

Fielteau's Focus:

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If you have had the chance to explore the Woodlands, a fantasy forest home to magical animals and evil Wolves, you're either protagonist Admarie Baxer or a reader of 15-year-old Jadin Fielteau's graphic novel "The Woodlander."

"Graphic novels were something that I wanted to try doing, but thought that I should wait until I was older because when you see the back of a book the authors are always adults, so it never occurred to me that I should try," Jadin said.

Admarie, *The Woodlander's* protagonist, caregiver and explorer, is hesitant at first to venture into the woods behind her house after discovering an uncanny creature. But when her close friend convinces her there is nothing to be afraid of, she finds herself back where her story began.

Photo by Melanie Frick



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Art by Jadin Fielteau

creating the magical world of the Woodlands

"I started thinking about what story I wanted to create and flesh out, so then I just started doing it," Jadin said. "I was like, 'Well, I'm in this now.' Then I started drawing."

Although Jadin attended Howard B. Stroud Elementary School from kindergarten until fourth grade, she currently takes online courses through Georgia Virtual School. Jadin's father, Kidd Fielteau, feels that homeschooling allows his children greater flexibility in certain aspects of their education.

"It's one of those situations where if you don't like what is being taught in school, you might as well just do it yourself," Kidd Fielteau said.

Jadin credits her own story developments to her early love of reading. Her favorite book series being "The Warriors" — stories about the adventures of magical feral cats in fictional forests — is quite fitting.

"My mom would give us story prompts, and I would really enjoy doing those, sometimes too much. I've always enjoyed reading, so that's how I enjoyed creating stories," Jadin said. "I was like, 'Well, what if my character did something like this?' When I started thinking about that, that's how this story was created."

Jadin has always enjoyed drawing

and began like most do — with pen and paper.

"I enjoyed drawing little doodles of stuff like Disney things from 'How To Draw' books. I would draw the princesses or I'd trace over books that I enjoyed reading. I asked my mom all the time to get some of her thin, transparent paper and I'd trace over it," Jadin said.

Having the ability to watch Jadin's art evolve over time, Kidd Fielteau was aware of her improving capabilities.

"There was this one picture of a duck that she did around first grade, and I was like, 'This is really good for a first grader.' I'm going to be honest, I'm not one of those parents who is like, 'This is lovely. Everything is amazing,'" Kidd Fielteau said.

Jadin's art is a family affair with her parents and siblings giving her support. Her younger sister relishes giving Jadin feedback on her characters.

"My sister enjoys giving me critiques on my art and watching what I do. I'll ask her, 'What color should this be here?' Just little stuff like that, she is able to help out," Jadin said.

Although Jadin is constantly shifting her style, around the age of 10, she started experimenting with digital drawing. Finding artists such as YouTube creators Hyanna Natsu and DrawingWiffWaffles helped her blend both anime and nature into her drawings.

"I liked their (DrawingWiffWaffles') style and how they drew nature, and I was like, 'I kind of want to just draw something nature as well,'" Jadin said.

Fielteau's art through the years



"But since I was more into characters, I put a character in nature instead of just drawing nature. That's where the story started and I developed the story along with her (Admarie) as I created her."

Comfortable in her art, Jadin never imagined creating an entire graphic novel out of her work.

"I wanted to create my stories and show it to the world and see what would happen, but I always thought that it was something that I should do later or after I had developed more," Jadin said. "When I started the book, it was more so my dad's idea."

The artistic apple didn't fall far from the tree in Jadin's family. Both her parents work at the Lyndon House Art Center in Athens. Kidd Fielteau teaches a

teen media art class, and Tabitha Fielteau, Jadin's mom, teaches a sewing class. Kidd Fielteau also works as a photographer and Tabitha Fielteau as a seamstress, and together they run and operate their own women's motorcycle clothing line, Chic Riot. Knowing that Jadin could eventually sell her novel through Etsy, a platform that Tabitha Fielteau used to sell clothes on, Kidd Fielteau began setting deadlines starting in

August of 2020.

"I don't want to say I forced her into it, but if I didn't, she would have never even thought about it or tried. I was like, 'You're going to make a graphic novel, and you're going to have one year to do it,'" Kidd Fielteau said.

