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Chris Van Allsburg

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Dear Mr. Van Allsburg,

Let me start off by saying that I love every single book that you have written and illustrated, although some are more of my favorites than others. My absolute favorite book of yours would be *Bad Day at Riverbend*. I truly did not expect to like this book because the illustrations were so different than those of your previous books. Upon completing this book, I fell deeply in love. When I reached the page with the little girl's arm, expertly drawn in your usual style, I sat with my mouth agape. I did not expect a twist as big as that one, although, based on your other works, I don't know why I was so surprised. In *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, you surprised me and made me think about whether or not the Great Gasazi actually performed magic. *The Stranger* presented me with the surprise of the "hermit" actually being a season, in human form. I loved how you added the detail of what the season put on the window of the farmer each year, "See you next fall." *The Widow's Broom* was a delight to read. I loved how the Widow Shaw tricked the townspeople into burning her plain, old, non-magical broom. If you need to get rid of a broom, freak the townspeople out with a magical witch's broom. Perhaps the greatest surprise contained in all of your books would be the one found within the final page of *The Sweetest Fig*. To have Monsieur Bibot turn into Marcel was the most unexpected thing I've ever read. Even though I understand that you draw your readers in by using suspense, I have a few questions regarding some other aspects of your books.

First of all, I noticed that in *Jumanji* and *Zathura*, you showcase the relationship of siblings. Were you close with your siblings growing up or did you fight often, causing you to use the extreme situations to draw the siblings together? I also realized that your illustrations differed from book to book. Although some books had the same illustrations, the ones that didn't were very different. What makes you use illustrations like you did in *Two Bad Ants* as opposed to the realistic illustrations in a book like *The Wretched Stone*? Does it just depend on your mood or is there some exact science behind it? My final question involves Santa Clause. Did he know that the little boy would choose the gift of the silver bell from the reindeer's sleigh, solidifying his choice of the boy? Or perhaps was it purely coincidental that Santa chose the young boy? I'd love to know!

Thank you so much for gracing the world with such wonderful picture books and artful illustrations. I, for one, am so glad that you didn't pursue sculpture or being just an illustrator. I have truly enjoyed studying you and your works.

Sincerely yours,

Stephanie Griffith