



Number 21

THE ARTIST ISSUE

Illustrator Loren Long
by C.F. Payne

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BEST

inside

FEATURING 161 FAMILIES...SO FAR

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A New Way to Look at Homes for Sale



THE MOVIE: Carl Samson always wanted to meet and paint wildlife artist John Ruthven. So, he did and we watched and filmed. See on: www.bestmagazinecincinnati.com

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About Best

Best Magazine is published 3X each year: January, May and September. Its editorial focus is on featuring families in their homes: who they are, what they do, what they like. Its advertising focus is to present products / services most likely desired by its readers and provided by Cincinnati's top businesses.

If you would like to nominate a family for inclusion in *Best*, or tell us about a business you would like to see advertise with us, call us at 513-708-3849.

Distribution of Best

Each issue of *Best* is mailed to nearly 11,000 selected homeowners living primarily in Cincinnati's eastside communities. Single copies are available for \$7 each through Joseph-Beth Booksellers, the Cincinnati Art Museum, The Weston Art Gallery and Frame & Save Hyde Park.

Accuracy

Being human beings, we are far from perfect. While every reasonable effort was made to be accurate and clear, we apologize now if something got past us. We appreciate your understanding.

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LOREN LONG



LOREN LONG HAS HEARD IT BEFORE.

THAT HE'S A BIG KID WITH A BIG IMAGINATION IN A BIG WORLD. ALL OF WHICH HE USES TO HIS ADVANTAGE IN HIS PROFESSION. THAT AND A LITTLE PAINTBRUSH, ONE OF THOSE UNDER \$4 TYPES THAT HE BUYS FROM MICHAELS OR PLAZA ART.

LOREN IS 47 GOING ON 27. HE HAS THE SMILE OF A KID WITH A NEW TOY, A RON HOWARD GRIN. HE HAS A MESSAGE FOR ALL OF US – TO DO THE RIGHT THING – TOLD IN MOSTLY MAKE BELIEVE.

STORY BY DOUGLAS EDWARD SANDHAGE
PHOTOS BY HELEN ADAMS



LOREN LONG. Heard of him? Few in Cincinnati, or in his Madeira neighborhood, have. But millions have read his name. Malia and Sasha personally chose him for something big, and their Dad shook his hand when he came to visit the round room in their Big House, the White One.

The newest edition of *The Little Engine that Could* has his name on the cover. Madonna knows him from *Mr. Peabody's Apples*. Both of their names are on that cover.

Loren is an illustrator *and* writer of children's books. Many would kill to be either.

Loren did not jump at the opportunity to have himself vetted in a magazine. He thought it perhaps a bit too much attention. Only after we introduced ourselves to him and his wife Tracy did he soften a tad, that and a nudge from another Cincinnati (Evendale) illustrator C.F. Payne. Loren did not know that C (Chris) drew the cover for this issue until about the same time you got it in the mail. C.F. is particularly well known for painting an inaugural portrait of President Obama for the cover of *Time Magazine*, and for having illustrated nearly a dozen children's books.

Three of the six artists featured in this issue make up things, or significantly alter existing ones, to paint, or sculpt. You have no idea what's in their heads until they are finished with it. In many cases,

their work may appear in a gallery or an art museum prior to sale.

Then there is Loren. He makes his things up too, but his audience is much broader.

Loren's illustrated version of *The Little Engine that Could* has had 400,000 printing impressions so far (600 of them have been sold to date at Joseph-Beth Booksellers, \$18); President Barack Obama's *Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters* (800 sold at Joseph-Beth, \$18), had an initial press run of 500,000 copies. Every children's book he does is guaranteed at least two sets of eyes: those of a parent and those of a child. Not to mention the aunt, the grandmother, other kids in the family and next generations.

Loren let me watch him paint, to create a story.

