



## **Paying It Forward With My BOYSTOWN Series**

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From the moment the first installment of BOYSTOWN was published in 2013, readers and fans all over the country have reached out to me to offer their support, encouragement, and feedback. I quickly learned that BOYSTOWN fans are the best a writer could ask for. I am humbled by and grateful for their kindness, support, and generosity. Meeting these incredible people, in some cases only via email or Facebook, has been the highlight of my entire BOYSTOWN experience.

I quickly realized that my BOYSTOWN series was not just an opportunity to tell a fantastic story; it was a gift with which I could support others as generously as people had supported me. So I began to brainstorm ways that I could use the series to “pay it forward” for some of the wonderful people in my life.

My effort began with my good friend Aaron Savvy. A personal trainer and actor, Aaron is one of the most inspirational and supportive people that I know. He’s also one of the best personal trainers in the country and had the patience to train me, which isn’t easy. Because I modeled one of BOYSTOWN’s characters after him, I thought it might be nice to feature Aaron on the books’ covers -- my way of not only saying “thank you,” but also of bringing his talents to the attention of BOYSTOWN readers all over the country. Personal training is a tough business; clients come and go for a variety of reasons from finances to relocation. I hoped that by featuring Aaron on the books’ covers, others would come to know the amazing trainer and friend that I already knew.

I then turned my attention toward the other artists in my life -- performers, in particular. I had seen the amazing Amy Armstrong perform at many venues in Chicago and Michigan and was a fan of her singing and humor. I reached out to her on Facebook to tell her how impressed I am with her and she immediately mentioned my books. In fact, she offered to distribute copies of my books at her performances. I sent her a bunch and soon Amy was giving away a couple of books at her shows in Chicago, Michigan, and even Mexico.

Amy told me that it had always been very important to her to help out other artists and I was very grateful for her support and warmth. After all of her generosity, I wondered how I could possibly ever repay or thank her. Then it hit me -- as a tribute to her, I could write her into my books, as herself. I discussed the idea with her and she loved it. So now, Amy Armstrong interacts in my books with several of my fictional characters, performing at their fundraisers and galas.

One night about two years ago, I walked into a newer Boystown bar called The Twisted Vine. As I took a seat at the bar, I had the pleasure of being entertained by a wonderful trio called "Whiskey and Cherries," consisting of vocalists Meredith Freyre and Danielle Kastner and pianist Brian Felder. They were phenomenal, performing a variety of pop and standard hits. During their break, I introduced myself, only to discover that they were already BOYSTOWN book fans. We got to know each other and I returned to watch their performances over and over again. We would talk during their breaks and they would often introduce me to the crowd during their performances. Having gotten to know them for the wonderful and talented people that they are, I asked them if I could write them into the books. They loved the idea and have since appeared in both BOYSTOWN Season Two and Season Three, which has introduced readers from all over to this outstanding musical trio.

It was also at The Twisted Vine that I first heard Chadwick Stadt perform, although I had known who he was prior to that night. Some Chicago BOYSTOWN fans who knew I occasionally wrote real performers into my books had encouraged me to write Chadwick in. One night, I walked into the bar and Chadwick was performing. What a voice! With his guitar in hand, Chadwick sang his heart out, a

wonderful blend of current hits and original songs. He played for nearly three hours, commenting that he was only stopping because his fingers were turning purple. Since then, I have had the pleasure of getting to know Chadwick as a friend as well. Kind, generous, compassionate, and genuine, Chadwick is a truly an up and coming star. I met with him recently to discuss the idea of writing him into the BOYSTOWN series so that more of the general public would come to know his talent and he agreed. I am excited to say that Chadwick Stadt will be featured in BOYSTOWN Season Four, which will be released in November.

Finally, I'd like to mention another inspiration and role model of mine -- pop sensation Steve Grand. I have been a fan of Steve since he first came on the music scene. A Chicagoan himself, Steve and I have that love for the Windy City and Boystown in common. I had emailed Steve a while back to introduce myself and tell him how much he motivated and inspired me as a person and a writer. His replies were supportive and kind. When I asked if I could honor him by writing him into the BOYSTOWN series, he was appreciative and grateful. I was flattered and honored.

Then, by fluke, I saw him out in Boystown on the night of his birthday. He was out celebrating. So I introduced myself to him and we talked for a while. It was great to finally be able to chat with him in person. We talked about his birthday, his new album, and the BOYSTOWN books. We even took a few selfies together -- he is the self-proclaimed "selfie king." I explained to him that I am working with two television producers who are interested in bringing BOYSTOWN to TV. If and when that happens, I would love for Steve -- and Chadwick -- to write and perform that show's theme songs.

And so, as I continue to develop the crazy plotline twists and turns that BOYSTOWN readers have come to love, I will also continue to think of ways that I can celebrate, honor, and thank those people in my life for whom I am grateful. We are all in this together and I am thrilled that BOYSTOWN gives me the chance to pay it forward.