

'Magnificent Brain' Plots New Adventures

by PATRICIA WALKER

The Magnificent Brain is living and thriving in Elmhurst, even though his many followers think he lives in Riverton, Ind. And before you know it, the achievements of M.B., as the Magnificent Brain is sometimes called, will be known—and therefore admired—by people everywhere.

What is the Magnificent Brain? Ask a child under the age of 12. Ask your neighborhood librarian. Ask someone from Walt Disney Productions, Hollywood.

The child will tell you: "M.B. belongs to the one, the only, famous Alvin Fernald who once found buried treasure in his home town, Riverton. His friend Shoie and the Pest—that's his sister, Daphne—help him in his adventures."

Your librarian will explain: "M.B. really belongs to Clifford Hicks, who lives with his family on Highland av., in Elmhurst. Mr. Hicks is the man who has written several books about Alvin Fernald and his friends."

Walt Disney people will tell you: "We like Alvin so much that we are producing a movie about him for our TV show. The movie will be about Alvin's Marvelous Inventions, including his automatic Newspaper Thrower and his automatic Man Trap; and it will be about his adventurous as Mayor For a Day, and how he exposes political corruption in Riverton."

Besides those two, Alvin's adventures include "Alvin's Secret Code" in which Hicks gave to Alvin, also known as Secret Agent 21½, knowledge Hicks gained as a U.S. Marine. With this knowledge, Alvin singlehandedly solved a mystery older than the Civil War.

There is also "Alvin Fernald, Foreign Trader," the story of how Alvin's "Fernald Fireballs" won a candy-making contest and a trip to Europe. Somehow, Alvin tangled with, and conquered, international industrial spies.

How does Alvin get into so many interesting adventures? Or to ask that another way, where does the imaginative Hicks find his ideas and inspiration?

A soft-spoken person, unlike Alvin, Hicks says, "Well, we have three sons who are pretty active and imaginative. I guess Alvin is a little bit of each of them and maybe a little bit of me, too." He continues, "For instance, Alvin is a redhead, like our youngest son—and also like him, is letting his hair grow longer and longer."

Being creative and resourceful, like Alvin, Hicks takes his ideas where he finds them. "One time," he explains, "I read an article in The Elmhurst Press about kids being made honorary officials, such as Mayor, for a day. The book just grew out of that."

You have to read the story to know how to 'spider web' a room. "My youngest son actually did that to his bedroom one time." Hicks reminisces, with admiration in his voice. "He must have used miles of string and rope."

Hick's first children's book, "First Boy on the Moon" reflected a strong interest in science. He has done much free lance writing on scientific subjects and his non-fiction work has appeared in national magazines such as Reader's Digest, Better Homes and Gardens, Today's Health and National Wildlife.

The children's books are a part time activity, though. "The most time I've ever spent at the typewriter on one book has been about 170 hours," Hicks says. "Of course, that doesn't count 'thinking' time as I'm driving to and from work."

"Work" is his job as Midwest Regional Editor of Popular Mechanics Magazine, a position he has held many years. Hicks has been with the magazine for 23 years.

The purchase by Disney of the Alvin stories won't add scriptwriting to Hicks' schedule. "It was written by some wonderfully talented people" he says. Besides, Hicks likes to live in the Midwest, though he tells "when we visited Hollywood this summer to read the script, we were treated royally."

His extra time, then, will be used to have the Magnificent Brain plan Alvin's next adventure. . . . You see, there's this chemical plant in Riverton that pollutes the air, and Alvin has read stories about the Fox in DuPage. Maybe Riverton needs The Weasel, or The Muskrat, or . . .



AUTHOR OF CHILDREN'S books, Clifford Hicks, of Elmhurst, creates his stories of the adventures of Alvin Fernald in this workroom decorated with pictures drawn by Alvin fans from all across the U. S. Many young readers become acquainted with the Alvin Fernald stories through the paperbacks issued by Scholastic Press and available through schools' supplementary reading programs.