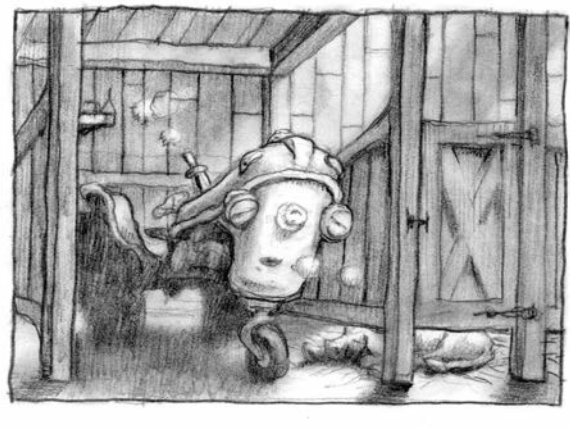
{IN THE STUDIO}



WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT LOREN LONG?
GO TO: WWW.LORENLONG.COM

All of Loren Long's illustrations begin with a storyboard, which includes how the book will be laid out end to end.

A pencil sketch is then produced for each page, or spread, and modified until it's time to paint the final to be submitted to the book publisher. The sketches and final pages shown here are from Long's *Otis* book, which he wrote and illustrated.



A BAT WITH FRECKLES

When you see Loren painting, you see him staring at his work just like a kid would do while reading one of his books, whether it be in Oklahoma, Okinawa or Orlando. And you get visions of Moms and Dads everywhere, happy that they can read their child to sleep and introduce them to a world of make believe, yet steeped in messages that include truth, hope, determination. Those that say: *Do the Right Thing*.

During our visit, Loren pulled out the working draft of what will be the dust cover for the newest book he is illustrating, *Night-song*, written by Ari Berk. It's about a bat named Chiro, whose mother is teaching him to fly for the first time. If you know about bats, you know they don't have the benefit of eyesight, but instead use radar. So Chiro has to start with a leap of faith that he can fly without crashing into something.

"It is very eloquently written," says Loren. "She (Chiro's

mother) says, 'just sing your song, and listen to what the world sings back.' It has a nice, profound message for all of us."

Loren pulls tubes of acrylic paints from a drawer and puts but a dab of each onto a disposable palette. He mixes one with another and soon applies them to the work with his brushes, which usually last him several years. Within 15 minutes, the working draft, which appeared to be more like a bird, becomes Chiro the bat, skeletally correct. Chiro looks like he can fly off the page and into your heart. Exactly what Loren has in mind.

Loren compares his work, particularly when he also writes the story line, more to that of a movie producer, rather than that of an artist. He chooses the costuming, the sequence of events, the lighting, the casting, the opening credits and the ending.

He explains: "When I got (the manuscript to) *Nightsong*, I got to sit by myself and read this and to think, 'who do I want to cast?' Instead of thinking Robert Redford or Brad Pitt, I said 'what do I

MY BEST BOOKS . . . SO FAR

One good book should always lead to another, whether you are a reader or an author. A happy reader keeps an author in business.

Best Magazine asked Loren Long to select the books that to him built upon each other. He chose seven titles that he either illustrated, wrote, or both.

I Dream of Trains by Angela Johnson

"This was the book that made me want to do this the rest of my life," says Loren. "I loved the art form, the experience of a children's book." Loren was 39 years old when he illustrated the book, winner of the 2003 Golden Kite Award for picture book illustration.

Mr. Peabody's Apples by Madonna

"While I still didn't know what I was doing, all I knew is that I loved children's literature and I had a story in front of me that I felt was created for me. The fact that it was written by Madonna added an exciting element to it, but at the end of the day it was me and the text. I believed in it." Published in 2003.

The Little Engine that Could by Watty Piper

Ranked among one of the most popular children's books of all time. "*The Little Engine that Could* changed the way I thought about the books I wanted to make. It made me assess and take stock, to study the books that I read when I was little," says Loren.

want my little bat to look like?' That's where the magic is. I want every child who sees this to know that Chiro looks different than any other bat. That's why he has freckles. He has little human feet.

"I have to love the manuscript in order to do it," says Loren. "This is completely different than the president's book. It (*Of Thee I Sing*) was an inspirational, meaningful piece, but it wasn't one little character that goes through a narrative, where there's a beginning, a middle and an end."

Nightsong will be released this fall by publishing giant Simon & Schuster.

While his curriculum vitae clearly suggests that he has already made it as one of the nation's top illustrators for children's books, Loren says his goal is to be like "Maurice Sendak or Dr. Seuss. The fact that I can write something, put pictures to it and have it become an art form, has become my quest."

