

A Walk in the Woods with Douglas Wood and P.J. Lynch

Perhaps most widely known as the award-winning author of *Old Turtle*, Douglas Wood is also a composer and recording artist, a wilderness guide, and a self-taught naturalist. He describes his new book, *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth*—illustrated by P.J. Lynch and published by Candlewick Press—as “a prayer and a thank-you, a walk in the woods, and a remembering smile. I feel I’ve been getting ready to write this book all my life,” he says, “for it is about my wise and gentle hero, my Grandad.”

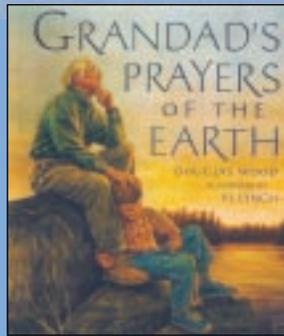
Wood, who now lives with his family in a log cabin in northern Minnesota, recalls spending summers with his grandparents and waiting eagerly for Grandad to get home from work each day. The former minor-league ball player always took the time to play catch with his grandson, despite a heart condition that sometimes left him winded. Whether the two were exploring the north woods together, watering the garden, or painting fishing lures, Douglas Wood’s time spent with his grandfather was precious. “It didn’t matter what we did,” says the author. “I just wanted to be with him. He always made me feel like the most important person in the world.”

Familiar paths, rocks, trees, and caves

By way of research, illustrator P.J. Lynch, a native of Ireland, spent a week with Wood at his island cabin on Rainy Lake, Minnesota. Lynch shot twelve rolls of film and roamed, sketchbook in hand, on the same paths—stepping on the same rocks, gazing up at the same majestic trees—that Wood knew as a boy and that Lynch later re-created in his evocative paintings.

“I was seven the first time my family brought me to the north woods,” Wood remembers. “I hopped out of the car before it had even stopped and dashed into the woods.” Grandad urged the boy’s anxious parents to let him explore. And explore he did, discovering a series of small caves that he proudly led his grandfather to later.

Nearly forty years later, Wood would introduce the same caves to P.J. Lynch. “Visiting places where Doug walked with his Grandad was an invaluable experience,” says the renowned illustrator, “and an



“He made me feel like the most important person in the world.”
—Douglas Wood

unusual one.” Normally, Lynch would not meet and spend time with the author of a book in this way, but he knew that this was a deeply personal story for Wood. “Doug also showed me photos and home movies of his Grandad, and all of this helped me to understand his gentle character and the love that Doug had for him.”

Inspiring landscapes, universal themes

Winner of the Christopher Medal for *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey*, by Susan Wojciechowski, and *When Jessie Came Across the Sea*, by Amy Hest—as well as a two-time winner of the Kate Greenaway Medal in the U.K.—Lynch says working on *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth* was “a wonderful experience. I’m not sure which was more inspiring, the words of Doug’s story or the landscapes he showed me.”

As they roamed in the woods, Lynch gradually began to see where he might place the characters: “I saw them starting their walk in the morning light. I envisioned them in the monumental calmness of the sunset on the lake. And all the time I was thinking of Doug’s story, his wonderful words, and what had been a very

special story before was now even more special to me in a very personal way. This was actually a little inhibiting when it came to doing the pictures. It took me a while to settle down back home in Ireland before I could get on with illustrating the book.”

Wood says he is always seeking themes that are universal, significant to both children and adults. *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth*, which explores grief and healing, our connection to the natural world, and the enduring spirit of love, is both a remarkable tribute to Wood’s beloved

Grandad and a lyrical expression of universal themes. It is also visually arresting, full of meditative images of nature that will linger in readers’ minds and hearts long after the book is closed. “It is a book,” says Wood, “for anyone who has ever had a woods to walk, a prayer to whisper, or a hero to love.”



CANDLEWICK PRESS
2067 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140