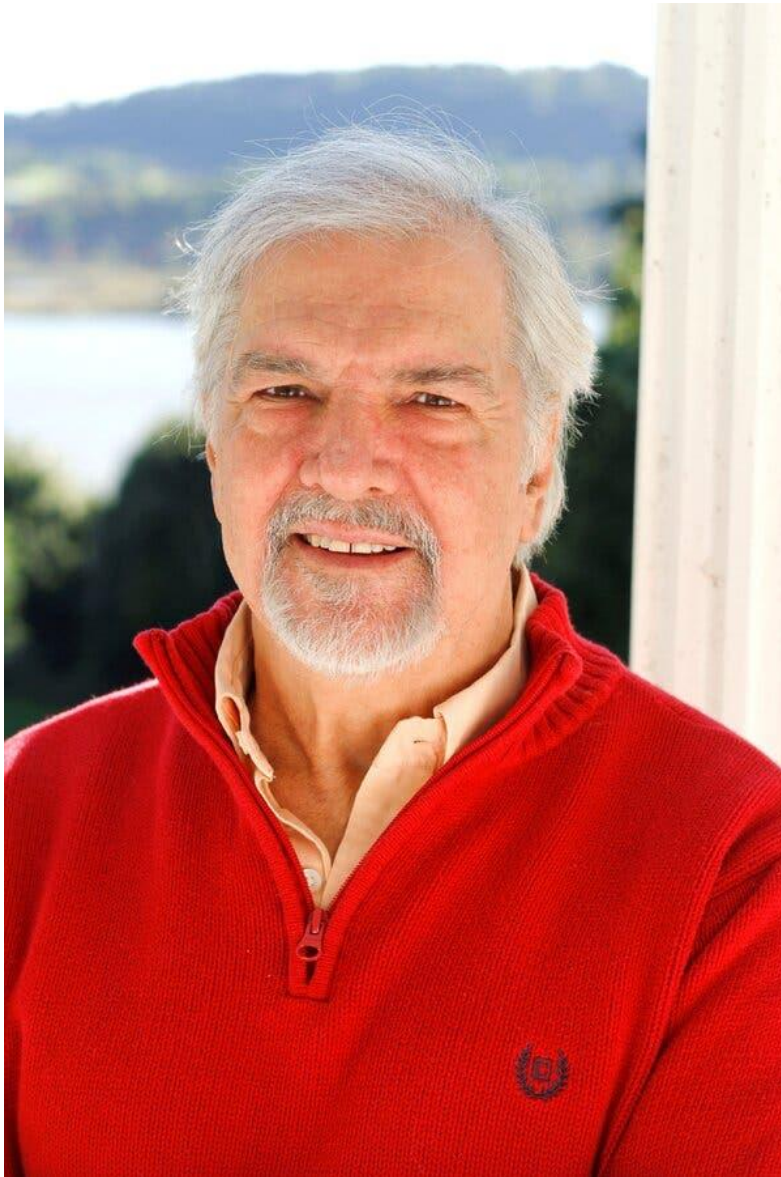


Hudson Talbott Dies at 76; Wrote and Illustrated Wide-Ranging Children's Books

His book about time-traveling dinosaurs became a movie. He also adapted the Broadway show "Into the Woods" for young readers and wrote about his struggles with dyslexia.



Hudson Talbott in 2017. After he turned the Stephen Sondheim musical "Into the Woods" into a children's book in 1988, the show's librettist, James Lapine, said, "Both Steve and I loved what he did." Credit...Ken Schiff, via Jay Lesenger



By [Richard Sandomir](#)

Feb. 10, 2026, 2:49 p.m. ET

Hudson Talbott, an award-winning children’s book author and illustrator whose tale about time-traveling dinosaurs in Manhattan became an animated film produced by Steven Spielberg and who also adapted the Stephen Sondheim musical “Into the Woods” into a book for young readers, died on Jan. 22 in Albany, N.Y. He was 76.

