



Transcript for “Kevin Henkes & Laura Dronzek: A Conversation”

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:00:00] Reach Out and Read, where books build better brains. This is the Reach Out and Read podcast. I'm your host Dr. Dipesh Navsaria, a practicing pediatrician with degrees in public health and children's librarianship. I'm a clinical professor of human development and family studies at the School of Human Ecology, and a professor of pediatrics at the School of Medicine and Public Health, both at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. At Reach Out and Read, we dream of a world in which every child is read to every day. Our show explores how children and families flourish and thrive through a combination of individual well-being, confident parents, supportive communities, strong public health, and good policy. Join us here for thought provoking conversations on these issues with expert guests, authors and leaders in the field of early childhood health and literacy. Research shows that reading physical books together brings the strongest benefits to children. That's why we're happy to have Boise Paper, a responsible paper manufacturer, as the founding sponsor of this podcast through their paper with Purpose Promise. Boise Paper looks for ways to make a difference in local communities. Thank you to Boise Paper for investing in our Reach Out and Read community.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:01:23] The New York Times called him a genius, and The New Yorker described him as one of the best writers of contemporary poetry books. She calls him Kevin. She's described as a sought after successful fine artist with gallery exhibitions across the country and whose work has been described as lush, vibrant and a celebration of hues. He calls her Laura. Together, they are the incredibly talented author, illustrator and husband and wife team Kevin and Laura, and we're thrilled to have them join us today. Kevin is the creator of dozens of books, including the beloved Own Chrysanthemum, Sheila Ray The Brave, and so many more. He's the recipient of the Children's Literature Legacy Award, the Caldecott Medal, Caldecott Honors, two Newbery Honors, and Giselle honors. And Laura is a fine artist who, in addition to having her work displayed at the Madison Children's Museum, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Gardner Art Gallery, has illustrated several children's books, including Birds by Kevin Hanks, Moonlight by Helen Griffith, and Rabbit's Gift by George Shannon, among many others. And in addition to their many individual

accomplishments, they have also successfully collaborated on many children's books as author and illustrator, respectfully. Kevin, Laura, welcome to the show.

Laura Dronzek: [00:02:35] Hi. Thanks for having us.

Kevin Henkes: [00:02:37] Thank you for inviting us. Happy to be here.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:02:40] So I'd just like to start off with how did you both meet?

Kevin Henkes: [00:02:46] Well, I grew up in Racine, Wisconsin, and I came to the University of Wisconsin in Madison, in part because the Cooperative Children's Book Center was here, and my freshman year, I met someone in my dorm who I befriended. And years passed, I suppose. And that person ended up knowing Laura.

Laura Dronzek: [00:03:14] She was my roommate. I was working in a lab on campus, working with endangered monkeys, and she was getting her PhD. And so we lived together, and she thought we would be a good match. And she invited Kevin to a potluck that we had.

Kevin Henkes: [00:03:30] And that was it. Yeah.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:03:33] Indeed. It was great to hear how those connections happen. So Kevin, what was your journey to becoming a writer and illustrator?

Kevin Henkes: [00:03:44] I think that I was born wanting to be an artist, and I always loved art. I cannot remember a time when I did not love drawing. I also loved books and going to the library was really important to my mother. We didn't have a lot of books in the home, but we went to the library regularly. It was like going to the grocery store or, you know, going to school. You go to the library. And we were friends. Our family was friends with the children's librarian at the Racine Public Library. And so Mrs. Ellsworth would always help me pick out books. And I loved books. And when I started reading novels, I always gravitated toward novels that were illustrated by the people whom I loved, like Garth Williams and Maurice Sendak. So I was always drawn to that art part of it, and I was often considered the class artist growing up. And that's really how I identified myself as an artist. And I was a junior in high school, taking an English class. And I always love books, of course. And this particular English teacher said to me, I wouldn't be surprised if I saw a book with your name on it one day. And I'd always been praised for my art, but this was the first time that there was sort of a special acknowledgement of my skill as a writer. And so junior year of high school, and at that point in one's life, one's thinking about what is going to do with one's life. And I thought children's picture books would be a great thing for me to pursue, because I could illustrate, I could draw and paint, which I loved, and I could write, and it would be in the same art form.