To that end, he is the creator of his own character and story line. *Otis* premiered in 2009, followed by *Otis and the Tornado* late last year. "Otis is a special tractor who loves his farm, his farmer, and all of his farm friends. He works hard and plays hard. He has a big heart and possesses a lot of the qualities we all aspire too," says Loren. "Sometimes what I want to paint will dictate what I write. That is the advantage of having me do both.

"My whole creative process is driven by mood and emotion," he adds. "I often think about what kind of music would be playing. A film director has lighting, music, costume, actors, all those visual cues to help create mood . . . I think about this book (*Nightsong*) as a short film from frame to frame . . . It is about choosing moments in a manuscript to bring across the mood you are looking for, the hit. There is the moment when he (Chiro) sees beyond the pond. He's never seen it before. I'm thinking the music in this scene. In my own little head, I'm Martin Scorsese. I'm creating a

Toy Boat by Randall de Seve

Loren says it is among his favorites because it was "simply told, a classic feeling." *Toy Boat* received the "Off the Cuff Award" for Favorite Picture Book of the Year in 2007 from *Publishers Weekly*.

Drummer Boy, written and illustrated by Loren Long

"The first book I had written myself," says Loren, inspired by the Christmas carol "The Little Drummer Boy." "I realized at this point I was thinking of myself as an author, having ideas and wanting to share them." Published 2008.

Otis and ***Otis and the Tornado***, written and illustrated by Loren Long

"I'm proud of the character. In some small way, I'm sharing some good, noble stuff with the world through this fun-loving little tractor," says Loren. Published 2009 and 2011 respectively. A third *Otis* book is in the works.

Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters by Barack Obama

"By this time, my work was out there to the point that publishers knew it, one led to the other. The subject was completely different than any other type of book I've ever done," says Loren. Loren believes *Of Thee I Sing* is the only children's book ever done by a sitting president. Published 2010.



Of Thee I Sing was #1 on the *New York Times* best-sellers list for 11 consecutive weeks and stayed on the list for another 20. *Otis* was on the list for 17 weeks. In all, nine of Loren's books have appeared on the list, three of them making it to the number one spot.

movie. It's why books translate so well into film."

And that thought hasn't escaped Loren's long-term plans. As much as Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* was recently made into a movie, Loren has a character that just might work on the big screen as well.

"Now picture book people are getting Hollywood agents to shop their ideas," says Loren. "I have a book that no one has ever seen, it's about a little duck, called *Mac Duck*. It's just a silly little story but I'm already thinking about how it could be a movie . . . I'm going to direct this film, I'm going to cast it."

LITTLE BRUSHSTROKES MAKE THE BIG PICTURE

Loren shows me one of his most important tools to great illustrating: a magnifying glass. He uses it to examine his strokes, to see better how colors and shapes might bring a bigger smile, a bigger sense of wonderment, to his first-time readers. He usually paints on illustration board, a heavy-ply paper with a smooth surface that allows his finished work to scan well, thus eliminating a texturized background.

The paper is just a bit bigger than the actual size of the book, and once the illustrations are scanned, he will more closely inspect them on his computer screen. "I blow it up on my computer and think, 'Man, I'm a painter. Those are big brush strokes. Wow! I'm a master.' I'm joking a bit. I'm not trying to say I'm a master, but (what I see) are all those tiny little brushstrokes and how they matter to the (overall) picture."

Growing up in Lexington, Kentucky, the son of Bill and Elizabeth Long, Loren never imagined that his life's work would someday be showcased in every bookstore in America, in its libraries, and on the bookshelves of children's rooms all over the world. On his own bookshelf are copies of many foreign editions of his books, written in Chinese, Japanese, German, French, Spanish, Hebrew

and Vietnamese. He says he's been told that Madonna's *Mr. Peabody's Apples*, which he illustrated, has now been published in more than 100 languages.

"I never thought when I was studying the likes of N.C. Wyeth and Thomas H. Benton that I would ever be painting cute little tractors and the kind of stuff I'm doing," says Loren. "But it has taken on a higher art form for me . . . It's taken the art of making a children's picture book a classic . . . It has totally engulfed me. I can't think of a higher pursuit to do with one's art.

