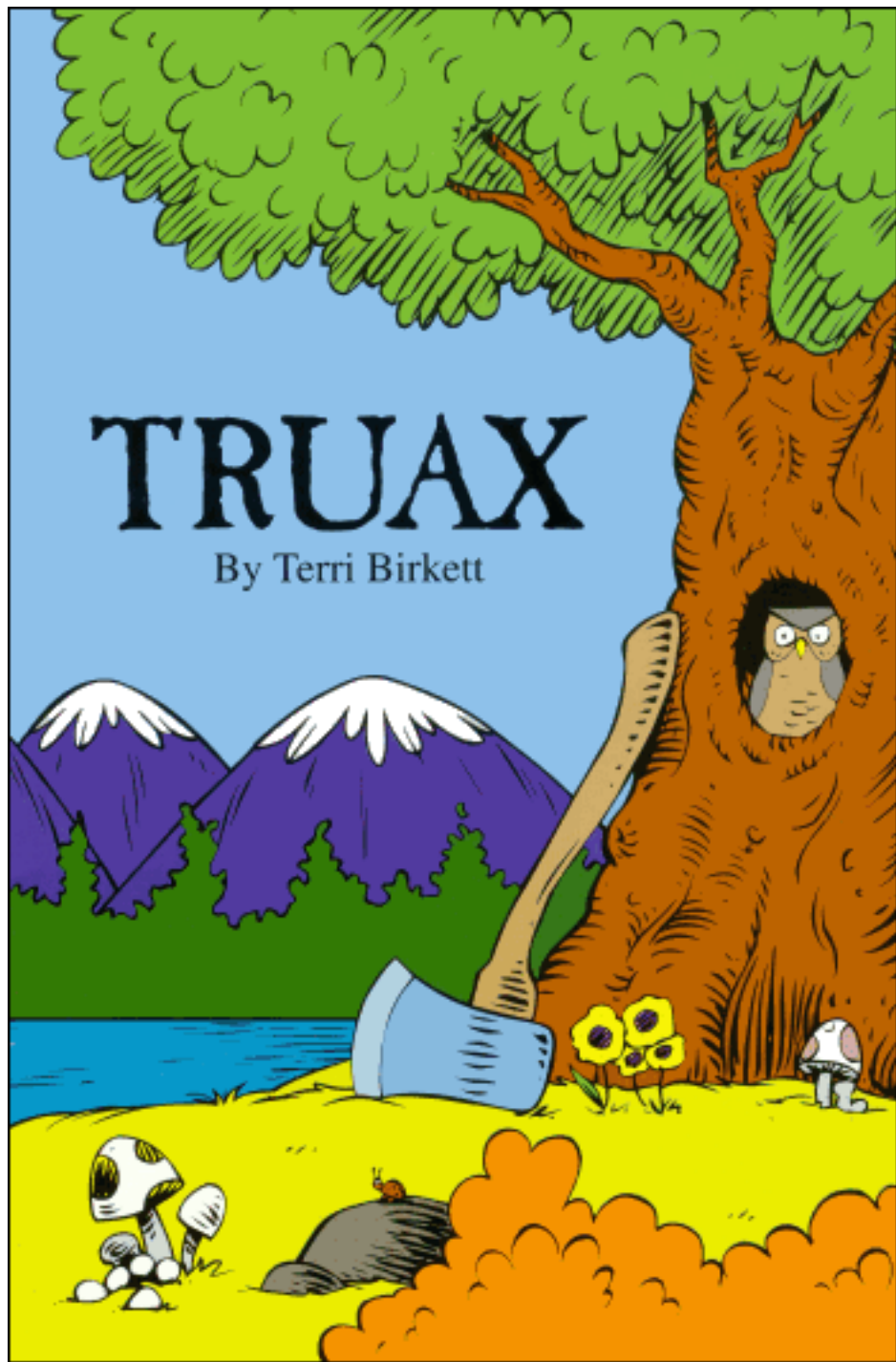


TRUAX

By Terri Birkett



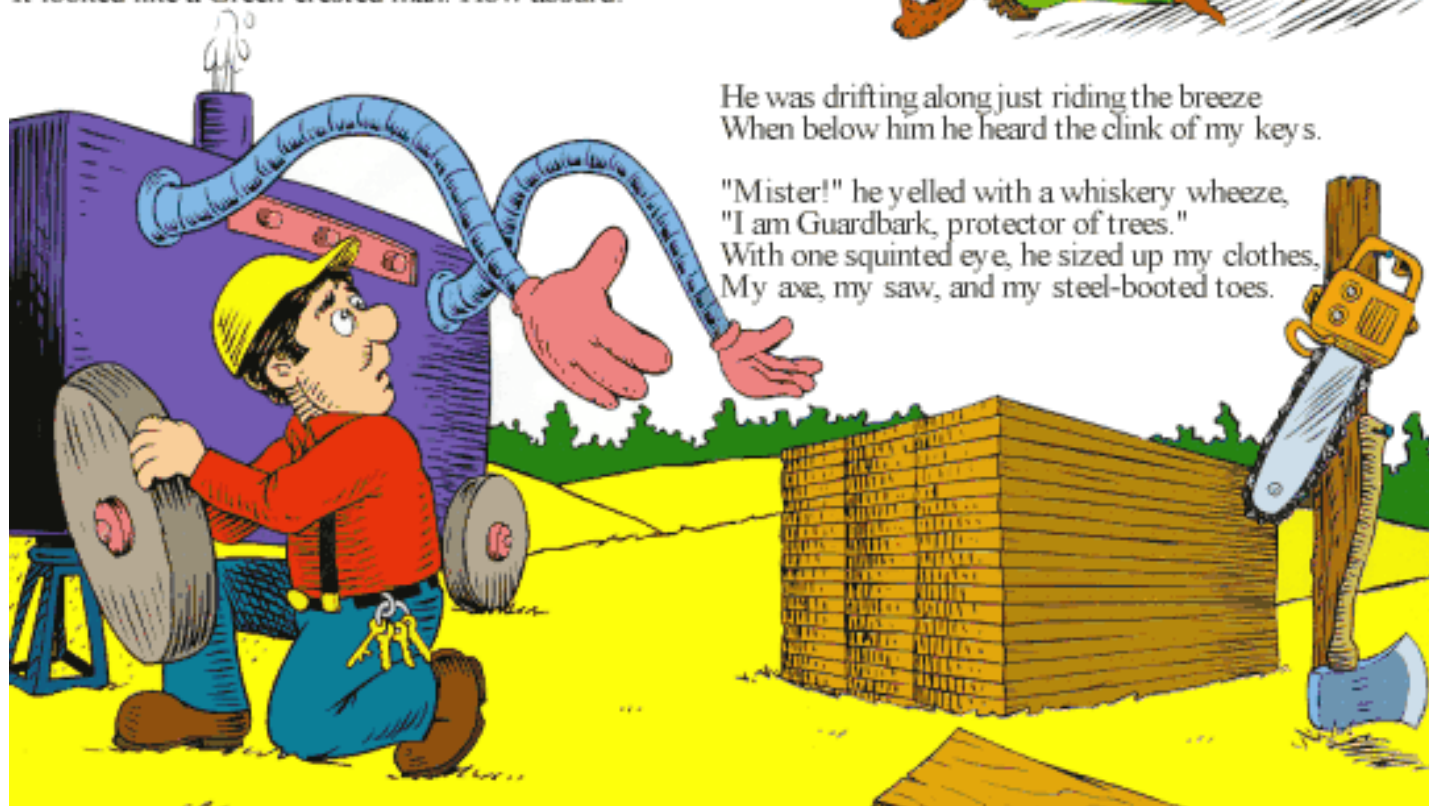
A warm day in June, way out on Oak Knoll,
With my saw and my axe hung up on a pole,
I was fixing a wheel on my Board-Flipping Packer
When I glimpsed what I thought was a
Green-crested Quacker.

I looked to the sky. That wasn't a bird.
It looked like a Green-crested man. How absurd!



He was drifting along just riding the breeze
When below him he heard the clink of my keys.

"Mister!" he yelled with a whiskery wheeze,
"I am Guardbark, protector of trees."
With one squinted eye, he sized up my clothes,
My axe, my saw, and my steel-booted toes.



"Hello, Mr. Guardbark," I said with unease.
And not to be rude, I got off my knees.

He must have been flying for quite a long while.
He seemed kind of sad, so I said with a smile,
"I welcome you here where the Loblolly grows
And the roots of the Shadegrove tickle your toes.
Where the Shrub-bird sings and hums out his nose
And Blue-breasted Barkpeckers peck out the rows.

