increasingly successful, it became necessary to employ assistants, so Freddy formed the Animal Bureau of Investigation, "a large corps of birds, small animals and bumblebees" under the direction of the capable but nearsighted robin J. J. Pomeroy.

Like his mentor Holmes, Freddy was a master of disguise. Indeed, Brooks tells us, "He had more than twenty disguises that he used." Among them were the desperado Snake Peters, Captain Neptune, the space alien with a blue face, and Mr. Arquebus, a crotchety baseball coach. Yet it is one of Freddy's first disguises, that of an old woman, which he donned in *The Clockwork Twin* (1937), which seems to have been his personal favorite. In later adventures he would refine the female persona, in one adventure becoming a little old Irishwoman "from Ballyhooblin in County Mayo," complete with an accent that, according to Riley, Mrs. Church's Irish chauffeur, "is the worst imitation of Irish talk I ever heard."

Frankly, the costume wasn't really much better. As Jinx said when he saw Freddy, "If you didn't guess who he was right off, you might think he was something human or you might decide not to take any chances and run up a tree." Freddy, of course, said dressing up made things "a lot more fun . . . and perhaps that is as good a reason for doing anything as you can find." This last remark is not only a prime example of the series' signature wit and wisdom but it also explains why the Freddy books have endured as modern classics. The fun Brooks had writing them is evident on every page for readers to share.

And there's absolutely no mystery about that! 🐷



# The Syracuse Flying Saucer Mystery

by Harley Hahn

You will remember that in *Freddy and the Men from Mars*, the Martians let Mrs. Bean steer their flying saucer from the farm to Syracuse (a detour on their way to visit the fake Martians at the circus).

When they get to Syracuse, Mrs. Bean steered the saucer up Salina Street. Why Salina Street?

Because Mrs. Bean lived outside of Centerboro, which was modeled after Rome N.Y. when Walter Brooks was growing up. And South Salina Street was “the commercial core of Syracuse, New York from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.”

(reference: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Salina\\_Street\\_Downtown\\_Historic\\_District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Salina_Street_Downtown_Historic_District))

It only makes sense that, given a chance to drive a flying saucer to the closest, largest, and most important nearby city (Syracuse), Mrs. Bean would naturally steer it towards the main commercial street (South Salina).

As a reminder of what South Salina looked like on the day Mrs. Bean visited it in the saucer, I have attached a screenshot of page 167 of “Freddy and the Men from Mars”.

In the drawing, you can see Mrs. Bean leaning out of the saucer waving at Amos Walcott, who is the elderly uncle of Mrs. Bean’s

brother-in-law, more precisely, “her sister’s husband uncle”. Why is this important?

We know that Martha Bean, nee Doty, grew up in Centerboro. We also know she had a brother named Aaron Doty. (Although the “brother” in *Freddy Plays Football* was an imposter, she did have a real brother of that name.)

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*But who is standing behind Mrs. Bean in the drawing on page 167?*

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And now we also know that Martha and Aaron had a sister, one who married and moved to Syracuse. It’s likely that she married a man whose last name was Walcott, although it’s not for sure. (After all, Amos could be the husband’s uncle by marriage. If not, he was a biological uncle, and Martha’s sister did marry a Walcott.)

What is even more startling is that, although Martha hasn’t seen her brother Aaron in many years, she does stay in touch with her sister. On page 166, she remarks that Amos saw her only two years earlier.

Further speculation: Even though Mr. Bean is in the saucer with her, she says “in the two years since I have seen him”, not “since we have seen him”. Thus, it is likely that she made the trip to Syracuse to visit her sister alone, that is, without Mr. Bean.

How do we know that Martha went to Syracuse to see her sister? Is it not possible that her sister came to the farm to see her?

No. Since she saw Amos Walcott at the same time, only two years earlier, he would have had to come to the farm as well. However, he has been lame with rheumatism for the last 10 years (page 166), so it is unlikely that he would travel all the way to a small farm outside of Centerboro to visit the sister of his nephew’s wife.

