

ALUMNI BOOKS

For David Kelly, Every Ballpark Has a Mystery

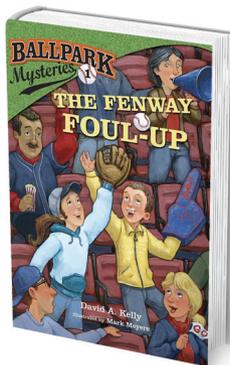
Children's books find mischief in the grandstands

BY SUSAN SELIGSON

As a writer, David Kelly has always worn several hats, and it could be argued, a pocket protector. As a freelance journalist, Kelly (GRS'89) has covered travel, business, and technology, and as a tech analyst, his writing and commentary can be found on the websites Upside Research and IT Briefcase. Writing for the *New York Times* and a variety of other publications kept him busy enough, but about eight years ago the father of two began writing for children. What started as a labor of love (for his kids and for baseball) and an antidote to the

demands of covering advances in digital technology blossomed into a franchise: the upbeat and engaging *Ballpark Mysteries* for ages six to nine, published by the Stepping Stones division of Random House.

Illustrated by Mark Meyers in a style reminiscent of *Mad* magazine's Dave Berg, the five-book series features kid detectives and cousins Mike Walsh and Kate Hopkins. In the same way lethal mischief followed *Murder, She Wrote*'s Jessica Fletcher to small towns all over New England, Kelly's sleuths find mysteries



to solve in every grandstand, from Houston to Los Angeles to New York. The series kicked off with, not surprisingly, *The Fenway Foul-Up*.

Bostonia asked Kelly about shifting gears as a writer, how he conducts his research, what his hopes are for *Ballpark Mysteries*, and the funniest question a kid ever asked him.

How did *Ballpark Mysteries* come about?

Back in 2005 I was spending a lot of time reading early chapter books to my sons, who were 10 and 8. I was also looking for an alternative to the business, technology, and travel writing that I did for my job. My sons loved mystery books and sports books, but as we discovered, there weren't many books that combined the two. I saw an opportunity in the market, so I wrote an adventure/mystery series set in the various Major League ballparks.

Where did you grow up? Were you a big baseball fan as a kid?

I grew up in New Hartford, N.Y., which is near Utica. Team loyalties there don't run as deep as they do in Boston, probably because the Red Sox, the Mets, and the Yankees are all about the same distance away, and teams like Baltimore and Montreal aren't much farther. So I never felt the team intensity that my sons have felt growing up in Boston.

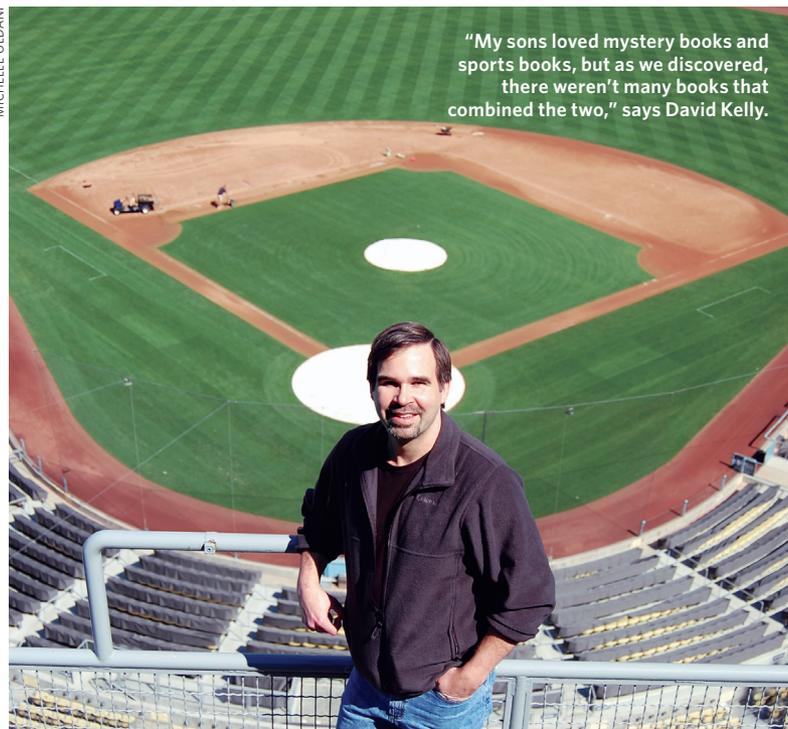
How do you research the ballparks where the stories are set?

Usually I start by spending about a week in the city where the book is set. I take a tour of the ballpark and watch a few games. I also have to spend a fair amount of time sightseeing and checking out attractions and historical areas that might fit into the story. I take lots of notes and photos and see lots of sights, because I never know what I'll need for the story.