Once the plan was set, it was time for Jadin to get to work. Putting together the various characters she had developed over the years into a comic format took time.

"The most challenging part mentally was writing it because although I did develop the story and wanted this and that to happen, it was also like, 'Okay, now I have to fully write it out and make it understandable.' I can't have people reading my head," Jadin said.

Both of Jadin's parents were there to help her with the novel's dialogue and grammar. Kidd Fielteau ensured that even though Jadin is homeschooled, she knows what publishing a book will be like when her parents are not her editors.

"The script had to be finished in two months, just a rough draft with outlines and sketches," Kidd Fielteau said. "You think I'm being harsh right now until you get into the real world. Then

you have an editor and you have a publisher and you have somebody to report to. They're going to be even worse than me.' I'm kind of preparing her for when she actually gets out there."

With Kidd Fielteau's expertise in photography, in 2018 he handed down his skills in Adobe Photoshop for Jadin's own digital creation, giving her the resources she needed to design her graphic novel. Finally Jadin was ready to publish, going through MP Morris Publishing which provides a platform for authors to self-publish graphic novels.

"With a graphic novel there's the templates and the layouts, so there were only a few publishers that we explored. We wanted one that was United States based, and one that had a fast turnaround and



fit cost wise," Kidd Fielteau said.

Jadin advertised her novel through her Instagram (@art_by_jadin), and her dad took professional photos for her Etsy page (ArtByJadin). She even garnered the attention of Athens Mayor Kelly Girtz who made an Instagram post about Jadin himself.

"For about ten years of my young life, I aspired to be a sequential artist, and never got there, but this 14 year old stands tall and stands as an inspiration to us all," Girtz wrote.





PART OF THE PROCESS: Jadin Fielteau opens her computer to her sketches on Photoshop. Kidd Fielteau admires Jadin's hard work. "It's actually cool to see the process of how it goes to create a story because I couldn't create one. You have ideas of stories, but to actually flesh it out with the characters and the settings and even the dialogue, especially in the second book, the dialogue is actually strong," Kidd Fielteau said. Photo by Melanie Frick.

Girtz's post caught the eye of local podcaster Victoria Cooper, who featured Jadin on episode 11 of her podcast "little decisions," a platform to foster kindness and community in the Athens area.

"I told her, 'If it sells two copies, who cares? You made a book. You did it.' Honestly, I was surprised that it even sold because I was like, 'We're just going to do it to say that you did it, you accomplished something,'" Kidd Fielteau said.

But Jadin didn't have to worry about not selling — in fact, she had to worry about not selling out.

"It was really exciting. I was like, 'Wow,' I didn't think that anyone would want to read it or buy it, like using your own money to buy something that I worked so hard on, so it was really re-

warding," Jadin said.

Having a tangible book to sign and hold felt surreal for Jadin, but she knows that her work is far from done.

"Now that I'm creating my second book, I have a better understanding of how to go about it. There were mistakes that I made before, so I have learned from those as well," Jadin said.

Currently at the end of her sketching phase for "The Woodlander's" sequel, Jadin feels confident in what is to come for Admarie and the Woodland creatures.

"Things are going to get more interesting with the Wolverers. They weren't too prominent in the first book, so you're going to see a lot more of them and their ideals," Jadin said. "I hope for it to be a trilogy."

Jadin knows that no matter where life takes her, creating stories will always be a part of her. Selling her books was simply an added bonus to being able to see and hold what she worked so hard to create.

"I think when I finally finished it was the most rewarding," Jadin said. "When I had everything done and I could scroll through all of the pages and I was like 'I did this,' and now I can go back to drawing other things." 

SKETCHES: Drawings and doodles are shown of character possibilities for Jadin Fielteau's graphic novels. Jadin Fielteau is currently in the process of creating The Woodlander's sequel, and her father is excited for her to show off her writing skills. "It all started with just an idea and then the script formed. I really liked the first story, but when I read the second script, I was like, 'Wow, this is better than the first book.' I'm not being biased because I would let her know 'Hey, this story sucks' but it's actually better," Kidd Fielteau said. Art by Jadin Fielteau.