But there’s more. Look closely at the drawing on Page 167. You can see Mrs. Bean waving from the open door. We know it’s Mrs. Bean because of the description in the text, and because of her hairstyle. On page 148, it clearly states that Mrs. Bean wears her hair pulled back -- compared to Mrs. Webb who wears a bang.

But who is standing behind Mrs. Bean in the drawing on page 167?

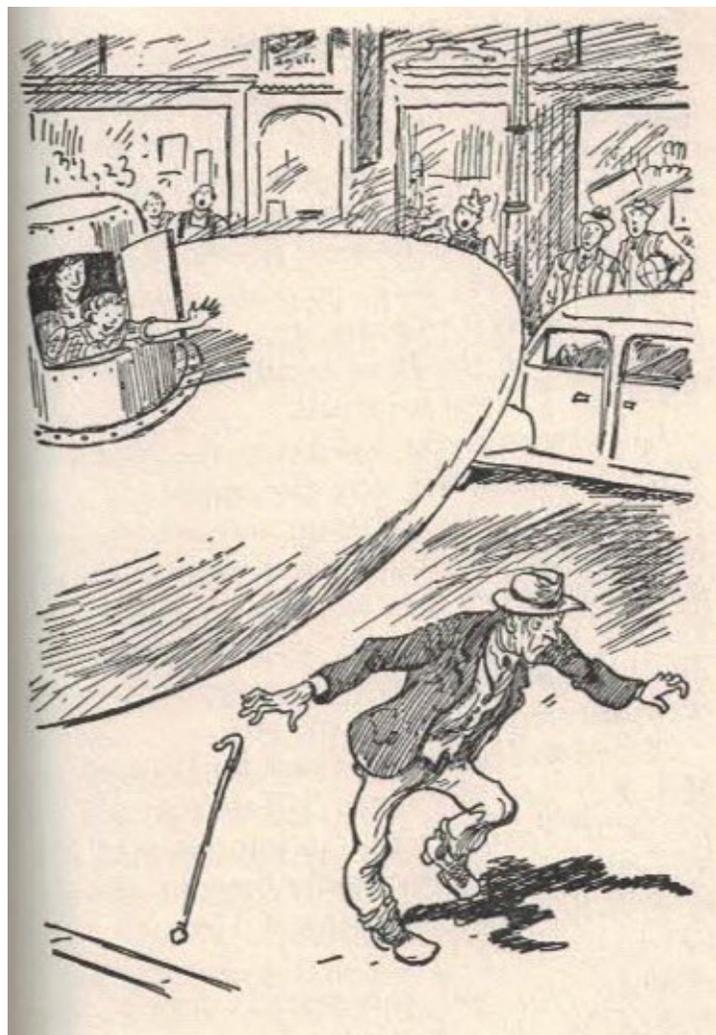
Clearly it is a human, not a Martian. And it is a man.

However, according to the text, there are only two men in the saucer, Mr. Bean and Uncle Ben. But Mr. Bean has a beard, and the man behind Mrs. Bean is far too young and too tall to be Uncle Ben.

So who is he?

The best explanation I can think of is that the young, tall man standing behind Mrs. Bean is a grown-up Adoniram or Byram. You will remember that in *Freddy and the Popinjay*, Freddy has a dream about Adoniram and Byram. Afterwards, in talking to the animals, it is clear that the boys are not on the farm.

So how can one of them (or both of them) be in the flying saucer? Most likely, they returned, grown-up, after *Freddy and the Popinjay*. For some reason, Walter Brooks, the self-described “official historian of the Bean Farm” had decided to not ever mention the boys again, even though they were on the farm and, presumably, helping Mr. Bean with the farm work. (We can only speculate why Brooks won’t mention them.) ☹



# Accept No Imitations: How to Tell Our Freddy from All the Others

by Randy Cepuch

There are a lot of Freddys (or Freddies) out there and we should do our best to minimize the potential for confusion, so I've put together this guide. (If you're tired of reading, watch this on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44KCRzZTuOE&t=4s>).