"I'm Truax, the logger. I harvest these trees
For ballbats and houses and things such as these."

"Sir!" he said loudly, "you are grisly with greed.
Cutting Hagbarks is MEAN- a horribus deed.
Look what a mess your hacking has made.
You did all of THIS just to get y your bills paid?"

"No, not at all," I said with a smile.
"Have a seat on that pile.
This might take a while."

"I WON'T take a seat, or LISTEN, or LOOK,"
the Guardbark raved on. He snarled and he shook.



But before I could shake or offer a seat,
The Guardbark stopped,
stiffened,
and stamped his two feet.

"I'm Guardbark, I tell you, keeper of trees.
Our future, you know is dependent on these.
You must stop this hacking and whacking and stacking
You should NOT be here. I MUST send you packing."



"Oh, Mr. Guardbark, you're right!" I agreed.
"No trees for the future would be dreadful indeed.
That's why I carry my bag of tree seeds,
And my Dirt Digging Planter to plant them with speed.

"In fact, for every ONE tree that I need,
I plant FIVE food-stowing, tree-growing seeds!
My friends do the same all over this land.
Six million a day - It's part of the plan.

"Thirty-some years ago (just this past May),
We had HALF the trees that are growing today.
We've worked really hard to manage our trees -
To keep lots of them growing, and free from disease."

"Whoa, Mr. Guardbark. Just calm down a bit.
Our trees won't be helped by a fumulous fit.
Let's talk instead.
As I've always said-
Talking's much better than losing y our head!"

"Okay, we'll talk, you brutish tree whacker.
Turn off your saw and your wood-hacking stacker."

I turned off my saw and my stacker, and soon
We could hear the shrill call of the Leafsucking Loon.

Then Guardbark began, "I'm angry all right.
What future is there with no trees in sight?
Trees clean the air, give Shrub-birds a rest.
Fuzz-worms and Kitesquirrels use trees for their nests."



Guardbark pondered this last bit of news
While chewing his fingernails off by the twos.
"You really plant trees for the trees that you use?"

"Still-
THAT won't remove my Tree-Hacking blues."

He looked rather gloomy there shaking his head,
I guessed he must not know the truth, so I said,



"Back in the 30s, with wildfires unchecked,
Millions of acres of forests were wrecked.
Then people began to pitch in and fight
The fires that began from big lightning strikes.
Now every year 49 million acres
Of trees are spared from this lawless tree taker."

Guardbark muttered, cocked his head to one side
And rubbed his chin as he thought. Then he sighed,
"But what about trees that are really, quite old.
That are cooling our planet and shouldn't be sold?
They're cleaning our air. It's really not fair
To cut THEM down for some wobblesome chair."



I realized that Guardbark did not want to know
How the earth keeps on changing, so I spoke sort of slow,
"With wildfires and wind, insects and disease,
Nature, herself, renews stands of old trees."

I looked at the Guardbark. His mouth turned to gristle.
His eyes shot some darts. His nose whirred a whistle.
*"But Nature is patient and willing to wait.
I want old trees NOW.
The wait's what I hate!"*

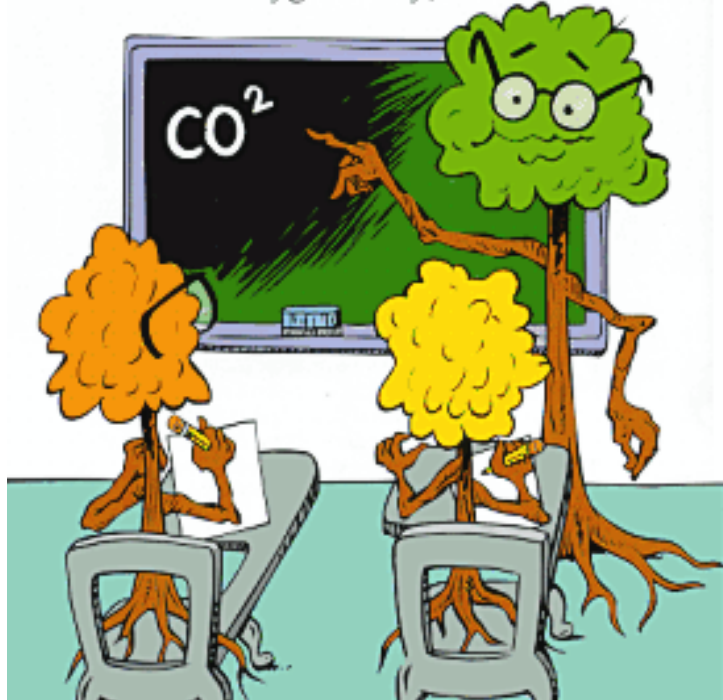
I agreed with the Guardbark that it always is good
To save some of the old, historical wood.