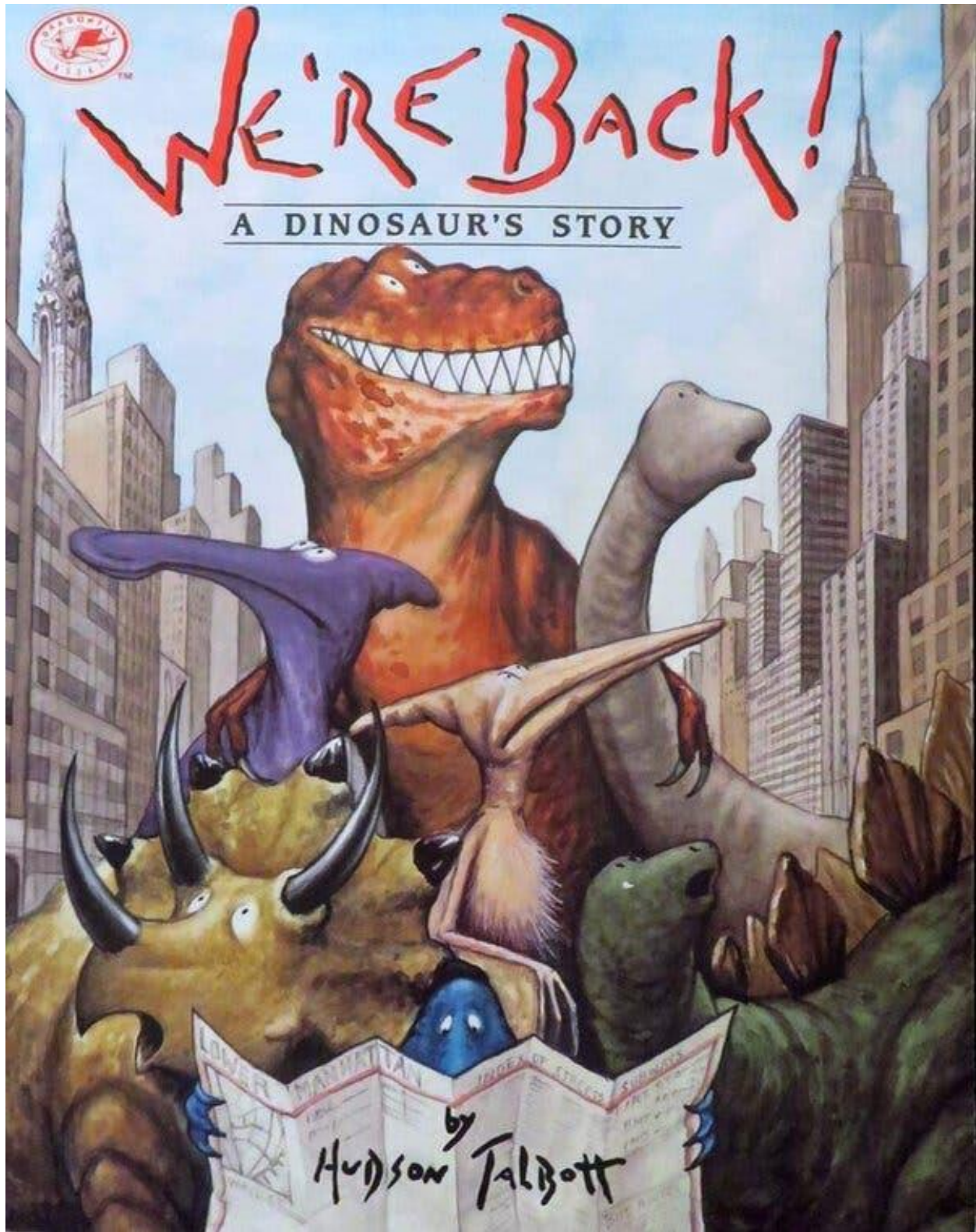
His death, in a hospital, was caused by complications of chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy, an autoimmune disorder known as C.I.D.P., Jay Lesenger, Mr. Talbott’s partner, said.

Before Mr. Talbott published more than 20 children’s books on subjects as diverse as Arthurian legend, the Holocaust and the 19th-century painter Thomas Cole, he was a freelance artist whose 1987 dinosaur calendar, published the previous fall, reimagined prehistoric creatures as oversize pets in contemporary settings — including a Tyrannosaurus Rex catching a Frisbee thrown by a boy.

“Drawing them gave me a sense of returning to something that I was very fond of when I was a little kid,” he told The Advocate of Stamford, Conn.

David Allender, an editor of children’s books at Crown Publishers, spotted the calendar at a Barnes & Noble. He was so impressed with the amusing watercolors that he looked up Mr. Talbott in the Manhattan phone book, called him and asked him to write what became “We’re Back! A Dinosaur’s Story” (1987).

In the book, the dinosaurs ingest multivitamins that turn them into intelligent beings. They are then transported to 20th-century New York, where they head to the American Museum of Natural History. But along the way they inadvertently start a panic when one of them greets a dinosaur balloon in a Thanksgiving parade, thinking it’s a friend, and accidentally destroys it.



In "We're Back! A Dinosaur's Story" (1987), Mr. Talbott invented dinosaurs who time-travel to 20th-century New York, where they mistake a balloon in a Thanksgiving parade for one of them.