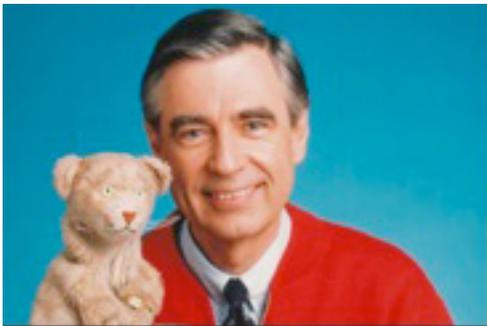
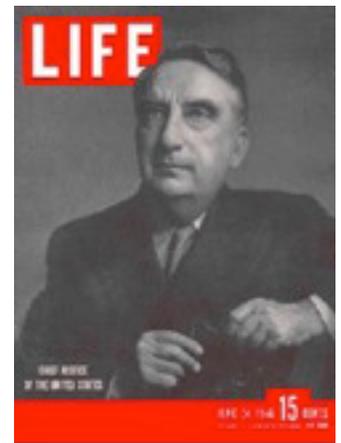
Fred Astaire was a singer and actor, but mostly a dancer known for his ability to dance up walls and even across ceilings. He's known for hoofing.

Our Freddy is known for having hooves.



Fred Vinson was appointed Chief Justice of the US by Harry Truman in 1946, after serving as a Congressman and Secretary of the Treasury.

Sure, he was Secretary of the Treasury. But Freddy was president of the First Animal Bank.



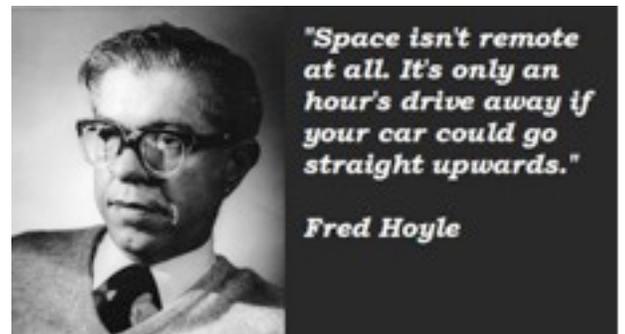
Fred Rogers was a beloved TV personality and noted sweater wearer (although sometimes he reportedly enjoyed dressing up as the Ignormus and terrorizing his neighborhood. Okay, I just made that part up.)

Our Freddy has always avoided TV appearances because he says the camera adds ten pounds.



Fred Hoyle was a British astronomer best known for his theory of stellar nucleosynthesis (whatever that is) and for rejecting the Big Bang Theory (not the program, the actual theory)..

Our Freddy *has* no theory of stellar nucleosynthesis.





Fred(die) Laker pioneered no-frills flights with his transatlantic airline, Laker Airways.

Big deal. Our Freddy proved pigs can fly.



Fred Durst is the lead singer for a band called Limp Bizkit.

Our Freddy would be very unlikely to be in a band named after things he would undoubtedly eat.



Fred Gwynne: You might know him as Patrolman Francis Muldoon from *Car 54 Where Are You*, or Herman Munster from *The Munsters*. Herman Munster had a furry pal named Thing.

Our Freddy has a furry pal named Jinx.



Fred(die) Krueger – leading man in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* film series, who appears to victims in their dreams and kills them.

Our Freddy is a much better poet.