Then I gave him the facts, the truth of the matter.
This Guardbark did NOT want to hear idle chatter.

"We're teaching our people just how to conserve
and we've set aside land in National Preserves.
95 million Acres (to be quite precise)
Have been set aside JUST to look nice.
(Well,- critters and plants DO use this land.
It just isn't used by woman or man.)

"Now breathable air-
You've got a point there.
We all need clean air.
For that there's no spare.

"But if we examine the scientists' rule;
We see that the planet's clean air and its cool
Depend on YOUNG trees in tree-growing school.
That's where they learn how to use C-O-2
To make lots of oxygen. Really, it's true!"



I looked at the Guardbark, the gleam in his eye.
I knew we weren't finished, this sentry and I.
As soon as that thought was leaving my head,
The Guardbark spoke up and here's what he said,



"BIODIVERSITY. Now there is a word.
A Science-y, Frogbirdy word I have heard."
He thought for a moment and then he went on,
"Will THIS still be there when the trees
have been sawn?"

I like these discussions where views are debated.
So I dug up my facts and quickly I stated,
"BIODIVERSITY, hmmm, let me see,
That word has lots of good meanings for me.

"In each of our forests, critters abound.
Leafsnatchers in treetops. Legbugs aground.
They're snacking and burrowing
packing and scurrowing
Their lives always changing- it must be quite hurrowing

"Cutting the trees sends SOME critters running,
But others move in, some cute, and some cunning,
They munch on the leaves. They grow on the bark,
And none loves it more than the Pink-spotted Lark.

"A newly-cut forest has sun on the ground
And BIODIVERSITY leaps and bounds.
All kinds of new species move in together.
From scales to warts, from fur to feathers."





Then a great thing happened. It made me quite glad.
The Guardbark calmed down. He was no longer mad.
His shoulders relaxed, then he said with a sigh,
"We want the SAME things? - Tree-whacker and I?"

"What about ENDANGERED species, my friend?
How do we keep them from seeing their end?"

He looked quite concerned so I knew he was through
Being angry at me for the job that I do.
I felt he must learn that I'm concerned, too,
I don't have all answers, but gave him my view.

"That's a tough question. It takes lots of thought
To decide what we ought not do, or we ought.
Would any one mind if we lost, say, a tick
That carried a germ that made Cuddlebears sick?

"Or what about something that's really quite nice
Like the Yellow-Striped Minnow that lives in Lake Zice?
How far will we go? How much will we pay? -
To keep a few minnows from dying away?"

"Do we ever consider just how it would be
If we could NEVER, EVER again cut a tree?"

"Would we live in houses made of plastic and steel?
Til the oil and the ores run out? - and they will.

"Then what would happen after a bit of time passes
To the animals that live in the shrubs and the grasses?
With no opening up of the dark forest floor,
There'd be no new habitat for them any more.