"I love the idea that I can create, that I can do essentially the same thing I was doing when I was four years old," he adds. "I'm drawing this and thinking, it would be cooler if he (Chiro the bat) had big floppy ears. So I'm thinking like I'm at the lunch table in third grade and saying, 'I should put freckles on him.' What I like about it is that you can make a living doing it. You're not in a boardroom with a white shirt on, but I'm still providing for my family and buying soccer cleats for my 14-year-old, and there's a major publisher that's waiting for my work and they're going to promote it and tour me. I think that, God willing, I'll be doing it for another 25 years."

While the book-publishing industry, particularly the print side of it has taken a significant hit the last few years, Loren is lucky in that his genre, children's books, still is viewed as one of the most stable in the industry, thanks to sales to parents and school libraries.

As Loren puts the finishing touches to Chiro, I start to leave for another appointment when a family friend calls him wanting to stop by and have Loren sign some of his books for her kids. I notice a large envelope on a ledge with probably 20 stamps on it, where it was obvious that the sender used his entire arsenal of postage to send copies of Loren's books to be signed and returned.

Loren's year-old, second-floor studio, is sort of like a tree house, a room 16'x 16' with a 13' ceiling, and wrap-around windows on three sides. He told his architect that he wanted to be off the ground, surrounded by a bevy of mature hardwoods. Here he can easily see the seasons change and watch the deer he's given Disney-sounding names. He feeds them, placing corn kernels in small piles around the yard. You get the idea that perhaps there is a book project forming, that the landscape has been set, awaiting Loren to imagine the cast of characters.

"My art is for that very tender, little fuzzy part of life," says Loren. "Where a mother, an aunt, a grandparent, or even a teacher, or somebody who loves a little kid, is sitting there, reading my story. I want them to love this little character. I want them to feel that this little character is their friend . . . They've read it for the fifth night in a row, and when they close the book (they feel like), 'I've just visited my friend.' Ditto with Otis. They know that Otis does the right thing every time. They can count on it." ■

{AT HOME}

HE THOUGHT HE COULD, SO HE DID.

Loren Long reads books to his two boys, Griffith, 16, and Graham, 14.

Yeah, they wince, being teenagers and all, and sometimes instead ask for the TV to be turned on so they can watch *The Office*.

Loren is not your everyday parental reader. Just prior to this interview he and wife Tracy were reading *The Hunger Games* with the boys, a young-adult science fiction novel.

On occasion, they will re-read some of Loren's own works.

Could be *The Little Engine that Could*, the 2006 edition he illustrated, a book that Moms the world over know nearly by heart.

Could be *Of Thee I Sing*, the one that President Obama wrote and Loren illustrated, after being personally chosen by the First Man's own daughters.

Could be *Otis and the Tornado*, written and illustrated by Loren about a tractor who loves everybody and, says Loren, "has a big heart and possesses a lot of the qualities we all aspire too."

If there is one image of the American dream that is nearly universal it's that of seeing a parent reading to a child. Most of us can picture it in our minds, as if it were only last night. We remember the story lines, the tonal inflections from Mom or Dad that would rise and fall with each sentence, the finely honed illustrations of character faces that let us know everything was going to be all right, that good is better than evil.

Loren and Tracy, his bride of 18 years, and their two sons, live unassumingly on a suburban street in Madeira. They moved here in 2010 after 13 years in a transitional home in West Chester. Their two-story, mid-century modern styled house sits in the middle of a small forest that includes robust ash, oak, maple, and buckeye. Deer – which Loren has given names like Sweetie Baby, Jack and Jill, Dwight, Joanie and, of

Built in 1955, the Long's three-bedroom, mid-century-modern-style home in Madeira sits on a secluded wooded lot. A significant remodel in 2011 resulted in the addition of an artist's studio above the garage. The lights are often on in the studio when Loren is facing a final deadline on one of his books.





