

Q&A

A conversation with

Chun Yu

author of

LITTLE GREEN



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www.SimonSaysKids.com

Q: What inspired you to write *Little Green*?

A: It's a story I always wanted to tell. I wrote it for an audience with no limit of age or nationality, an audience who would listen with their heart open.

I was born at the moment the Chinese Cultural Revolution began. During the following ten years, my family was separated and reunited—millions of people were persecuted and died in my country. It was such a difficult yet important time in Chinese history, a time that should not be forgotten. I don't believe history should always be taught by textbooks, it can be better told through a story, sometimes through the innocence of a child's eyes.

Little Green is a personal story that brings you into the society and daily life of China during a time when it was completely isolated from most of the world. The announcement of political movements, the first dream of a child, the anxiety and silent suffering of the adults, a simple and peaceful meal grandma under the propaganda noise of loudspeakers in the countryside, the courage of the mother and the poetry of the father, the discovery of a precious blue ribbon that escaped the revenge of the revolution, and a child walking upon the fallen city wall.

Little Green is also the first book of a trilogy where my story and the story of my country continue. After the Cultural Revolution, China struggled from decades of isolation to its new openness to the world. It was an amazing time with unpredictable social changes and a hopeful yet complicated and sometimes tragic time for any individual or family to cope with.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The experience of each age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet." The story of *Little Green* is poetry in my heart wanting expression and history of a time and a country wanting to be known.

Q: What were the most enjoyable moments you experienced when writing *Little Green*?

A: Sometimes past midnight, two or three o'clock in the morning when the whole world was asleep, a stanza or a story completed itself. It made so much sense, it was perfect. I found myself laughing, crying, or laughing while crying by myself. It was incredible.

Q: Describe your writing process. Where do you find your inspiration?

A: Life itself is full of inspirations—in every little moment we live through, every observation we make, and every realization we come to. I don't believe that writing is a process that strictly involves physically writing things down on a page. As we go through life we contemplate things, reason with the world, strategize our actions, feel happy or sad. In a broader sense, these are all practices of writing.

Q: What language did you originally write *Little Green* in?

A: English. From the very first sentence, it was natural. It was probably because of the English-speaking environment I was in and also the freedom I felt with the language and my desire to share the stories with my friends here who are from the States and all over the world.

Q: Do you hope to publish a book written in Chinese in the future?

A: I think I will in the future. Chinese is an extremely beautiful language. I am constantly in awe reading Chinese classics from hundreds and thousands of years ago—the timeless beauty and effects, the musical quality and pure elegance in those writings. I only hope that one day, word-by-word, I will achieve some kind of perfection in my writing that already exists in the language.

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Q: Why did you decide to write *Little Green* in verse instead of prose?

A: It simply came to me that way. We've been telling stories in verse for thousands of years in many traditions around the world. It's a natural form that allowed us to pass stories as well as histories from generation to generation.

Q: How does living in America differ from your life in China? Do you miss China?

A: The cultural environment in America is very different from China as is daily life and the way people carry themselves. Sometimes the difference is on the surface, but other times it's very subtle, like a smell in the air, a look on a face, a thought you understand without speaking, something you can detect almost with secret senses, the history of a place and its constant existence and long-lasting effect on life. In certain ways, I feel freer in my spirit here while I feel more intimate with feelings and surroundings in China. Sometimes I thought I came all the way to America so that I could have the distance and perspective to write about my country.

I miss China very much. In my family, I am the only one who has ventured this far to the "other land." I am very close to my family so it is tough being here without a brother or sister or even a cousin nearby. Although, after living in America for more than ten years, I miss it every time when I visit China, especially all the friends I have made in the States. In many ways, this is also my home.

Q: You have a Ph.D. in chemistry and studied at Harvard and MIT as part of a postdoctoral fellowship in biomedical engineering. Do you find it hard to be an accomplished scientist and an up-and-coming writer at the same time?

A: It has been satisfying to do both. One activity often inspires the other. Although sometimes when the brain is excited, it wants to do two things and it's tough to decide which one to focus on. Also the dilemma is that there are only twenty-four hours a day.

Q: Is *Little Green* your first book?

A: Yes. I wrote a collection of short poems and some papers in science before, but *Little Green* was my first attempt to write a book.

Q: What are you working on next?

A: I am mostly focused on finishing the trilogy of the memoirs. Although each book in the trilogy can be read independently, they are very much related to each other, and the story will continue to when I was a student in Peking University during the Tiananmen Square Student Movement in 1989. I am also contemplating and starting some other projects that are very different from the trilogy, for example a novel or screenplay of a story from late 1800s and early 1900s in China or a novel about contemporary life in the U.S. and China.

*A Paula Wiseman Book/Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
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