

Finding Righteous Ray-Ray's Illustrator

I love writing, but art and drawing are not a particular skill of mine. With that being said, as a Children's Book writer, I had to find an artist to make my words come to life through images.

Just because someone can draw, that does not mean that they would be good Children's Book Illustrators. I had to learn that the hard way. As teacher, I encounter many students that are talented artists. My first encounter came the summer after my first teaching job at DuSable Leadership Academy. I wanted to be a mentor to this talented, but troubled young man who was a student in my classes there. I left the school after the first year, but we maintained a relationship which led to us discussing possibilities for him to be my illustrator. FAIL! His talents and work ethic did not fit my needs. He missed deadlines, and barely drew the simple things I asked him to do to get started. I quickly ended the partnership.

From there, I decided to focus on perfecting my craft as a teacher, and put my dreams as a writer on hold. I was really enjoying my job as a teacher. Once I got a handle on it, I got back to my search for an illustrator. This time, I decided to do something different. I wanted to put together a team, that not only were talented artists, but I wanted them to also have knowledge of art software. I decided on these two brilliant young ladies. To keep a long story short, we had meetings and after seeing their work, I gave them some feedback which they did not take well. Their art was much better than the first guy, but it had a Japanese Anime look to it. Ray-Ray looked like he could've been a girl. Actually, all of the characters looked like they could've been male or female. After discussing this with them, I decided their style was no fit for me.

After this, I decided that my next artist would be my last. I taught myself how to screen artists to see if they would work for me, before giving them anything dealing with Righteous Ray-Ray.

One day, while out with my sister, Ayana Herron, we were discussing my challenges with finding an illustrator and she alerted me to a talented friend of mine right in my backyard. "Oooh you know who would be good for this?" She asked. "You know Alan can draw, you should run it by him." From there we met and I discussed my goals for Righteous Ray-Ray and he was immediately excited about it. We discussed

his knowledge of photoshop, and he came up with what Righteous Ray-Ray would look like.

He went on to create the logo and the pages for the first book. At his suggestion, we now meet on the first Monday of every month, which leads me to say that Alan is more than an Illustrator, more than an Art Director. He has taught me a lot about how to coordinate meetings and events, as well as putting my work in perspective. I cannot say enough. He wants success just as bad as I do, he works just as hard as I do, he believes in Righteous Ray-Ray as much as I do. Furthermore, I tell him all the time that he should be a motivational speaker. One of my favorite things that Alan has said to me is that "You cannot brainstorm on an empty canvas." It's so true to me, because a lot of times we have ideas about things and we don't know where to go from the idea.

For all of you out there that are building businesses and organizations with others, how do you go about building and sustaining those relationships? I hope it has been as rewarding as mine has been...

Peace,

Raymond Smith