Favorite paintings, most from friends of Loren and Tracy Long, make for a unique floor-to-ceiling arrangement in the Longs' living room. "It's all works we like and enjoy," says Loren, noting that they are easy to change out, to keep it fresh. One of the paintings is a 2004 portrait of Tracy done by Cincinnati David Mueller. The vintage-looking chairs are popular resting spots for the couple's two dogs. Robert Lee of Jones the Florist provided the flower arrangement, which included majestic red calla lilies, fuchsia snapdragons, green fuji mums, green button pomps, green hypericum, and variegated Ti leaves.

course, Buck, are frequent guests who nibble on the piles of field corn left by the Long family.

For most of his professional career, Loren worked in the basements of his homes. In this one, it was going to be different. After moving in, he asked his architect, Mike Wentz, to build a separate studio, close to the house, but far enough away so he could dream without interruption. But when Wentz said that the best choice

would be to simply use the surround sound, surround forest, surround sky – and add a room above the garage, featuring wrap-around windows on three sides, and a 13' ceiling, Loren was speechless. When you stand in the middle of his studio, the branches of a giant ash appear to cradle the room, almost like being in a treehouse.

One of Loren Long's more notable meets in the book business was Frank McCourt, author of *Angela's Ashes* and *Angela and the Baby Jesus*, the latter of which was illustrated by Loren. Together they toured to promote the title. Frank signed the movie poster for *Angela's Ashes* and presented it to Loren at a movie showing with the inscription, "To My Fellow Adventurer." The spiral staircase leads to Loren's studio.



LOW PAY / GOOD EXPOSURE / HIGH AMBITIONS

Loren grew up in Lexington and graduated from UK with a BA in graphic design/art studio. He liked what he was learning and went on to do graduate studies at the American Academy of Art in Chicago.

One of Loren's first jobs was as an illustrator for Cincinnati-based Gibson Greetings, a low-paying, but quick-learning environment for anyone wanting attention paid to their work. Exposure

included nearly every greeting card rack in America.

There he met Tracy, one of the firm's accountants, whose office just happened to be by a photocopier that Loren preferred over dozens of others located closer to the jean-dressed den of illustrators. It was, he says, within "hello" distance of this Hamilton-born girl who later, he learned, knew his salary and still agreed to go out with him. When she ordered a Beck's dark beer on their first date



While Moon (left) and Ellie, the Longs' two Weimaraners, don't normally sit on the island counter, they certainly have the run of the rest of the house, says Loren. Loren says Tracy "likes to cook. She has never cooked a thing I haven't loved. I like to watch her cook and pretend like I'm doing something, like pour the drinks." The kitchen was totally remodeled in 2011.

and cried at the end of *Rain Man*, a reaction that tugged at Loren's heart, he was smitten. They married in 1992 in nearby Monroe.

The storybook life of their early years together is not altogether different from that of any other couple who worked hard to get ahead, to someday retire and rest on the nest egg. But fame entered along the way.

After Gibson, Loren's work took a few quantum leaps through publisher territory, starting with the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, and on to magazines like *Forbes*, *Time*, *Atlantic Monthly* and *Sports Illustrated*.

He did well and soon book publishers also came a-calling. They asked him to do covers for children's books. From covers he moved to illustrating the interior pages.

As much as Loren's work is now represented in nearly every bookstore in America, Tracy, though in a less direct way, is represented in nearly every school in America. Her parents founded Hamilton Stands. If you ever played in a school band, the stand that held your sheet music probably had the word HAMILTON embossed across it. They were built like tanks to withstand high winds, and were broad enough to hide shenanigans from the band director. Wikipedia says that Bob Dylan used the stand and that Michael Nesmith of the Monkees even referred to the stands in his song, "Circle Sky."

Sharing ownership of the company with her siblings, Tracy worked at Hamilton Stands for more than a decade, serving in nearly every capacity, including the manufacturing line and human resources. They sold the company in 2006.

It was clear in our interview with this couple that they support each other. Loren frequently interrupts his train of thought to say how Tracy was the backbone to a lot of his success; she talks about how he listens, and how he has taken a significant load in raising the boys.

"She married me knowing I had a big question mark over me," says Loren, speaking about the fate of illustrators in general, meaning that many stay in the low-pay category. In the early days, he says that when he mentioned anywhere in public that he was an illustrator, either the room "got interesting or it got real quiet."

