

## Behind the Scene with Mr. and Mrs. Green

by Author and Illustrator, Keith Baker

“Who are the Greens?” you ask. They are an alligator couple, the main characters of an early reader series I have written and illustrated. So far there are four books—*Meet Mr. and Mrs. Green*, *More Mr. and Mrs. Green*, *Lucky Days with Mr. and Mrs. Green*, and *On the Go with Mr. and Mrs. Green*.

Working on these early readers has been the most fun and rewarding experience of my career. The fun is getting to expand the characters, anticipating their behavior in new situations, and remembering and referencing other stories. Readers, too, get to know characters through a full range of experiences, situations, and settings. Their fun is seeing behavior tested in new situations, predicting reactions, and being surprised—“I didn’t think he/she would do that!”

I have been surprised, too, as I have worked on the series. I thought I would soon exhaust story ideas; quite the opposite has happened. Because I know the Greens so well now, I can see the world through their eyes and I can place them into new situations. When confronted with problems in my real life, I often ask, “What would the Greens do? Could there be a story here?”

When asked by students “Who inspired Mr. and Mrs. Green?” I most often reply, “My parents.” (Dock and Ernestene Baker.) Like the Greens, my parents are best friends, good humored, and take great pleasure from the little things in life. I can also see that the Greens represent two sides of my character—industrious and lazy, practical and crazy, tidy and slovenly, active and lethargic, observant and clueless, bold and shy—oh, how I could go on, but I think you get the point.

I have been visiting schools with the Greens for several years. I share and reference most of my books in the presentation, and because the Greens are the newest books, I present them last in the slide show. Very often, if I may boast, the children cheer when they see the first Mr. and Mrs. Green image. It gives me thrills; this is what authors and illustrators dream of! My stories, my books, have made a connection with readers! I can’t wait to write more! The Greens rule!

Now the story of the series takes a turn—all good stories have turns, right?

For various reasons (marketing, distribution, publicity, reduced budgets, lack of early reader display in libraries and bookstores) the books have not sold well. I was given the opportunity to purchase a portion of the available supply of the first two books in a ‘stock reduction’ move by the publishers. The other options for the publisher are to sell the books to discount houses, or to have the books ‘pulped’: that is to say, ground up into pulp for recycling. I bought the books.

(My stockpile of books has taken over the laundry room: I can’t get to my washer and dryer.)

I knew I could have some fun in giving the books away, and maybe, by getting them into the right hands, I could spread the word, boost the sales, and keep the series alive. I *have* had fun giving them away; to schools, to friends and neighbors, to attendees at a friend’s child’s birthday party, and to Karen Antikajian, who has served as a foster mother for the series. But I still have books, and books in boxes are not doing their job. I want the books to be in the hands of readers: how about your hands? If you would like a Mr. and Mrs. Green book (and you want to help clear the way to my washer and dryer), go to my website: [www.keithbakerbooks.com](http://www.keithbakerbooks.com). You will find a ‘contact author’ link. Send me an email with your name and address, and I will send a copy, gratis. If you like the book, please buy or order another one (or two, or three, or twenty) from your local bookstore. If sales pick up, the publishers will support the continuation of the Mr. and Mrs. Green series; I would like nothing better than that. So . . . go GREENS!