

**An interview with the creators of *Neighbors*,
The Yard Critters, Book 1, a new book from
Filsinger & Company, Ltd., New York**

George Held, who wrote *Neighbors*, and Joung Un Kim, who illustrated it, recently responded to questions about the book from Jim Furlong, independent journalist and writer. Mr. Held's remarks appear first.

JF: I have read most of your poems and would classify them as adult reading. Can you say a few words about the poetry you have written prior to *Neighbors*?

GH: Prior to *Neighbors*, and since, I have written decidedly adult poems, but I always have also written playful poems, which is how I'd describe those in *Neighbors*.

JF: What inspired you to write poems for children?

GH: I still have a part of me that is a child at heart, so I occasionally write poems to entertain him. The publisher liked a few of my animal poems and urged me to write enough of them for a children's book.

JF: How is writing for children similar to and different from writing for adults?

GH: While I generally avoid difficult syntax and language when writing for children, I have included in *Neighbors* some challenging words that offer parents teachable moments for vocabulary building. I am also careful not to condescend, and I write in shorter lines, but I try to find engaging language and music no matter my audience.

JF: Did you listen to or read poetry as a child?

GH: I was lucky enough to have parents who read to me from the time of my earliest memories. I especially liked verse with rhyme and meter, like “Hickory Dickory Dock.” One of my earliest favorite books was *A Child’s Garden of Verses*.

JF: Are the poems in *Neighbors* pure entertainment or do they have an educational purpose as well?

GH: Since 1991, I have been a member of the executive board of The South Fork Natural History Society and Museum (Bridgehampton, NY), an organization devoted to educating people about and helping to preserve the natural world. The poems in *Neighbors* are intended to make even lowly animals appear valuable, as they are, and to show how they fit into their ecosystem. That’s why in *Neighbors* each animal has its own poem and illustration, whereas most other children’s picture books feature a single hero or heroine.

JF: Where do you come into contact with critters like the ones in *Neighbors*?

GH: I love to walk woodland trails and constantly look out and listen for critters, especially birds, snakes, and the increasingly rare turtle. And of course many of the critters are in my own yard.

JF: What can kids get from poetry that they don’t get from prose or classroom lessons?

GH: Ideally, kids read poems that provide music and images that will stick with them and make them want to reread what they love. When a great artist like *Neighbors* illustrator Joung Un Kim creates a marvelous menagerie of such images, word and picture interact and reinforce each other.

JF: How did you select and work with the illustrator?

GH: The publisher did a lot of research and together we looked at the ones whose work she thought would suit the poems best. She deserves the credit for finding and signing on Ms. Kim through the artist's agent, Jane Feder, but with my strong approval.

JF: What age group are these poems aimed at?

GH: While I hope kids as young as three--my age when I fell for nursery rhymes--will like these poems, I also think that no one is too old to enjoy them.

Joung Un Kim

JF: Were you trained as a painter or a graphic designer?

JK: My focus was illustration, which allowed me to do both, mostly in the context of storytelling.

JF: What research did you do after you read George's poems?

JK: I read a little about each animal for anything interesting, funny, or peculiar.

JF: What is your process for working?

JK: I read the manuscript, and get the essence or mood of the story. I think about ways to make it more intriguing than just visually explaining the text, while keeping true to it. I research and sketch. I find and create elements to use in the illustrations, scan them into Photoshop, and start collaging.

JF: What do you paint when you are not on assignment? In other words, what do you paint for your own satisfaction?

JK: I enjoy looking for and creating material to use in my collages. It's a pleasure to find odd little things, and figuring out a way to use them in the illustrations.

*Jim Furlong, interviewer, is author of numerous works of fiction and non-fiction. For many years, he was managing editor of the international news service of Dow Jones & Co., publisher of **The Wall Street Journal**.*

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