

Weirdness a theme in novel about atomic bomb

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Author visits Dudley students.

The events that took place in a remote area of New Mexico during the predawn hours of July 16, 1945, forever changed the world.

In the early morning darkness the incredible destructive powers of the atom were first unleashed and what had been merely theoretical became reality.

—Eyewitness to History.com

Have you ever had a friend who thought you were weird?

A show of hands of Gothenburg fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade students revealed that most of them have had that experience when asked by author Ellen Klages.

“That’s something we have in common,” Klages told Dudley students in the performing arts center Oct. 13.

Weirdness and curiosity is what drew two misfit 11-year-olds together during World War II, Klages said.

The girls, whose parents were working on the atomic bomb near Los Alamos, NM, are featured in Klages’ first novel *The Green Glass Sea*.

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The book won the Scott O'Dell Award for historical fiction and has been nominated for the 2009 Intermediate Nebraska Golden Sower Book Award.

Klages said the title of the book comes from the dropping of the first atomic bomb.

Less than a month later, two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, which led to the end of World War II and the beginning of the Atomic Age.

The test bomb, at a desert location with the code-name "Trinity," melted 75 acres of desert sand into glass.

Klages said it was described by a pilot as like being in the middle of a sea of green glass blooming from the desert.

Reading the accounts "got me hooked."



The author, who now lives in San Francisco, CA, said she also read about families who took their kids to the test site after the bomb was dropped.

The 55-year-old said she started writing at age 4 on fat-lined paper with crayons about leaves.

Although she wrote for herself through the years, Klages said she didn't know what steps to take to go from a student in creative writing class to someone who writes and tries to get

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published.

She worked as a copy writer and a proofreader before landing a job at the Exploratorium Museum in San Francisco, CA—a hands-on museum of science, art and human perception.

There, her boss (Pat Murphy) was a science fiction writer who introduced Klages to some other writers.

“I felt like a fraud,” Klages said. “I had always thought I’d grow up to do what these fascinating people were actually doing.”

After Murphy gave her the advice, “then write something, Klages went on to write her first short story which was published in 1998.

“I like to make words dance on a page,” Klages said.

Later, another short story *Basement Magic*, won the Best Novelette Nebula Award in 2005.

At a science-fiction writing convention, Klages was reading aloud a short story that was heard by a New York City editor.

When asked if Klages wrote children’s stories, Klages said “No, I write stories with children in them.”

The editor asked if she’d consider writing a children’s book, and the result—a few years later—was *The Green Glass Sea*.

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Although the fictitious novel is based on history, Klages said for her it's all about the story.

To write a good story about that time, she spent about three hours of research for every page of the book which translates into 1,000 hours.

She also visited Los Alamos, talked to physicists, and poured through issues of Seventeen Magazine and Popular Mechanics from the 1940s as background for the period and her characters.

Klages said she loves talking to kids about her book and its sequel White Sands, Red Menace.

"It's fascinating to me to introduce to them the history and the science and have them come up to me and say it isn't boring," she said.

The new book happens in 1946 when the war is over and the future is about to happen.

"It's the beginning of the Atomic Age, the Space Age and the Cold War," she explained.

The author said that kids today "are going to be running the world."

"They might not know where all of it started but they have seen weapons of mass destruction," Klages said.

Her visit was sponsored by the Nebraska Library Commission, the Nebraska Humanities Council and the Nebraska Regional Library Systems.

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