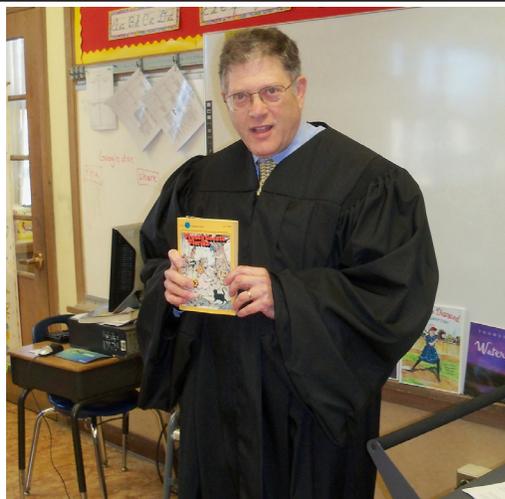


## The Purring Lesson

by Wray Rominger



It had been a long time since I read *Freddy and the Dragon*. Coming to Chapter 12 one encounters Freddy and Jinx on Mrs. Peppercorn's front steps. A kitten comes along and asks Jinx to give her purring lessons. Jinx really couldn't be bothered until the kitten explained that she belonged to Mrs. Twitch, the cook at Ollie Groper's hotel, and could pay for purring lessons with leftover goodies and cream from the dining room. (It reminded me of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* offering to pay 'enry 'iggins for her elocution lessons.) Cute! But wait. Several years ago in a doctor's waiting room I picked up a copy of *Country Living* magazine. Apparently there is a feature called "Ask the Country Vet." A woman wrote in that her cat did not purr. Was something wrong? "No," the veterinarian answered. "Cats learn purring from their mothers, and cats raised from birth by humans do not purr." Perhaps Walter knew such a cat. 🐾



## The Reading Judge

by Henry Cohn

Here is a photo of me on March 2, 2017 at a 5th grade class at an elementary school in New Britain, CT, on Reading Across America Day.

The kids love the robe which is why I bring it.

I read the alligator chapter from *Freddy Goes To Florida*. They seemed to enjoy it. I also gave them, and about 4 teachers, information on Walter and other books in the series.

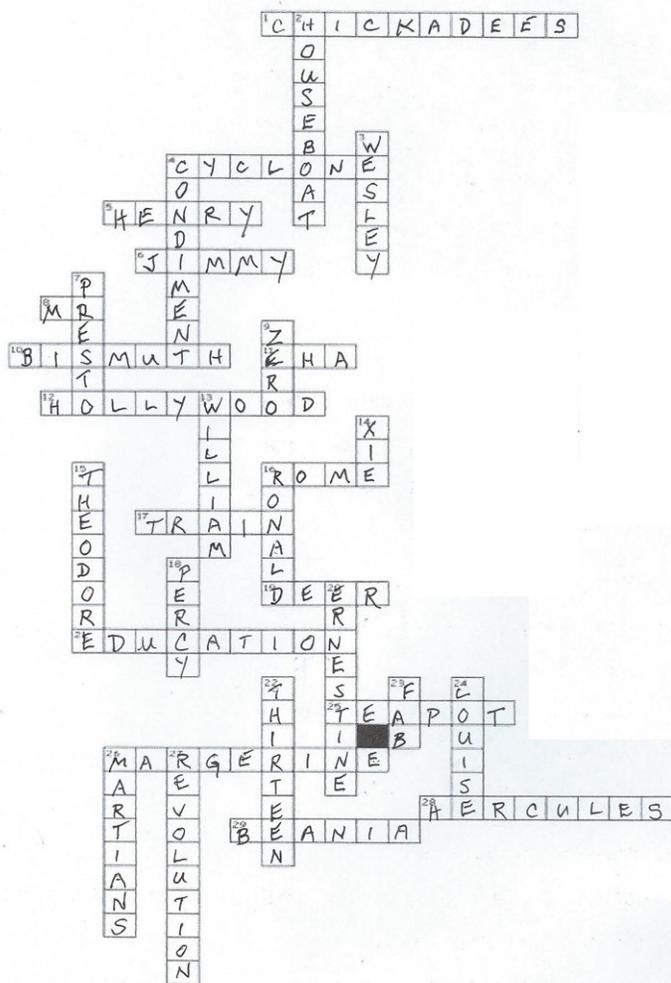
Perhaps some day you can use this photo as a newsletter filler. I would send a photo of the kids but I'm not sure I can do that without their permission.