So that's when I really decided this is what I want to do. But it really grew out, I think of my, you know, love of writing, of course, and I really owe a lot, I think, to my mother. I mean, going to the library was just so important.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:05:53] So I need to note here your high school teacher said a book with your name on it. So clearly you've overachieved.

Kevin Henkes: [00:06:03] Yes. I'm working on my 65th so, yes.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:06:07] Oh my goodness. Yes. Laura what was your journey to being an artist and illustrator?

Laura Dronzek: [00:06:14] Mine was much more convoluted. I actually always loved to draw. And I did that a lot when I was a child, but I didn't take any art classes in high school. I went to a high school in suburban Chicago that was very academic. And, you know, my thought process was to get into a good school. I needed to take all the AP classes, and I couldn't take art classes. And so I didn't take an art class until my final year of college. It was the last class that I took, and I loved it. And at that point I was working in the lab and I kept working as a research specialist and I ended up taking other jobs at the university.

Laura Dronzek: [00:06:58] And then I started taking classes as a special student, and eventually I went back and got my master's in fine art in painting. So my path was much more sort of convoluted. And I also was an English major and a psychology major, and I thought that I would do one of those things. I thought I would either get a PhD in English or become a clinical psychologist. So it was sort of a different path. And I would talk about that with our kids, because Kevin's was so direct that I think they sometimes felt like, oh, I should know what I want to do. And now, especially in high school, you know, they often are pushing you to make a decision. And I think it can take a long time to figure out where you're going. And you might not do one thing. You might do a lot of different things.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:07:49] As a fellow English major, who probably should have realized something about how much I loved books and libraries along the way, I did not come to the world of children's books until much later. I was in the middle of med school. I really started digging into all this stuff. So, yeah, the scenic road can be fun. Yeah. So how did you both start working together?

Kevin Henkes: [00:08:15] Well, that came much further on in my career. Laura was doing paintings and showing them in galleries and entering painting exhibitions, and I was doing my thing, and I wrote a novel, I think. I think it began with my novel. And it was my novel, Sun and Moon, and I tried several jacket sketches for that book. And they weren't working. And my

editor at that time, Susan Hirschman, who knew both of us, knew Laura was a painter and had some of her paintings suggested one day on the phone after she had very gently rejected my latest jacket sketch. She said, why don't we have Laura try it? And Laura did, and it was beautiful. And it seems to me like that was that was the very first thing. And then that opened the door to everything that followed.

Kevin Henkes: [00:09:31] I wrote a picture book. And again, I was working on another novel at the time, and I didn't think that I wanted to take the time off to work on the picture book. So I think that was my idea. Or maybe it was Susan's idea. I don't quite remember. And I thought, oh, Laura could do this. And then that was the first picture book. So it began with the jacket for the novel, and then was the first picture book. Yeah.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:10:00] I'm always struck yet again. And the story is an example of it, of how much the editor is this, you know, mystery heard, creator write and all of this bringing the right people together and in the right way. Right. Yeah. So what's it like working with your spouse?

Laura Dronzek: [00:10:20] I think we work really easily together. I mean, we've been doing it for such a long time, and we tend to go. Our studios are across from each other on the third floor of our house. And even when we're not working on a project together, we tend to use each other as a critic or a third eye for most of the things that we do. If Kevin's writing a novel, he reads it to me while he's writing it. And if I'm working on a painting, you know he'll come in often and tell me what he thinks. Sometimes I'm like, oh, well, maybe you shouldn't come in yet. But we really don't have any issues.

Kevin Henkes: [00:11:01] And I really love it because when you're working on something and you're so focused and, you know, I may have been working out for a very long time, it's really nice to have someone who you trust and love, who's right across the hall, who can see it with a clear eye. And sometimes you become myopic if you're just working on this thing. And it's really wonderful to have someone else who you trust look at it and see it. And it's kind of like having another editor. I mean, when you have a really good relationship with an editor, it's that same thing. You have the same goal in mind. You want the best book possible, and sometimes, you know, you can't see what's right there. And it's great to have someone right there too.

