



Trudy Ludwig

Inspires Kids to be Kind

by Melissa Fales

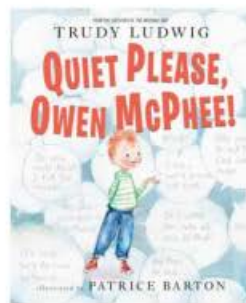
photos courtesy of Random House Children's Books

Children's author Trudy Ludwig adds chatterbox Owen McPhee to her cast of unforgettable characters in her latest book, *Quiet Please, Owen McPhee!* Owen's constantly talking, having one-sided conversations with people who never get a word in, until he loses his voice and has to start listening to those around him for the first time. "It's a learning

experience for him," says Ludwig. "One of the reasons I wanted to write this book is that we're at a point in our country and our world where we're not really listening to one another and what our needs are. I believe that if we can be more compassionate in our listening, and really hear what others have to say, we can open the lines for more connection. We

all have a need for connection. While talking can prove a point, listening can open your heart."

In *Quiet Please, Owen McPhee!*, as she has with her other books, Ludwig addresses the complexity of children's friendships and the issues that arise from them in simple ways. She touches on topics such as bullying, social anxiety, and self-esteem. "My mission with



all my books is to recruit more kindness warriors," says Ludwig. "What I'm trying to do is empower kids to make better choices in how they use their words and actions to be helpful rather than hurtful."

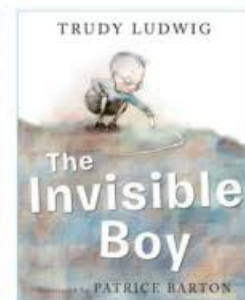
Years ago, when her daughter was bullied by the second-grade classmates she considered friends, Ludwig sought out information about this puzzling behavior. "It's called relational aggression," Ludwig explains. "It's a term coined by Dr. Niki Crick to define bullying that uses relationships to intentionally manipulate and hurt others. It's the 'frenemy' who says, 'Nice dress' while rolling her eyes." Other signifying behaviors may include gossiping, spreading rumors, giving someone the silent treatment, and intentionally slighting or excluding someone. "And it's not just something mean girls do," says Ludwig. "Boys do it, too."

Eager to help her daughter, Ludwig looked for books on this particular type of bullying. She found *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, Rachel Simmons' ground-breaking look at bullying in girls' social

groups. However, she couldn't find anything about relational aggression appropriate for her young daughter. "There was nothing," she says. "There was a huge resource gap."

Ludwig, a freelance copywriter at the time, decided to write a children's book about relational aggression. The result was *My Secret Bully*, published in 2003. It's about a girl named Monica and her friend, Katie, who subtly and cruelly bullies her. "I wanted to create this picture book to help my daughter and other kids who found themselves in the same situation," says Ludwig. "I wanted them to understand that they have choices when it comes to friendships and I wanted them to understand what constitutes a healthy friendship. If they don't understand that, I worry that they'll gravitate to abusive romantic relationships as adults."

As it turned out, Ludwig not only has a knack for writing children's books, she finds it rewarding to help young readers develop



positive social behaviors. "I've found my niche," she says. She has 10 titles to date and has won numerous awards, including the Mom's Choice Gold Award.

Ludwig is perhaps best known for *The Invisible Boy*, released in 2013, which follows the story of Brian, an introvert largely ignored by his classmates. When a new student arrives in the classroom, Brian is the first to reach out to welcome him. "One reason I wrote *The Invisible Boy* was to show



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children that you don't have to be a superhero to do super things," says Ludwig. "In fact, you can be just a normal kid, or an average grown-up like me. You just have to be kind. Kids often think you need big actions to make a difference, but actually it's the little things ... those small shows of kindness that can cause a ripple effect."

When she's not writing, Ludwig travels the country speaking and leading workshops for students,

educators, and parents about bullying. "It's become such a hot topic that it's being misused and overused," Ludwig says. "What I try to do is help people understand what bullying is and what it isn't. Not all hurtful behavior is bullying. If someone does something unintentionally hurtful to you once, that's rude, but it's not bullying. If someone does something intentionally hurtful to you once, that's mean,

but it's not bullying. Bullying is when someone is hurtful on purpose and they continue to do it, even when you show you're mad or scared or try to get them to stop. Bullying is about a power imbalance."

Ludwig supports a campaign by The Committee for Children promoting the idea that the word "bully" is not a noun. "We don't want to label these kids, we want to help them change," she says. "The reality is that we're all more than our labels. We all have the capacity to be kind and to be cruel. I write books to help kids recognize that they choose how to treat people. I want them to choose to be kind."

For more information about Trudy Ludwig and her books, visit trudyludwig.com.

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