

### 'Chillers' thriller: Author Johnathan Rand opens doors to reading for Burton Glen students

by Elizabeth Lowe | The Burton News  
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Burton Glen fifth-grader Nigyeriah Harris listens to "Chillers" author Johnathan Rand. Rand visited Tuesday during the school's "March is Reading Month" event.

**BURTON, Michigan** — Who says that lead-filled wooden stick is just a pencil? Johnathan Rand, author of the "Chillers" book series, told Burton Glen students

Tuesday that a pencil is a magic wand that transports both writer and reader to a fascinating realm of adventure.

Rand's works haven't always been chilling.

His first books were actually a spinoff of a character created by author Beverly Cleary.

"I was enamored with Beverly Cleary and started writing my own little Henry Huggins series," Rand said. "But even at that age, I thought, gosh, I can't really copy her, so I started writing a Henry series, 'Henry goes fishing,' things like that."

Rand wrote and made bindings for the series.

"I made a cover out of construction paper and stapled it together," he said. "My mom still has a copy of these somewhere."

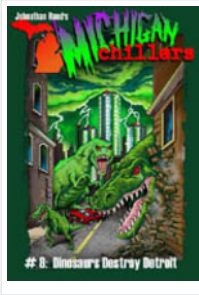
His early construction paper volumes aren't counted among the 4 million books Rand has sold as a self-published author.

A Pontiac native whose real name is Chris Wright, Rand was a college student when he learned the importance of reading and writing skills while pestering a radio station manager for a job.

"I wrote radio commercials and told stories," Rand told students. "One was about an alien that crashed his spaceship to Earth. And he took it down to the local auto parts store."

The job launched a career in broadcasting, but he soon found he shared his name with another broadcaster, so he assumed the name Christopher Knight.

Knight became his pen name when he began authoring adult thriller books, but he chose a second pseudonym when he switched to writing children's literature.



"I wanted to make sure people knew the difference between the two," Rand said. "I didn't want a third-grader to pick up a book by Christopher Knight."

Accompanied by his wife, Deirdre "Boots" Wright, Rand keeps a schedule chock-full of engagements at schools across the country, where students greet him like a rock star.

This week's schedule took him from San Francisco to Burton Glen.

Rand and "Mrs. Chillers" were married in 1998 and moved to Topinabee, his wife's hometown in the northern Lower Peninsula.

Rand compares writing to a sport.

"When I sit down to write, I really focus on it, pursue it aggressively, put my all into it," he said.

Regardless of what career students choose, they need to read and write well, Rand told students, encouraging them to work hard toward their dreams instead of just fantasizing about them.

"Don't wish for it, work for it," he said. "If you really want something, work for it. You can accomplish anything you want to do, but don't just sit there and daydream."

Rand advocates writing out a plan of action without worrying about failing or changing the plan.



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"I write outlines for all of the Chillers books. I have a plan I might follow. Sometimes it changes, but I think it's actually important to have a map, know where you're going. That's half the battle right there."

Writing and reading shouldn't be viewed as a hardship.

"Reading is not something you do, reading is a place that you



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"Chillers" author Johnathan Rand says a pencil is transformed into a magic wand when it's picked up to write a story. "Reading is not something you do, reading is a place that you go," said Rand on Tuesday, during a "March is Reading Month" visit to Burton Glen Academy.

Shyann Bower, a first grader at Burton Glen Academy, practices her spooky laugh Tuesday, encouraged by "Chillers" author Johnathan Rand during his "March is Reading Month" visit.

go," said Rand.

"Find a book, pick it up, hold it in your hands and ask yourself where it'll take you."

What's ahead for fans?

Rand said to look for a new Chillers book, "Kentucky Komodo Dragons," coming out in May.

"Basically, it's about couple kids living near a thick Paducah forest near the city," said Rand.

While trying to find an old graveyard, the friends discover first a small lizard then a pair of full-grown Komodo dragons.

"There's something very strange about these Komodo dragons," said Rand, who declined to give away the rest of the story.

For children ready to move on to more challenging literature, Rand has penned the book "Pandemia," a story about bird flu and the "end of the world."

"It's more mature without being over the top," he said. "It's for kids who aren't really ready to graduate to Stephen King."

To learn more about author Johnathan Rand, go to [www.americanchillers.com](http://www.americanchillers.com).