Tracy says she believed in Loren because of his ambition. "You always dreamed big," she says, nodding in his direction.

"I've always been driven, deep down," he responds.

HE HAD THE CHOPS

In addition to Tracy, there is a second person Loren holds dear to his success: C.F. (Chris) Payne. Chris is the one who recommended to *Best Magazine* that this issue include both Loren and portrait artist Carl Samson. When Loren decided he wanted to be more than a greeting card illustrator, "that I wanted to be a freelance illustrator of some kind . . . to do national work . . . to be in the Society of Illustrators," he took a night class at Miami University taught by Payne. Payne at that point was already known nationally for his work with *Sports Illustrated*, *Reader's Digest*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *New York Times*.

Chris took Loren under his brush. "He told me 'you are good enough, you just have to figure out how to separate yourself.' What he meant was, you've got the chops. You've got to give them (art directors) a reason to call you in Cincinnati as opposed to any number of other talented artists." Loren remembers working with Chris

into the early morning hours and recalls times when Chris let him finish “tiny little areas” in a *Sports Illustrated* project.

“That was awesome,” Loren recalls. “The cool thing for me is that I was single and did not have any other responsibilities. I would stay up all night and go home before four in the morning, take a nap, and get to work at Gibson by 8:15. I look back at those years fondly.

“I once told Paula (Chris’s wife) how much Chris meant to me, to my career, not so much my life, but my work at the time I needed it. There’s a closeness . . . this is kind of emotional for me because he was a big influence on my work.” The coincidence of Chris painting President Obama for the cover of *Time Magazine* and Loren illustrating the president’s children’s book is not lost on Loren.

He remembers the first call he got from an art director at *Time Magazine*. “He told me, ‘I want that Loren Long, Thomas H. Benton (famous for his paintings and murals) thing you’re doing.’ I was doing something that set me apart.”

But despite his achievements, on which he could easily hang up his hat today and feel good about it, Loren is far from content. “I feel like sometimes I’m the most confident person in the world, and then are other times when I am very insecure about my work . . . I judge myself by what’s next, or what I’m working on now. Sometimes I forget how far I’ve come, how many people who would love to be here.”

It is difficult to imagine a child growing up without having been read a book by a parent. “It is amazing how much books really affect children,” says Tracy. “They are so excited by them. Some of our favorite times when the kids were young were with them sitting on our laps and reading to them at night, the same books over and over. There is a tactile part of having a book and being a part of that.” Tracy says she remains amazed to see children come up to Loren at book signings and in schools and ask that he include them in his next book. “That happens over and over. It is really rewarding, even as your wife, just to see how they respond to you (Loren).”

It is Loren’s goal to do his own book, from beginning to end, that will someday be a classic like *The Little Engine that Could*. “People across the world know that ‘I think I can’ thing. I’ve told kids recently that I want to make a book that you read now, and love it, but that someday you’ll read it to your children.”

The decision to have Loren illustrate the 2005 redo of *The Little Engine that Could* came as a result of the publisher of the book Loren did with Madonna (*Mr. Peabody’s Apples*) talking to the publisher of Penguin Books, who owned the rights to *Little Engine*. Loren was present during the discussion when, Loren recalls, *Peabody’s* publisher, Nicholas Callaway, said, ‘You ought to get Loren to do the new version of it.’ “And I said, ‘Wow! That would be cool.’ But then I thought, it would be almost like sacrilegious. You can’t do new art for *The Little Engine that Could*.”

But that he did and *Little Engine*, the third version since its first edition in 1930, was soon #1 on the *New York Times* best-sellers list. “It’s my best selling title; it’s up there with *Of Thee I Sing*. I hope to be signing this book when I am 70 years old.” He said the book is popular as a graduation gift, and that he signed, during tough times in their careers, *Little Engine* books for racecar driver Jeff Gordon and Governor Bob Taft.

In the world of children’s literature, Loren is famous. Books that

sell 100,000-plus copies help make you so, especially when your name is on the cover. And when your Mom sees it. Loren says his Mother has always been a big fan, noting, “If I drew a picture of Snoopy, she would say it was the greatest thing in the world.” And his late father, even though he might not have first approved of Loren doing the president’s children’s book (“I don’t think you could have found too many people further right than he was”), he “would’ve bragged about it to everybody. My son did a book with the President of the United States.