It would also be an idea to encourage members to get out to their local school or library and read some Freddy to the kids, and thereby spread the word to their teacher and librarian. Perhaps the club could even donate a couple of books to any school or library that participated in such a program. 🐾

## Crossword Solution

Crossword by Connie Arnold

Solution by Michael Cart



# Equines and Others

by Michael Cart

Most Freddy fans already know that Walter created another celebrated talking animal, Ed the horse, who became the co-star of the sixties' antic TV series, "Mr. Ed." Walter found certain similarities between his two creations and their respective adventures. They both could talk, of course, though Ed talked to only one human, his often hapless owner Wilbur Pope. Ed once explained to Mr. P. why he was his only auditor: "Look, Wilb. You know what will happen (if I talk)? Reporters and Hollywood scouts and these candid camera lunkheads and people with babies and their lunch in a bag – that's what will happen by the million. And all peeking and snooping. Except for your wife's friends we have a nice quiet life up here in Mt. Kisco. Why spoil it?" Why, indeed?

As for Walter, he once dryly observed, "None of the animals I have ever known could talk, which seems a pity, since I have had to make up a lot of things that I could otherwise simply have taken down from their dictation." (Because at various times Walter had both a dog and a cat, one wonders if maybe they sometimes slipped him stories on the sly despite his protestations to the opposite... .) Anyway, Walter continues: "It is true that animals that can talk are probably a lot more fun to read and write about than they would be to have around. Your dog would give you an argument every time you told him to lie down and your cat would criticize everything you did in an unpleasant voice." Can't think of a dog in the Freddy books that fits that bill but as for the cat, perhaps Jinx's sister Minx might serve.

But back to similarities. A superficial one is that there were twenty-five Ed stories just as there were twenty-five Freddy books (if you exclude the anomalous *The Collected Poems of Freddy the Pig*). More substantive is the way in which the respective series were written. "I try to write the same for children and grown-ups," Walter once declared "or, rather, it is the only way I can write The talking horse and magic stories in the (*Saturday Evening Post*) were just children's stories for grown-ups and I find that many grown-ups read my kid stories" (sound familiar, Friends of Freddy members?). "I don't plan them ahead, though; I have never learned how, though I've tried." This reminds of something a friend of mine, the celebrated children's book author Sid Fleischman, once told me about his approach to writing: "I sit down at my computer every morning," he said, "look at it and say, 'Surprise me.'"

Like Walter, Mr. Pope was fascinated with talking animals. "When he was a boy," Walter tells us, "he had a dog named Horace who could almost talk. But Horace had died without saying a word." The chatty Ed would more than make up for that erstwhile silence, just as Freddy and his friends would make up for their silence in the first three Freddy titles in the fourth, *The Story of Freginald*, when animals begin talking with humans. Walter was silent on the reason for many years but finally he broke down and wrote, in a letter to a young fan, "In the first 3 books about Freddy the animals only talked to one another. But in *The Story of Freginald*, they began talking to people. I think the reason I changed was that it was more fun to have them talk to people. But I never explained it in the stories, because what explanation could you give? I just thought nobody would notice it. And of course everybody did!"

It's worth noting that Walter, like Mr. Pope, was fascinated by talking animals when he was a boy. He confirmed this when he

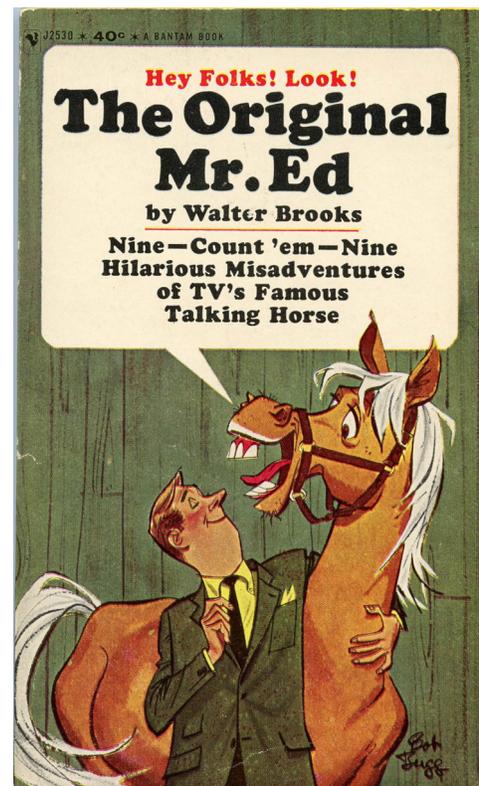
wrote, "I had always liked stories about animals talking, and my tales about the animals on the Bean Farm are, I suppose, echoes of the stories of Lily Wesselhoeft, which were my childhood favorites." (Wesselhoeft's husband, Dr. Konrad Wesselhoeft, was Louisa May Alcott's physician!).