Laura Dronzek: [00:11:45] And it's really helpful for both of us because neither of us are joiners of groups. So we're not in artist groups or writers groups or anything like that. So we have each other, which works really well.

Kevin Henkes: [00:11:57] And it's nice. Now, when I write a picture book text, I usually know that it will be for Laura. And I love if she likes it. I love giving it up and just letting her do whatever it is she wants to do with it. I think we've done nine books together, and out of the nine books, there was only one instance where I really had an idea in my head, or an image in my head, of how I thought the breaking of the text should be on one, double spread and how it relate to the page. Turn to the next page, but only one time in all. You know all those books. So I really love just letting her do her thing.

Laura Dronzek: [00:12:51] And it's interesting because most people don't know. And even my own brother, like last year, was shocked to find out that when you illustrate a book, the editor gives it to you. You get the text and the author doesn't have input most of the time. Yeah. And most people don't know that. They think, oh, the author says, well, I see this happening here, and I see. So Kevin gives me the written words and then I split up the text. I figure out how the book's going to look, what the characters are, all of it. And, you know, obviously he's looking. I show him what I'm doing. But in general, the author never has any input.

Kevin Henkes: [00:13:28] And it's nice. Our last collaboration was a picture book called Finding Things. And it's a very, very young picture book. And there's no dog in my text, but a dog has become kind of the main character. And so Laura added this subtext that wasn't there. And that's the kind of thing that I love. And it's usually a surprise to me. And I think a really good picture book is such a tight combination of the words and the pictures, so that when you look at the finished product, it's really hard to separate them. And I think that's true with several of our collaborations. I mean, I can't imagine one without the other anymore.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:14:12] That's so nice to know, because I know from doing this podcast, I'm well familiar with that separation between the author and the illustrator. But to know that, you know, you're in the same home and studios across from each other and you still have some of that separation of roles that's very interesting to know. So, yeah, I look forward if you ever run out of ideas. You can also maybe write a book about parenting that uses picture book creation as a metaphor or something along those lines. So, Kevin, you've said in the past that all your stories center around an emotional truth. Can you explain what that means?

Kevin Henkes: [00:15:00] I think emotional truth to me is just that character's feelings have to ring true. It can be a fantastical story. It can be a created world. That's illogical in some sense. But there's got to be a logic there. And it's just got to ring true for me. What's important when I'm working on a book is that it rings true. You believe it? That's, I guess, the bottom line for me. Does it convince you? Does it make you understand the characters? And part of that is getting the emotion right. And I think what I always try to keep in mind is that I try to always remember and acknowledge that kids have big feelings. Kids are people. People have

feelings. Kids have feelings. And I think sometimes we forget. We think, oh, they're young or they haven't lived that long. They don't know what pain feels like, or they don't know what sorrow feels like or whatever. So I try to keep that in mind. And when I'm working, it's the emotional truth that really matters. It's making the book entertaining. They want the child or the caregiver to read it. And the other thing that's really important to me is making good sentences. I mean, it sounds simple, but it often is not.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:16:31] It's so notable with the feelings that so many of your stories start with a feeling right on the first page. In still Sal, which I will, you know, brandish forever. Listeners who can't see that, you know, Sal Miller was embarrassed by her dad. And in, Billy Miller was worried about school, and Owen was in love with his blanket and chrysanthemums. Parents were happy. I just finished reading still Sal over the weekend, and there is so much about that inner world of young children and how it sort of brought me back to kind of that. Yeah. Man, I remember when some of these things felt so important. And now as an adult, you think, oh, gosh, you had no idea. You know. Yeah. But they mattered at the time. Yeah. And they do matter. And I think you've just captured that so beautifully.

Kevin Henkes: [00:17:31] Oh. Thank you. Well I think the imagined life is sometimes just as, if not more powerful than the real one. And I was a kid who really lived in his head. So I think I understand Sal and I understand Billy Miller because I think they're both kids who think deeply, who think a lot, who have really good imaginations. And I think that can make life complicated and wonderful and sometimes difficult. But it's the kind of kid I like to write about. And I have said in talks that I've given before that I'm more interested in the ripple than the wave. And they're often not about big things or what most people would think of as big things or huge plot points. They're very small domestic stories, but I think to a kid and a kid who does have a pretty strong interior life, those small things can be confused.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:18:30] I mean, I didn't count pages, but the number of pages and still sell devoted to a crisis around that self-portrait. Right. And it's like, well, yes, but this is. I mean, she spent all her time thinking about this for, you know, like a couple of days at least, you know, and it was like, yeah, yeah, this matters, you know.