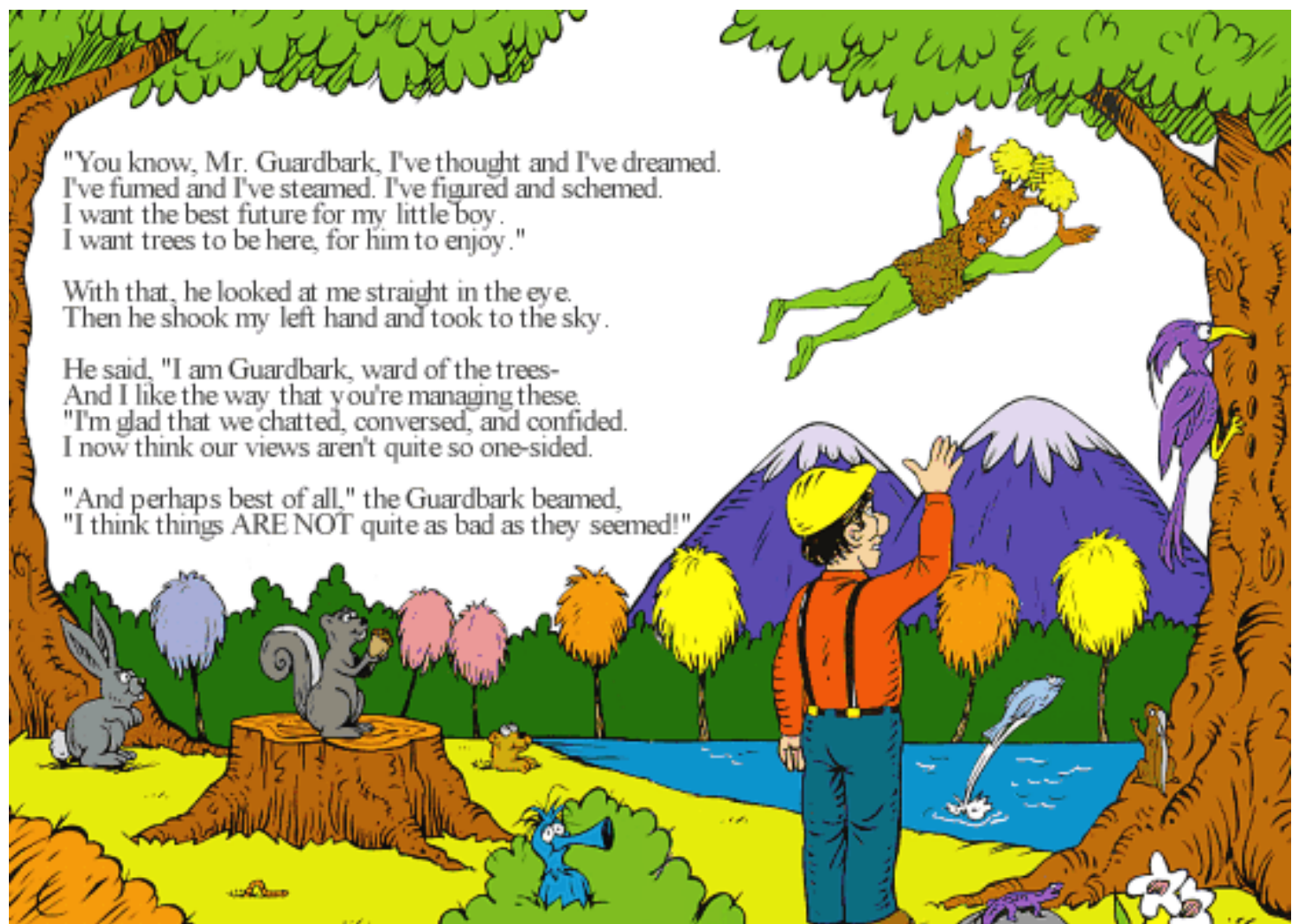


"You know, Mr. Guardbark, I've thought and I've dreamed.
I've fumed and I've steamed. I've figured and schemed.
I want the best future for my little boy.
I want trees to be here, for him to enjoy."

With that, he looked at me straight in the eye.
Then he shook my left hand and took to the sky.

He said, "I am Guardbark, ward of the trees-
And I like the way that you're managing these.
"I'm glad that we chatted, conversed, and confided.
I now think our views aren't quite so one-sided.

"And perhaps best of all," the Guardbark beamed,
"I think things ARE NOT quite as bad as they seemed!"



Credits

About the Author:

TERRI BIRKETT is an active member of the hardwood flooring industry. She has a passion for education, degrees in Biology and Chemistry, and two young sons who challenge her creativity. This is her first children's book.

Terri resides with her husband and sons in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, where she also serves on the local School Board.

About the Artist:

ORRIN LUNDGREN attended Florida State University, where he studied art and was a member of the famous FSU circus. During his 11-year professional circus career as a flying trapeze artist he performed worldwide.

He has since moved to the mountains of Western North Carolina where he does free-lance artwork out of his studio in Asheville, which he shares with his two cats. His work has appeared in newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, television and numerous other places. This is his first children's book.

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