Well, thus far this has been more digression than thematically unified essay so let's get back to the consideration of similarities, though this time let's focus on differences, instead, which most notably manifest themselves in the leading characters in the respective series. We all know Freddy, of course, that well-spoken, polished, empathetic and diplomatic porker. Ed was just the opposite: sarcastic, sardonic, and always quick with a quip, his talk was colloquial and sometimes reflected the fact that unlike Freddy he couldn't (gasp) read. He also had a predilection for strong spirits. It was for this reason, Dorothy Brooks (Walter's widow) once told me that *The Saturday Evening Post* stopped publishing Ed stories, for Walter refused to put Ed on the wagon. But I get ahead of myself: there's a wonderful episode in one of the stories in which Mr. Pope decides to teach Ed to read showing up at his stable with a bottle and a primer that starts with "A is for Aardvark."

"What the hell is an aardvark? said Ed. Why not teach me words I know? Like A stands for Ale. B stands for Beer. And what's this? C said Mr. Pope. C stands for Scotch said Ed. No, no, Ed, said Mr. Pope. C stands for – let me see – cognac.

Well, this didn't make sense to Ed and Mr. Pope tried to explain and they got into an argument that lasted until it was so dark they couldn't see the letters any more. The bottle was empty, too."

For literary historians, it's perhaps worth noting, in conclusion, that the publication of the Ed stories spans two decades: the '30s and the 40's, more specifically from 1937 to 1945. They appeared, chronologically, in three different magazines: *Liberty*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Argosy*. However, no matter where or when they appeared, they remain to this day a reader-pleasing delight. 🐾



# President's Corner: I didn't WANT to like eBooks... BUT...

by Randy Cepuch

Call me Old School or whatever you want (just not “Late for Dinner,” thank you), but I’m one of those people who tends to favor the analog version of things unless and until I’m overly impressed by the merits of digital. I was slow to embrace CDs and MP3s and still have lots of vinyl records – although I have to admit I never play them.

I doubt if that makes me unusual among Freddyites, the vast majority of whom grew up with books about our favorite pig (or anything else) as wonderfully tangible things – even if those I toted home from the library sometimes included pages stained by careless snacking readers. Also, I ran a bookstore for two years and delighted in bringing both order and happenstance to groaning shelves.

So although I was intrigued when eBook versions of Freddy were announced a while back and I thought they looked very nice, I was content to stick with my full set of Overlook hardcovers nestled between pig bookends.

Several months ago, I began to read through the entire series in order, and I’m about halfway through. Part of my motivation was to compile ideas for a presentation I’m planning to do at the 2018 convention – an appreciation of Jinx. While reading, I took note of a few dated references here and there and that led to some online discussions about which books might be the best present-day “starters” to attract new Freddy fans. (That, in turn, helped us suggest titles to Overlook as donations best-suited for the Little Free Libraries program.)

The discussion thread reminded me how hard it is to remember what words or characters or scenes appear in each book. Wouldn’t it be nice if you could simply run searches on your computer, I thought?

Duh. Enter my newfound appreciation for eBooks!

After years of buying everything The Beatles ever did in every new format as it was released – vinyl to 8-track to cassette to CD to MP3 to remastered CD, etc. – I realized it was time to honor Freddy in a similar way. I treated myself to a complete collection of digital Fred-dys, all downloaded from Amazon for about \$6 or \$7 each.