Kevin Henkes: [00:18:49] So yeah. No. And I remember that feeling and being a parent myself. I mean, seeing that in my own kids. Our kids. Yeah. I mean, the feelings can be really, really strong.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:19:02] Laura, in talking about your gallery work, you've said that your art is in discovering the mystery found in the commonplace, the extraordinary in the ordinary. And it feels to me like there's a connection there between that phrase and what you

do for children's books as well. Are there differences or parallels that you can pull out in how you create for children versus adults?

Laura Dronzek: [00:19:29] I mean, I think the one thing when I'm creating for children that I try to keep in mind is that the illustrations are, first of all, in service to the text. So I'm working in a different way in that regard and I'm thinking about what would a child find interesting on every page. And I try to keep the story moving and to add other elements of subtext in the illustrations that isn't in the words, so that the parent can be talking to the child, and or the child can say, oh, look at that. You know, that's not in the words or what's happening over here and have continuity throughout the book with the illustrations, with the movement of what's happening and with when I do my fine art or artwork. All those pieces are standalone and I approach them, I think, in a similar way in terms of I'm interested in the sort of normal things in life that are all. If you look at them carefully, they're filled with wonder and I think, you know, landscapes, flowers, all those tiny things or in the in the picture books, you know, shells, fish, trees, flowers, all those things that are around us all the time that I think sometimes now kids don't look at so much because they are seeing, you know, phones and tablets and all these other things. But the world around us has so many interesting things that are so beautiful. And so I try to illuminate that in both the picture book illustrations and in my artwork.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:21:18] I, I'm curious when you receive a book text what's your process like. Do you read through the full text before even entertaining a thought about how to illustrate it. Or yeah, think about things as you go.

Laura Dronzek: [00:21:31] Yeah, I usually will sit with the text for a long time. Kevin actually gave me a picture book text in February, and I still haven't started the dummy, and I'm just rereading it and thinking about it. And I often do research and think about what kind of images I want to use. And then at a certain point, after I procrastinated long enough, I, unlike Kevin, who will do something immediately, I just sort of say, okay, now I'm starting, and then I'll start to split up the text first. And that is one of the hardest things for me. And that's something that Kevin, when he does his own books, he likes that part the most. And for me, that part in figuring out what I'm going to put on every page is the hardest part. And I love just getting into the illustrations, whereas he loves splitting up the text and figuring out the size and I like the design part, but I really just love illustrating. And so that's sort of my process. So I'll start out with splitting up the text and figuring out the size of the book and figuring out the page turns, and then I do a bunch of storyboards to figure out how the illustrations are going to go and if the page turns will work, and whether it's going to have 24 or 36 pages. And then I start to once I get the dummy set up, I start to do sketches and I do all of my dummies. I paint them, whereas Kevin really figures out all of his dummies really carefully with drawings, and he measures everything.

Kevin Henkes: [00:23:06] To the 16th of an inch.

Laura Dronzek: [00:23:09] And mine's just like all over the place. So a much different process.

Kevin Henkes: [00:23:13] And the thing that I think a lot of people don't know or think about, you know, just someone who's picking up a book and looking at it. There are so many decisions that go into it that help inform what the book is about. So it's the size of the book. It's the shape of the book. It's the tone of the paper. Is the paper smooth? Is it shiny? Is it vellum? So it's, you know, rougher. What is the size of the type? I mean, there's so many things.

Laura Dronzek: [00:23:43] Yeah. Even what medium you're going to use is going to be in black and white in color. I tend to use acrylics. And every time I start a new book, I think, well, maybe I should do something different and I end up going back to something sort of the same, because that's how I paint, I mean, I paint in oils normally, but all those decisions have to be made.

