ART

# IN THE HOLE

### Montvale Teen Proves Autism Is 'A Gift, Not A Setback' By Releasing First Novel BY BRIANNA RUBACK

## BEN LEVIN

ontvale resident Ben Levin has always had a L passion for writing. From creating a Harry Potter rewrite at age 10, to publishing Nellie's Friends, a children's book series, as a 16-year-old, Levin has demonstrated true commitment to bringing joy to people through storytelling.

Now at 18 years old, Levin has made his debut in young adult fiction with the recent launch of his first novel, In the Hole, which presents a child's experience with homelessness.

After watching a video about homeless children in Florida during an eighth-grade religious school class, Levin felt compelled to raise awareness about the United States' homelessness crisis. Then, a character quickly popped into his head: David Kimball. Other story elements slowly came together, and soon enough, Levin began writing his story.

In the Hole follows nine-year-old David Kimball, whose life suddenly unravels after his father loses his restaurant and, later, their home. Forced to live in a small borrowed car, David and his family seek shelter and soon find refuge in a run-down inn. Throughout the novel, David struggles to maintain a sense of normalcy as he and his family confront the harsh realities of homelessness. Searching for the strength and resources to help his family, David leaves readers wondering whether he and his family will make it out of "the hole."

Told through David's perspective to emphasize that homelessness can happen to anyone, including children, In the Hole explores a variety of themes, ranging from poverty, addiction and bullying to hope, perseverance and community.

To ensure that his portrayal of homelessness was accurate, Levin interviewed several individuals who faced homelessness, as well as people who work at organizations committed to helping those experiencing severe economic hardships, such as National Poverty Law Center, Covenant House New Jersey and Family Promise of New Jersey.

As written on Levin's website, "In the Hole offers to give hope and inspiration to young adults and their families who face homelessness and economic insecurities during this challenging time in history as we collectively face a global pandemic."

Despite publishing a novel just three months ago, Levin has no intention of slowing down, having already written



Photos By Rick Helman Photography

about 150 stories over the course of his life. Now, he is currently working on four different stories: a biography about the Wright brothers, a historical fiction novel about World War II, a musical and the seventh book in one of his series about a writing and reading club.

"I love working on a bunch of stories at once," he said. "I am a machine [that] enjoys producing and producing and producing."

As part of his writing process, Levin often gets inspired to

write by scrolling through social media, listening to music new activities, such as musical theatre and managing the or going for walks. And while he is most successful under a time crunch, Levin aspires to continue building and improving his writing stamina.

Going forward, Levin would like to continue raising awareness about causes he is passionate about while also using his status as an author on the spectrum.

Proud to be autistic, Levin strives to help other autistic people understand that they are no less than neurotypical (non-autistic) people and are just as capable of achieving their goals. He advocates that "autism is a gift, not a setback."

"I spent years being ashamed of my autism and thinking that it made mess less than human," Levin said. "But this year, I started to understand that autism was something in me that I could embrace and that it wasn't a curse or something that made me inferior to others. It was a blessing. I don't think I would have become a writer if it wasn't for autism."

Writing has continued to provide Levin with a source of solace throughout his life, helping him get through several challenging times, such as fitting in at school. It has also given him a sense of purpose, inspiring him to take on

Pascack Hills High School soccer team.

Currently a senior, Levin is also in the process of applying to colleges. He plans on studying creative writing, with the ultimate goal of becoming a full-time writer, though he is also interested in teaching English.

Above all, Levin wants to continue bringing happiness to people, particularly kids, through his stories while simultaneously encouraging people to believe in themselves.

"I want to be an example of how dreams come true," he said.

In The Hole can be purchased on Amazon.com and JumpmasterPress.com. For more information on Ben Levin and In The Hole, visit https://benlevinauthor.com/ or @benlevinauthor on Instagram.

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