Immediately I began discovering advantages I never expected. Word searches are indeed a snap, and before long I’d gone through all the books and located each use of keywords that would make our

hero nervous: “ham” appears 23 times, while “bacon” turns up 16 times and “pork” 15 times. “Pie” (as a food rather than an endearment) turns up 78 times in a total of 18 books – a frequency that no doubt has always made a major contribution to my enjoyment of the series. (Truth be told, I was probably among those “careless snacking readers” responsible for a blueberry pie stain or two on a library copy back in the day.)

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*Call me Old School, but I’m one of those people who tends to favor the analog version of things unless and until I’m overly impressed by the merits of digital.*

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Searches come up with snippets of context, making it easy to separate mentions of pies you eat from references to “Sweetie Pie” or perhaps even those things Mrs. Wiggins and Mrs. Wogus have been known to deposit in the meadow. They also reveal where something is in a book, so it was simple to determine, for the sake of my pending Jinx presentation, that the black cat’s name is the very first word in no fewer than five of the 26 books in the series.

Among the many other advantages of eBooks:

- if you want to photocopy an illustration and put it up on your wall to inspire you, you can just capture the image from your screen and not worry about ruining the spine on your book by pressing it tight against the scanner
- you can adjust the width of pages
- you can adjust how bright a page is and even switch from black type on a white background to white type on a black background (or black type on a sepia-tone background)
- you can determine how many columns of type you’d like on each page
- you can use electronic bookmarks to flag pages you might want to revisit
- you can change the display font
- you can turn the pages silently
- and perhaps most importantly of all for those of us with aging eyes –

## You can easily make the type (and the pictures) larger!

Try *that* with a physical book.

Sure, there are a few ways that eBooks suffer by comparison. Battery life isn’t a factor when reading physical books (except perhaps if a flashlight is involved). A solar flare powerful enough to erase digital data is far less likely to have an effect on printed books. No flight attendant will ever tell you to turn off a paper book. And you probably can’t use an eBook to hold up the short leg of a dining table as the Beans did with *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* until they bought a new table and gave the book to Freddy.

But I’m now a big fan of eBooks, thanks to discovering the joys of digital Fred-dys. One more advantage I forgot to mention: it’s *much* easier to wipe blueberry pie stains off a screen than a page in a book. Not that I’d know from personal experience, of course... 🐷





# The Wind in the Willows and Freddy

by Henry Cohn

The back cover of the Overlook Press editions of the Freddy series quotes the *New York Times Book Review*: “[Freddy books] are the American version of the great English classics, such as . . . *The Wind in the Willows*.” In what ways are the Freddy books written by Walter R. Brooks similar and different to Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*? Of course, both Freddy and *The Wind* feature rational animals that interact with humans, suspending any reality. Mrs. Underdunk merely protests to Judge Willey that she refuses to be cross-examined by a bird.

In each book, the animals take to the road for adventures and to fight villains. Freddy is frequently facing judges in court, as does Mr. Toad. Mr. Bean’s brother Ben has an experimental automobile, while Mr. Toad cannot keep out of racing cars. The animals’ clothes are similarly studied in both Freddy and *The Wind*. Freddy wears a ten gallon hat and Mr. Toad is concerned when he loses his waistcoat holding all his money. Both Freddy and Mr. Toad wear a washerwoman disguise. In both Brooks and Grahame, the animals often wash their faces and comb their hair.

Some of the animals in the Freddy books are similar to animals in *The Wind*, although they may not be the same type of animal. The Toad and Charles the rooster are similarly bombastic. Cy, Freddy’s horse in *Freddy the Cowboy*, has a similar disdain for Cal as the cart-pulling horse has for Mr. Toad in *The Wind*. A key incident in *The Wind* occurs when Rat and Mole travel in a fierce snow storm through the Wild Wood (in Freddy it is called the Big Woods) and are rescued on finding Badger’s underground home. Rat’s discovery of Badger’s home has a link to Sherlock Holmes, the Mole comments on the careful reasoning of the Rat in finding the Badger’s door. *Freddy the Detective* shows Brooks’ love of Sherlock Holmes too; Freddy is a faithful reader of the detective’s stories.