Kevin Henkes: [00:24:04] One of my favorite author illustrators is Amby Goldstein, and I think she said this. I mean, one thing that she said that I know she said is you should work and work until it looks like you didn't have to work at all. And the other thing that I think it was her who said is there is one way for your book to look and it is your duty to find it. And I think that's true. And that's why I think sometimes living with the words, even if I write the words myself and I know I'm going to illustrate it, I still like to think about it for a long time. Yeah, yeah. And just, you know, read it every day, get it to the point where I know it by heart. And often during that time, that's a really good time to get rid of a couple extra words that you might not need anymore by reading a text aloud. And I do this with my own. Or if I'm giving it up for someone else, I read it aloud in my studio, just walking around, because with a young picture book, most likely it will be read aloud to a child by a caregiver or a parent, whomever. And you want the words to be exactly right. You want the rhythm to be exactly right, and you know when it works and you know when it doesn't.

Laura Dronzek: [00:25:13] Yeah, sure. And one thing I've talked to kids about when I've done school visits is the fact that you make mistakes. And, you know, I think sometimes people think, oh, you just sit down and then that's it. And I've like, gotten rid of a whole dummy or redone artwork, you know, a page several times because I can't get something right. Or and so that's a part of the process too, is, you know, you're going to take wrong turns, you're going to make mistakes, and you have to just keep, you know, going with it.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:25:47] Kevin, as you mentioned earlier, you've, written 65 books and many are picture books. An awful lot of them seem to feature mice as main characters. Is there a reason behind the mice?

Kevin Henkes: [00:26:03] Well, it started, I had done four books where my first four books, the protagonists were humans, fairly realistically rendered. The fourth one was a novel. My fifth book was called Bailey Goes Camping, and I wrote it, and my texts were becoming a bit more humorous. And I thought that book was Billy Goes Camping. And I thought, with Bailey goes camping, I would try doing animals. That was the first one I did animals with. And I did many sketches. A mouse, a rabbit and elephant. I think I did a dog, a cat, and I decided that I would do rabbits for Bailey Goes Camping. I thought I could show a lot of emotion and how I drew the rabbits ears, and I did Bailey, and I liked it. It was sort of freeing for me. I enjoyed doing that artwork more than I did drawing humans, and the next book I wrote was The Weekend with Wendell, and I knew I would do animals again. I wanted to do something other than rabbits, and I went back to my sketches that I had done for Bailey, and I was trying to figure out what to do for that one. And there was a sketch of a mouse, and I liked it, and I thought, I'll try mice. And I did mice for a weekend with Wendell, and I had a really good time.

Kevin Henkes: [00:27:20] Each book was doing a little bit better, selling a little bit more. And that had a nice little bump to it. And I thought, oh, I'll do another mouse book. And then I wrote Sheila Ray the brave, and Wendell makes a cameo appearance. So that one had to be nice. And then Sheila Ray the brave was a little bit bigger bump. And I just kept doing it. And it was not anything that I set out to do. I never intended it. But what I realized is that it did free me up a bit. I could be more humorous if I was doing the same things with a human counterpart. Some of the things it wouldn't. It's funny, in Julius, the baby of the world, Lily is jealous of her new baby brother, and she pinches his tail and screams in his ear. And if I did the same things with realistically rendered humans, it wouldn't be funny, but I could, you know, heighten the humor and, you know, dramatize things in a way that I couldn't. And I thought it worked. And so, you know, it doesn't work for everything. But I enjoy doing it. It's a different way of working and thinking. And for some of the books, it's exactly the right way to go, I think.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:28:39] Well, I'm really glad that the answer did not involve, like, an exterminator and some problems. So that's good. That's great to hear. I have two more questions because we're almost out of time here. I hope there's some top listeners out there listening to this podcast. We'll recall that, I as well as you live in Madison, Wisconsin. In fact, I think we're only about a mile and a half from each other. Sal's school. Georgia O'Keeffe O'Keefe elementary. Is this a local shout out on purpose?

Kevin Henkes: [00:29:17] Oh, I. Yes. Sal's father is an artist, so I figured I'd want to do that. And in the year of Billy Miller. The first book in that series, I remember trying to think of a name for the school. And Georgia O'Keeffe lived on Regent Street, very near our house. Briefly. And every time we would pass the house, I would remind our kids that Georgia O'Keeffe lived in this house.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:29:49] And did they roll their eyes and say, yes, dad, you told us.