CLIFFORD B. HICKS was born and raised in a town in Iowa much like Riverton, the scene of *Alvin's Secret Code* and *The Marvelous Inventions of Alvin Fernald*. He began writing professionally during his high-school years, when he was a correspondent for the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*. During World War II, Mr. Hicks served as a Major in the Marine Corps on Guam and Bouganville. In the service he learned something about codes and ciphers, a subject he had studied briefly in college. After the war Mr. Hicks joined the staff of a scientific and mechanical trade magazine in Chicago, and in 1961 was made editor of the magazine and its seven foreign editions. When the magazine officers moved to New York City in 1962 Mr. Hicks elected to stay in suburban Chicago as Mid-Western Editor.

A graduate of Northwestern University, Mr. Hicks spends his leisure time with his woodworking, his writing, and his three sons, who are, he says, his severest critics.



*About the
Author*

Clifford B. Hicks is the father of three boys. In their home in a suburb of Chicago the boys have an "inventing bench" similar to Alvin's, and for a good many years their father has watched them dream up all sorts of interesting contraptions.

A graduate *cum laude* of Northwestern University, Mr. Hicks is assistant managing editor of a popular scientific and mechanical magazine.

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was born and raised in a town in Iowa much like Riverton, Alvin Fernald's home-town and the scene of ALVIN'S SECRET CODE and THE MARVELOUS INVENTIONS OF ALVIN FERNALD. He began writing professionally during his high school years, when he was a correspondent for the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*.

Mr. Hicks was formerly editor of *Popular Mechanics* magazine and its seven foreign editions. In 1963 he left this job to return to writing, although he is still associated with the magazine as Midwest Editor.

A graduate of Northwestern University, Mr. Hicks spends his leisure time with woodworking and with writing. Recently he and his wife and three sons enjoyed a trip to Europe which helped provide some of the background for ALVIN FERNALD, FOREIGN TRADER. Mr. Hicks is also the author of THE WORLD ABOVE.

CLIFFORD HICKS is the well-known author of the Alvin Fernald series of antic adventures, based in part on the boyhood capers of his three sons. *Peter Potts* also draws upon such firsthand experiences. Mr. Hicks is special projects editor for *Popular Mechanics* magazine, where he had been an editor for more than twenty-five years. He is also a freelance science writer. Mr. Hicks and his family live in Elmhurst, Illinois.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Alvin Fernald, Mayor for a Day*, is Clifford Hicks' fourth book in a series all dealing with Alvin—possessor of the Magnificent Brain, which, says Mr. Hicks, are inspired by the antics of his three sons. An editor of a scientific and mechanical magazine, Mr. Hicks and his family live in Elmhurst, Illinois.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: Bill Sokol is an Associate Art Director of *The New York Times* and has always been keenly interested in graphics. His work has been cited by the Art Directors Club and the American Institute of Graphic Arts. The pencil drawings that Mr. Sokol has used to animate Alvin's adventures combine caricature with naturalism. The illustrations truly capture the youthful humor of Mr. Hicks' story.

CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS

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HICKS, Clifford B. 1920-

PERSONAL: Born August 10, 1920, in Marshalltown, Iowa; son of Nathan L. and Kathryn Marie (Carson) Hicks; married Rachel G. Reimer; children: David, Douglas, Gary. *Education:* Northwestern University, B.A., 1942. *Home:* 226 Highland Ave., Elmhurst, Ill. *Office:* *Popular Mechanics*, 740 North Rush St., Chicago 11, Ill.

CAREER: *Popular Mechanics*, Chicago, Ill., and New York, N.Y., member, editorial staff, 1945—. *Military service:* U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, 1942-45, became major; received Silver Star. *Member:* Society of Midland Authors, Chicago Press Club, Chicago Headline Club. *Awards, honors:* Friends of American Writers prize for book, *First Boy on the Moon*, as best juvenile book of the year, 1960.

WRITINGS: *Do-It-Yourself Materials Guide*, Popular Mechanics Press, 1955; *First Boy on the Moon*, Winston, 1959; *Marvelous Inventions of Alvin Fernald*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960; *Alvin's Secret Code*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963; *The World Above*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965; *Alvin Fernald, Foreign Trader*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966; *Alvin Fernald, Mayor For a Day*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966. Editor, *Popular Mechanics Magazine*, 1960-62.

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