

Roar, Little Lion, Roar

By Kellie Magnus



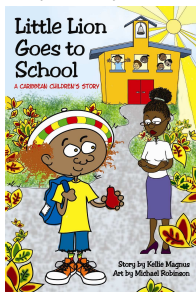
A few years ago, I ventured into children's book publishing. I was concerned about the plethora of American media images children in my family were being exposed to. I was even more concerned about the paucity of Caribbean children's media, and books in particular, available to strike a balance. I started to daydream about creating a line of Caribbean children's books that would reflect our history, our culture, our lives; and, most important, would be cool and fun enough to inspire our children to read.

Everyone warned me: children's literature is the most unforgiving and unpredictable genre. It's too expensive, cried the cautious. You'll lose your shirt, scoffed the skeptics. Buoyed by a growing need to prove the doubters wrong, I pressed ahead.

I had no choice, really. A character had moved into the back of my brain and refused to leave or be quiet. He was a six year old, red-headed Rastafarian boy, growing up with his father in a fishing village in rural Jamaica. One night as I tried to sleep, he whispered:

*My name is Zachariah Zion
My Papa calls me Little Lion.*

Cute, I thought. But, please shut up so I can sleep. As the days and weeks passed, he told me more about himself and, with the persistence that only a six year old can display, he insisted that I tell his story.



So I did. The first story "Little Lion Goes to School" poured itself unto the page. After several frustrating attempts to find a publisher who took the Caribbean children's book market

seriously, I decided to publish it myself.

Had I known the challenges that face small publishers, I might not have gone forward. I had already left the security of a comfortable salary as a strategy consultant behind, and was struggling to adjust to the far less lucrative world of freelance writing. Taking on a high cost, high risk enterprise was quite possibly the least logical thing I could do, but Little Lion was insistent:

I might be small.

I might be poor.

But one day I'll have a mighty roar.

The book was released in October 2003. What it cost me financially – to print and to market; in the income I lost while I took on the daily challenge of getting into schools, bookstores and the Caribbean community – was staggering. What it gave me back in the joy that it brought to children who read it, in the letters sent to me by grateful parents and teachers, was immeasurable.

But joy doesn't pay the rent. And by the summer of 2004, my financial position was becoming precarious. I had a full time job, shepherding the book and trying to grow my fledgling media company. But I had far less than a full time income. Though I had other sources of income to count on -- writing articles for magazines and business plans for venture capitalists -- I was in a classic Catch-22. Every hour on another project, put me an hour behind on the work that meant the most to me. Every hour working on Little Lion and his friends put me an hour away from financial security.

Then opportunity knocked. I was asked to join a team working on a multi-media package for children with autism. It meant more security and a break from the grind of trying to be both the rider and the mule in my own business endeavour. I was exhausted and the project was one that genuinely held my interest. So I took it.

And Little Lion languished.

Six months later, I was restless. The work was good and the money was good, but I was getting a familiar feeling of becoming detached from my self. It was the same feeling that had caused me to quit consulting in the first place. Thoughts gathered in the back of my mind: This is not what I should be doing. This is not who I am.

Little Lion was more candid: "You're selling me out."

I moved back to Jamaica, hoping to reconnect with my dream of building a line of Caribbean children's books, but soon opportunity knocked again. After doing a short consulting project for CARIMAC, I was asked to join the Institute full time as Editorial Director and head of their business development unit. It was the perfect position for me: a mandate that fused all my interests - the Caribbean, media and education. I wasn't selling out. And I would be financially secure.

But it meant that Little Lion had to creep back into a corner of my brain.

Because I loved the work that I was doing, and because I thought I was being responsible, I thought that that would be okay. But I was wrong. The harder I worked in my new position, the more impatient Little Lion grew. He resorted to his old technique of pestering me at night:

*One, two, three, four
Little Lion tapped a beat on the floor.*

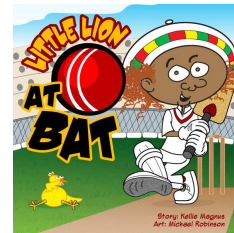
I loved my job, but something still wasn't right. And then it dawned on me: No matter how hard I worked, no matter how much I loved my job, I would never feel free until I paid respect to the dream that kept me awake at night. And that's what freedom is. It's the ability to act on the little voices in the back of your head; the ideas that make your skin tingle; the work that makes you feel YOU.

The second book in the Little Lion series, "Little Lion at Bat" was launched in April 2007. For more information, visit www.jackmandora.com.



Everybody's path to financial freedom might be different; for some it might mean balancing that dream with pragmatic choices that bring security. To realize your dream might take longer than you want; it might have to be accomplished on the side, in stolen hours at night or on weekends. It might cost you sleep, time with friends and loved ones. But if you fight to protect that idea, that big dream, it'll bring you closer to your true self than any paycheck ever will. And nothing feels more free than that.

So one weekend, I headed off to Robbins' Bay, with my laptop and a friend, and I gave Little Lion the attention he demanded. And, more



important, I made a promise to myself -- no matter what it costs; no matter how long it takes; no matter what other challenges I decide to take on along the way; no matter what else life

throws at me -- I'll make this dream a reality.

Or as Little Lion would say:

*Here's a rule I'll make for sure
I'll follow my heart
Stay true and pure.
Someday soon the whole world will see
My special gift is the lion in me.*