Kevin Henkes: [00:29:53] Yeah, I still do it.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:29:56] We've heard that 500 times.

Kevin Henkes: [00:29:58] But anyway. So that was a natural for me.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:30:01] Excellent. Last question for both of you. We talked about starting books with feelings. Are there feelings that either of you haven't explored yet in your creative work that you might want to play with in a future book that you write or illustrate it.

Kevin Henkes: [00:30:20] It's so funny. I recently wrote a speech and I was talking about feelings, and I was really talking about the mouse books and how it's about social and emotional learning. And as part of the PowerPoint presentation, I went through all of the books, and I wanted to look at different pictures and show emotions. And I made a list of the feelings that I found and it was fear, bravery, jealousy, anger, shame, remorse, worry, disappointment, sadness, joy, love, contentment. I can't think of anything that I haven't done yet, but I think the beauty of it all is, even if you could write 20 books about joy, you could write 20 books about fear or bravery. And I think the thing that makes it different, the thing that makes it new, the thing that makes it fresh, are all the details about that particular character and how they're facing whatever it is they're facing, or how they are experiencing, whatever it is they're experiencing. So it might not be a new emotion to explore, but it might be a new way to explore something that I've already done before, but it still makes it new.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:31:37] So we're not going to expect a book themed on nausea or ennui or Schmidt's Never know.

Kevin Henkes: [00:31:46] You never know.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:31:47] Laura, how about you?

Laura Dronzek: [00:31:49] You know, it's funny, I was thinking about that, and I think there isn't anything that I feel like I haven't experienced illustrating and or that I'm missing out on. I

think I tend to like the books that are more about a sense of wonder, I think. And a lot of the season books are about that, and the little houses was about that and birds. So I think it's more the flip side of that's what I love illustrating is a child's sense of wonder. But I'm not averse to, you know, doing anything else. But that's what I enjoy the most.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:32:31] Indeed. Well, thank you both for the extraordinary work you share with the world. I mean, every, every, every time a new book or a new illustration that comes out, people are just so captivated by it and your collective works have just brought so much joy and introspection and thoughtfulness to both children and adults alike. So thank you for all that. And thank you for spending some time chatting today.

[00:33:03] Thank you. Thank you very much.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:33:09] Welcome to today's 33rd page. Our something extra for you, our listeners. In 2005, Kevin Henkes, one of our two guests today, did an acceptance speech for the Caldecott Medal for a book called *Kitten's First Full Moon*. I want to share with you some stretches of his acceptance speech which really resonated with me. He's talking about children and their firsts. And he goes on to say, the list goes on and on. The magnitude of each first. Each act is staggering when you consider it. Think of them, these firsts, and think of the child experiencing them. A child, someone who is egocentric but powerless. Someone whose knowledge is limited, but whose imagination is vivid. Someone whose experience is limited, but who has curiosity. Despair. These combinations are complex and difficult by their nature. They provide the perfect setup for a child to misinterpret with great certainty. Northrop Frye wrote. Nearly all of us have felt, at least in childhood, that if we imagine that a thing is so, it therefore either is so or can be made to become so. A blanket on a chair at night can be a bear. An illustration in a book can be physically real as the book itself. The moon can be a bowl of milk. Back to firsts. The sociologist Erving Goffman made the following observation. To walk. To cross a road. To utter a complete sentence. To wear long pants. To tie one's shoes. To add a column of figures. All these routines that allow the individual, unthinking, competent performances were attained through an acquisition process whose early stages were negotiated in a cold sweat. These negotiators are who I write and illustrate picture books for.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:35:10] They are also who I write about. On a different note, he closes out by talking about the reaction that a young child had to his Caldecott Award winning book, *Kitten's First Full Moon*. And he tells us, a young man who works in the art department at Green Willow gave a copy of *Kitten's First Full Moon* to his two-year-old niece when the book was first published. I'm told that the little girl loves the book so much that over time, she's licked a hole in the page that shows a triumphant kitten lapping up milk after her journey. I've rarely been paid so high a compliment. And that's our 33rd page. You've

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