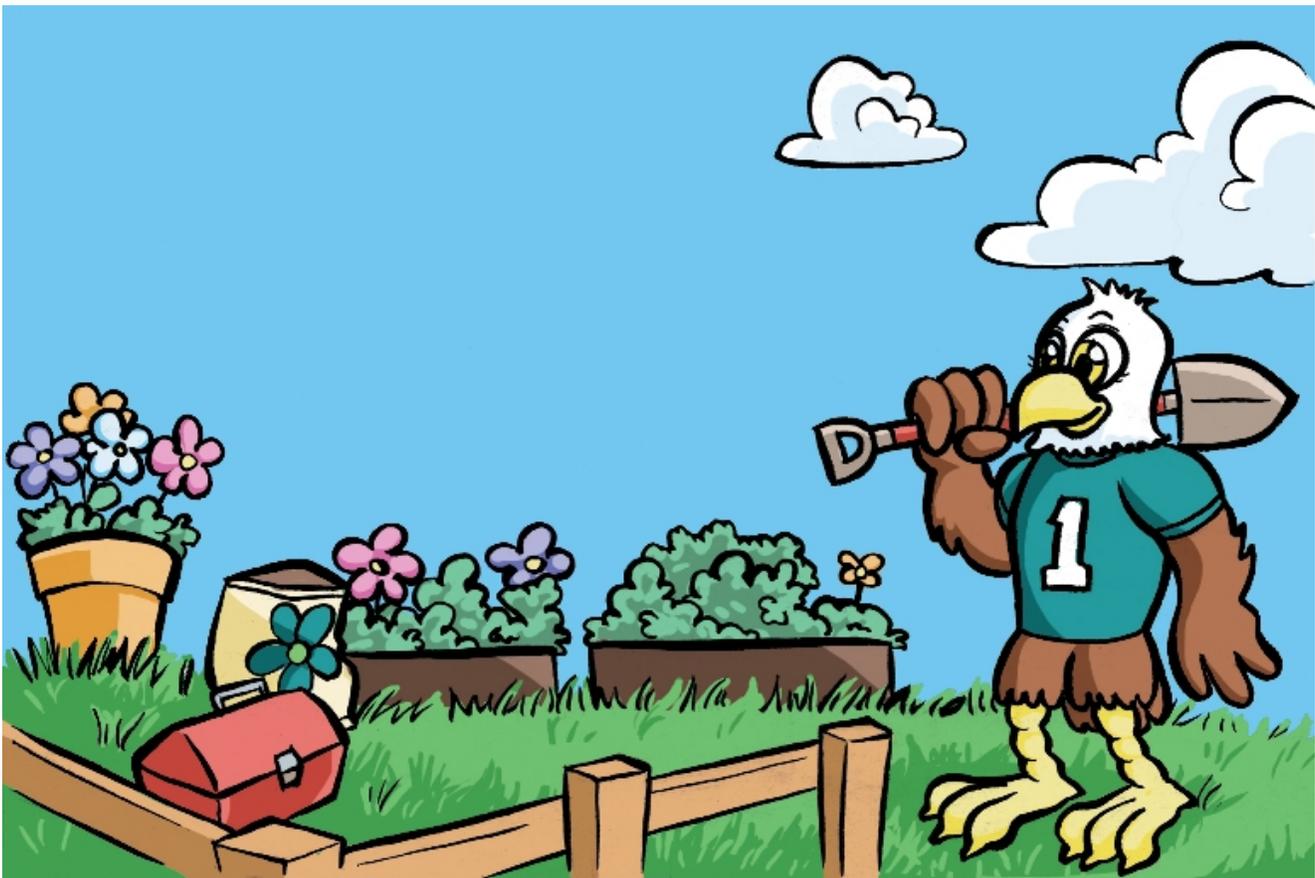


The Saga of George

Back in May, an old friend's mom contacted me about illustrating a children's book for the hospital where she works. I had to say "Yes" because: a) it's a book for kids in the hospital - who could say "No" to that?; and b) the book is about the hospital's mascot, Eddy the eagle, who loves smiling.

Let me just repeat that so we're clear: the book is about an *eagle* who loves *smiling*.

If that idea doesn't make your heart jump with childish glee, you should really see a cardiologist. Meet Eddy:



Eddy enjoys smiling, helping people, the number one, making new friends, and brushing his teeth. He's a good guy, this Eddy. Ostensibly, he's the hero of the book - I mean, he *is* the only character mentioned by name. It's a short, simple story: Eddy likes smiling, because smiling is awesome and makes people happy. But the longer I worked on this project, the clearer it became to me that Eddy is not the real star of the book. The real star is George the hardware clerk, who has his own fan club.

Theo Nicole Lorenz

writer, artist, coloring book tycoon

<http://nicolelorenz.com>

George is a background character who works at the hardware store where Eddy goes to buy supplies. He's balding, middle-aged, chubby, and utterly charming. Within ten minutes of drawing him, I had to name him. And start a fan club for him on Twitter, which seemed like the logical next step. (Just FYI, the hashtag is #georgefanclub.) Within the hour, the George Fan Club had amassed a membership of three - me, my roommate, and an internet friend. The consensus was: George is rad. That weekend, membership exploded when my roommate's little brother and his friend also joined the George Fan Club.

It's not hard to tell why George is such a popular guy. I mean, look at him. Here he is in his first appearance, selling nails to Eddy the Eagle.

By meeting Eddy, melancholy George learns to smile. Life may not be perfect - his apartment's a mess, his feet hurt from standing all day, and the store's card scanner has needed to be replaced since 2004 - but turning that frown upside down actually makes him feel better. For the first time in ages, George feels...happy. Happy enough, even, to try to make someone else happy.

That right there is the climax of George's character arc - the biggest (and only) character arch in the book. In the last three pages, George has outgrown his misery and learned to love. He returns on the final spread a changed man.

George has made friends and become a fully actualized person. He's involved in his community. He's volunteering. I think he might have learned the language of the owls.

As the final line in the book says: Doesn't that make you want to smile?

And join the George Fan Club?