The Badger in *The Wind* is the brains and boss of the animals. Freddy travels into the Big Woods to visit Old Whibley, the owl, who

is also brainy and on top of most of the serious situations faced by the animals on the Bean farm. The Rat is tempted by a companion to see the world by ship, as Charles is tempted by a robin to travel to Florida.

The books are most importantly similar in that the Freddy series and *The Wind* stress a child’s need for safety and security. The close and comfortable riverbank home of Rat and Mole’s *Dolce Domum* are analogous to Mr. and Mrs. Bean’s warm kitchen, the cow barn and Freddy’s pig pen. The need to improve oneself and the value of forgiveness are found in both Freddy and *The Wind*.

There are major differences between Freddy and *The Wind*. *The Wind in the Willows* was published in 1908, while Walter R. Brooks’ *To and Again* was published twenty years later. Grahame was a banker (by the way, so was Freddy) solidly in the upper class of British society. He characterized himself as holding to strict Victorian values. While Brooks had received a substantial inheritance, he was a writer living in New York and favoring the free style of the metropolis. He was a major spokesman against Prohibition and for change in society.

Graham wrote to defend Victorian values. He was disappointed in the increasing influence of the Labor movement, had a dislike of the coming triumph of the motor car speeding over country roads, and over the years has been suspected of anti-Semitism in his picture of the pushy Toad trying to use his fortune to gain acceptance.

There are few women in *The Wind in the Willows*; only the gaoler’s daughter, her aunt and the barge-woman. At one point, the Rat scolds Mr. Toad because (horrors) a woman had thrown him into a stream. Brooks’ books have prominent women and female animals who show love and reasoning—Mrs. Bean, Mrs. Church, and Mrs. Wiggins. Graham was writing mostly about *chums*.

*Continued on page 12*

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## **The Wind in the Willows and Freddy**

*Continued from page 11*

The animals in Freddy, as one would suspect, do not have the same diet as Grahame's animals. Freddy likes flapjacks, while Mr. Toad enjoys his hot buttered toast. Brooks' grandfather was a minister and scholar; his principles are found in the Freddy books, but not overtly. Graham, in contrast, has the Rat and Mole seek out the god (or God) that they call Pan. The Rat and Mole have a religious experience and fall into a trance of worship.

The Oxford University Press edition of *The Wind in the Willows*, edited by children's literature expert Peter Hunt raises another issue important in comparing Freddy books to *The Wind*. Is it correct to call *The Wind in the Willows* a children's book? This question would never arise with the Freddy books. As Michael Cart has written in his biography of Brooks, *Talking Animals and Others*, Brooks was an author of adult fiction, who broke away from this pattern in 1927, to write the children's book, *To and Again* (now, *Freddy Goes To Florida*).

Hunt argues that the so-called animals in *The Wind* are types of people. Grahame's friend Jerome K. Jerome had recently published a book, *Three Men in a Boat* that was both a travelogue and a study of the travelers. Several of Jerome's incidents, including how the men cook their meals, and how they travel on a river, became similar incidents in *The Wind in the Willows*.

On the other hand, Michael Cart, also an expert on children's literature, has written to me the following about Hunt's theory: "I, on the other hand, would argue that it is definitely a children's book

from its original incarnation as a series of stories and letters told to and written for a child, his son, and its publication in 1908 was as a children's book. Grahame himself would have probably been dismayed by Hunt's overzealous explication [because he didn't want anyone probing secondary layers of meaning]. I believe he told a story for children that—if it has secondary layers of meaning, they are largely subconscious. I do think that there is no argument that adults love the book, just as we adults love the Freddy books, which—if one were so inclined—could be analyzed half to death as Hunt has done with *The Wind* . . . . But, really, what is the point? I think books for children are written to be enjoyed and the fact that many of them continue to be loved by adults reveals their power to speak to the child's heart and mind and are, thus, definitely written for them."

Thank you Michael for your excellent insight. ☺