Do you hope to continue the series indefinitely? What other ballparks would you like Mike and Kate to visit?

I'd love to see the series continue. I can tell you that I have 30 books planned, since there are 30 Major League Baseball teams. But Random House and the market will decide if I go beyond the nine books in process now. If the books continue to sell well, I imagine I have a good chance to get to all the teams and maybe even take on the World Series, the Hall of Fame, spring training, and more.

What's it like shifting gears from writing for children to writing for grown-ups? Has writ-



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Fiction

Darwen Arkwright and the Peregrine Pact

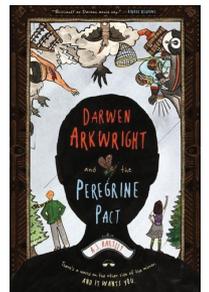
A. J. Hartley (GRS'92,'96)
Penguin Group

NOTHING IS AS it seems in A. J. Hartley's book for young adult readers. Mirrors reveal more than reflections. Teachers can't be trusted. And the new kid at school is more unique than his name.

Darwen Arkwright is a seemingly normal 11-year-old boy. At least, he would be in his hometown of Lancashire, England. But living with his aunt, Honoria Vanderstay, in his new home in Atlanta, he couldn't be any more out of the ordinary. His accent, yellow-gold eyes, and love of cricket and soccer give his new classmates at Hillside Academy reason to bully him.

Early on it becomes clear that there's another reason for Darwen's uniqueness. While waiting for his aunt to finish shopping, he spies an odd-shaped bird flying through the mall. No one else seems to notice the not-quite-bird-not-quite-bat zipping toward one store. He follows the creature until it disappears inside a store called Mr. Octavius Peregrine's Mirrors. The wise shopkeeper notices that the boy harnesses special powers (especially if he could see that Flittercrake) and gives him one of his mirrors.

Darwen hangs his new mirror on the inside of his bedroom closet door. And that's where the adventure truly begins. Each night, the mirror turns into a "portula" to another world only he can see, where a moonlit forest and a serene, bubbling fountain beckon him to explore. That first night, he passes through the



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ing for children made you a better writer?

Surprisingly easy. I strive to make both types of writing clear and concise, although it is nice to be able to use bigger words and longer sentences in my technology writing. Writing for kids has made me a better writer, because I've learned to focus on simple, direct ways of saying things. That's important in any kind of writing.

How often do you get to Fenway Park?

Not as often as I'd like—a few times a year. I'm usually too busy working on baseball books at home. Plus, I spend a lot of time watching my sons play baseball on their high school and neighborhood teams.

Are your fans both boys and girls? Does the appeal go beyond baseball fans?

The Ballpark Mysteries audience is really both boys and girls. When I'm speaking at schools, the girls ask the most questions. But I get the most fan mail from boys (especially reluctant readers) and their parents, who are thrilled to have found books that connect with them emotionally. There's a shortage of exciting, engaging books for boys in that age group.

Do readers send you story ideas, and if so, do you use any?

I do get requests to write about my readers' favorite baseball teams, like the Rockies or Milwaukee Brewers. I've had a few suggest some mystery ideas, and even had one child write a mystery for me. He wrote the "mystery of the New York Mets," since he's a Mets fan. He even created his own cover art, table of contents, illustrations, and "about the author" page. And it was a pretty good mystery!

What's the funniest question a kid has ever asked you?

My favorite school visit experience was also my most humbling. It happened

after my second book was published. When I finished my presentation to 200 kids, a boy raised his hand and asked,

"So, how many books have you published?" I explained that although only two had been published, several more were in the works. I thought I had done a great job answering his question, but I knew he wasn't impressed when he said, "So...you're really not that famous at all, are you?"

These stories would work nicely as animated or live-action television shows—any possibility of that?

I'd love to see my main characters, Mike and Kate, on TV, visiting ballparks and solving mysteries. My agent is investigating it, but nothing has clicked yet.

I've read that you were inspired by the Hardy Boys books of your youth. What other books and writers have inspired you?

One of them was *Harriet the Spy*. I loved the idea of spying on other people and writing down observations in a notebook. I even went as far as to buy a miniature pen and small notebook to carry around with me to write Harriet-like notes. Another series that made a strong impression on me was *The Mad Scientists' Club*, which details the adventures of a club of boys who used science and smarts to play tricks on the people in their town and do cool things, like win a hot air balloon race and build a miniature submarine. Of course, I also liked mysteries, like the *Encyclopedia Brown* and *Hardy Boys* series.

What are you working on now?

I'm working on more Ballpark Mysteries. Three are written (books five, six, and seven, set in Kansas City, Chicago, and San Francisco), and I'm currently writing book eight, set in Miami. I'm under contract for one more, which I'll start when I finish the Miami book. But I'm not sure yet where that book will take place. Perhaps Toronto or Philadelphia, but we'll see.