



SOUTH BEND TRIBUNE

# Freedom with imaginations

*Author encourages youth to have courage to try new things*

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## DOWAGIAC

**W**earing his Rascal the Raccoon hat, 6-year-old Lucas Petro sat on the school library floor with his classmates.

He met the real Buck Wilder, also known as best-selling children's author Tim Smith, Tuesday at Kincheloe Elementary School in Dowagiac.

"I like Buck because he likes to go fishing and so do I," Lucas said, nodding his head in reference to the storybook character in "Buck Wilder's Small Fry Fishing Guide."

"Buck has a lot of fishing gear and he's real (referring to Smith)," the kindergartener said. "He makes reading fun and told us to try new things. I might practice ice skating."

The 56-year-old author from Traverse City, Mich., described himself.

"I live in a regular house, drive a regular car, take out the trash like everyone else. I'm a regular man, nobody really special," Smith said.

He encouraged the assembled students

to use their imaginations and try new things, like he did at becoming an author at age 50.

"When you try something new, whatever it is, don't give up and don't be afraid even if someone laughs at you," he said.

"I never grew up to be an author. I grew up to be a fisherman," Smith said. And his love of fishing was the topic for his first book.

"I took all the common game fish, gave each fish their own page and had each one look like they enjoyed being caught."

Katherine Pielemeier likes to fish as well.

"That's the best thing (about Buck Wilder), his fishing," the 7-year-old Katherine said. "I like that the best and it was kind of nice to meet a real author."

The author made his fish unique. "Take this largemouth bass," Smith said, turning to a page in his book. "I gave him a big grin with lips, teeth and curly eyebrows. I've had fun with all my books."

As a child, Smith liked to doodle on the edge of pages, but his teachers discouraged it.

"When I started writing, I decided I would doodle on my pages," he said. "So I've written on every page along the edge, some upside down, backwards."

Many of the students wore T-shirts with the "Wild Animal Tracks and Poops!" chart found in the book, "Buck Wilder's Small Twig Hiking & Camping Guide."

"I think I'm the only author that made a

poop chart just for pure fun," Smith said. The chart lists bear, moose, elk, deer, coyote, fox, mountain lion and The Buck.

During a question-and-answer period, Smith was asked how he comes up with ideas.

"I take a plain piece of paper and a pencil with a big eraser," he said. "I find a quiet spot in the house with a flat surface and begin to draw. This is something you can do as well."

He encouraged the students to try drawing, bending the paper, folding it or even punching holes to make a pattern, but don't turn on the television.

"Unlock your imagination, don't let the TV distract you," Smith said. "You don't have to be the best, you just have to do it."

Fourth-grade teacher Pat Franz has used the books in her classroom.

"The kids just love them and I really like them," Franz said. "They are really colorful and popular. As a reader, any level of information can be understood and learned from."

Student Lucas Petro was going home with an autographed book.

"I don't know which one," the kindergartener said, "but I think they're neat to look at and when I get my book I'm going to have my dad read it."

And inform his dad of the author's advice: Use your imagination and be creative.



Smith

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