

A Chat with Martin Nelson Burton

As a child, Martin Nelson Burton used to write to a leprechaun.

He is the author of the classic *St. Patrick's Day* book,

Dear Mr. Leprechaun: Letters From My First Friendship.

We asked him about his book and the friendship he shared.



Q: Your book starts out with this line: “The first friend I ever had was a leprechaun.” How did your friendship with a leprechaun start?

A: My stepgrandfather, who was Irish, introduced me to leprechauns. I would come home after listening to his stories and look for leprechauns in the house. I was convinced one was there, but I couldn't find him—probably because he was too shy to come out. So, I got the idea that maybe, if I left a note out at nighttime, he would come out when no one was around and write back. And that's exactly what happened.

Q: How long did this letter-writing last?

A: Seven years. I wrote my first note when I was five, and my last one well after I had turned eleven.

Q: What would you write about?

A: I'd ask him to draw a picture of himself and tell me about his life in Ireland. I'd sometimes leave out toys for him to fix, and he would often untangle the strings of my marionette. But whenever I asked for some real leprechaun magic—like to make my toy boat life-sized—he'd always find some sort of silly reason not to do it.



Q: When did you realize you could write a book about this correspondence?

A: About ten years ago, my dad came by our house with a huge envelope, and it was filled with the notes I'd written over the years, and Mr. Leprechaun's replies. My dad had saved every one. It was then that I realized I'd had an experience few people have ever had: communicating with a magical being, and I had the notes to prove it. I wanted to share this experience.

Q: Don't some people think that it was really your dad you wrote the notes?

A: Well, there's no question that the leprechaun usually borrowed the handwriting of my father. But that's just an old leprechaun trick to throw you off-track. But whether it was my father or a real leprechaun, one thing is for sure: whoever wrote me had to love me very, very much. Whoever it was, I know I have the best friend in the world.

Q: What is the message of your book?

A: That to be a great friend, you don't have to write the funniest jokes or tell the most clever stories. You don't even have to be perfect in spelling. You simply have to be there for the one you love. Whenever I wrote to the leprechaun, I knew he would always write back; and whether he was funny or clever or ordinary, I knew he would always be there. That's what love is all about.