“It’s not me (being famous) really, but it’s a privilege and an honor. I’m just sort of the same schlep whose trying to make pictures. I’m still the same guy picking up dog poop in the backyard. But it is cool to have a medium that does touch (so many) people,” says Loren.

When does a children’s book become a classic, such as *The Little Engine that Could*? Could *Otis and the Tornado* be the one that is still being read to children in 2050? Could *Otis* be fodder for a movie? A TV show?

“It would be awfully presumptuous for me to sit here and say I could create this kind of a classic but I’m certainly trying,” says Loren. “Every book I do I want it to be as great as *The Little Engine that Could* or better . . . *Otis* might be it. But I really feel my best work is to come. It would be fun for us to sit down two or three years down the road and find that there is an *Otis* show on TV.”

But most important to him, says Loren, is not necessarily the pride, the money, or his once-in-a-lifetime visit to the Oval Office to greet the President of the United States. It is looking into the eyes of his most honest reviewers: kids.

“There are professional reviewers and there are all kinds of measuring tools and big awards in this field. But the best thing for me honestly is some of the letters I’ve gotten that say ‘my two-year old loves *Otis*, it is his new favorite book’ . . . The world of children’s publishing loves to wave the literature flag because you are getting kids interested in books and they are learning to read because of those experiences, and it’s all true. But the part I like the most is what Tracy said, it’s the moments you spend with somebody who loves you, and it could even be a teacher, a librarian, and aunt, an adopted parent or whatever, those moments shape a person’s life, and if it’s with one of my books, that’s a special place for me.”

AT THE END OF THE DAY

Much of Loren’s time in his studio is time alone. Just him, three walls of windows, and the tree limbs just feet away that appear to be begging him to climb. It’s time to think about new characters, new plot lines, new ways to show a defining moment such as he did on the cover for *Miles’ Song*, about an African-American boy during slavery who escapes through the underground railroad, the look on his face on a mountaintop when he finds freedom.

Loren and Tracy say they often tell their sons, “Do something you love; don’t be afraid to dream.” As for continuing to read picture books to them, “I’m going to do that until they leave for college. It’s family time you don’t get too often,” says Loren.

But Loren cautions me that while his story may sound as “if I have it all figured out,” he adds that he hasn’t. But I disagree, at least in part. It’s hard to argue that a parent who still reads to his



Even today, Loren and Tracy Long say they sometimes still read books to their sons, Graham, 14 (left), and Griffith, 16. Ellie and Moon also seem to enjoy the family time together. “We don’t watch that much TV, but when we do it’s as a family,” says Loren. “This is our hangin’ out room.” The books on the shelves include some of Loren’s titles that have been published in foreign languages. The circular couch and ottoman were found at Macy’s Furniture Gallery in Kenwood.

teenage kids doesn’t have an inside edge to doing the right thing.

Together we imagined a parent somewhere else in the world reading *Otis and the Tornado* or *The Little Engine that Could* to their child. What is going through their head?

“This is a really warm fuzzy thing but I want people to feel my work, not just look at it,” says Loren. “I want these little ones, the raw ages, the ones who are well loved, the ones who have everything, the ones who don’t have everything, maybe don’t have love, I want them all, the fortunate ones, the unfortunate ones, I want them to feel like they visited a friend. I know this is all attempting to be profound but I want them to feel love from my books. It’s not curing cancer, or what the amazing doctors do for us, but more so than I got from just the broad-based world of illustration, I’ve

gotten that from doing books for kids.”

Loren says an agent once told him, “You’re not going to be happy only doing your art for children. I can tell you now, seven years later, it’s what has *made me happy*.” ■

WHO DID IT?

The following businesses were identified by the Longs as having been significantly involved in the home’s architecture, design and/or landscaping in recent years:

Architect: Mike Wentz, Wentz Design **Builder:** Metropolitan Design Build **Interior Designer:** Stacy Willenbrink **Realtor:** Robert Stephens, Comey & Shepherd