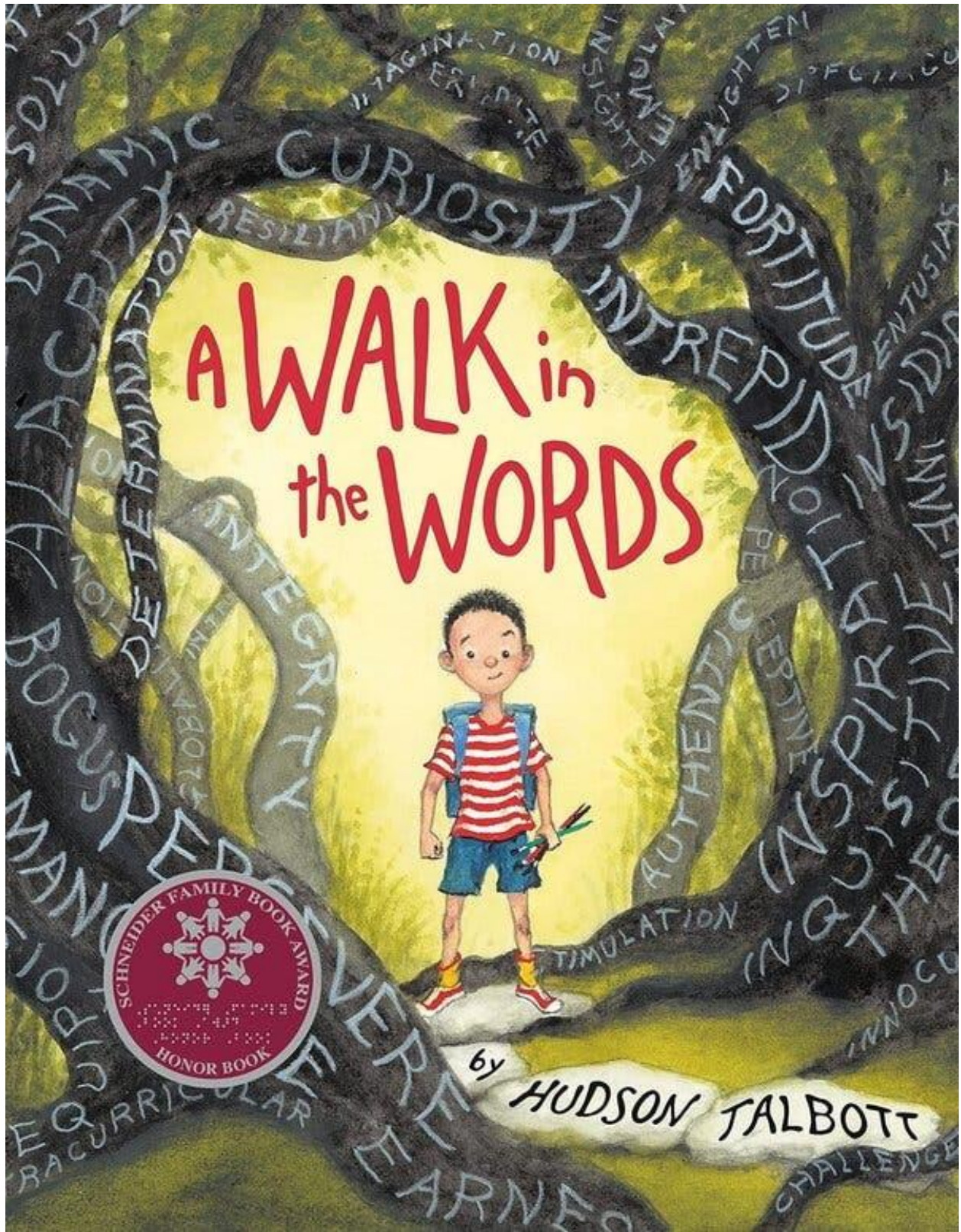
When the book was made into an animated movie, Mr. Talbott was invited to the film studio in London to see the early progress, and he was unhappy with the way his dinosaurs looked.

After the movie was released in 1993, he told The Tampa Tribune that he was “dumbfounded” by the changes to his art. “I said, ‘Why me? Why bother using my book if this is how it’s going to come out looking?’”

He was also displeased with plot changes and the introduction of new characters, including an evil circus owner, which the directors told him were needed to broaden the film’s appeal. But he conceded to The Courier-Journal of Louisville, Ky., that the completed film “captured something of my characters’ original personality.”

Mr. Talbott’s collaboration on “Into the Woods,” published in 1988, was a happier experience. The musical, which opened on Broadway a year earlier, is for adults — although it is based in part on folk tales by the Brothers Grimm, and features characters like Cinderella that are familiar to children. Mr. Talbott adapted it for a younger audience.

James Lapine, the musical’s Tony Award-winning librettist, said in an email that the book “honors our show rather than reinvents it.”



“A Walk in the Words” (2021) is Mr. Talbott’s semi-autobiographical story about dealing with a learning disability as a child. “When everybody was turning to the next page, I was still on the first sentence,” he wrote.

Mr. Talbott used a lush visual style, which he described as “more or less 18th-century French,” for illustrations like the depiction of Little Red Riding Hood’s grandmother inside the wolf’s open mouth, and he rewrote the story with help from Mr. Sondheim’s notes.

“Both Steve and I loved what he did,” Mr. Lapine said. “And the book remains my favorite gift to anyone who has a child.”

Hudson Talbott was born on July 11, 1949, in Louisville, the youngest of four children of Mildred (Pence) Talbott, who managed a dress shop, and Peyton Talbott, a bank manager.

As a child, he showed artistic talent, but he had difficulty reading; he discovered later in life that he had dyslexia. In his semi-autobiographical book “A Walk in the Words” (2021), he wrote that drawing allowed him to disappear into a safe world all his own.

“I was the slowest reader in my class,” he wrote. “When everybody was turning to the next page, I was still on the first sentence. Nobody knew. But the books knew! And they were coming for me!”

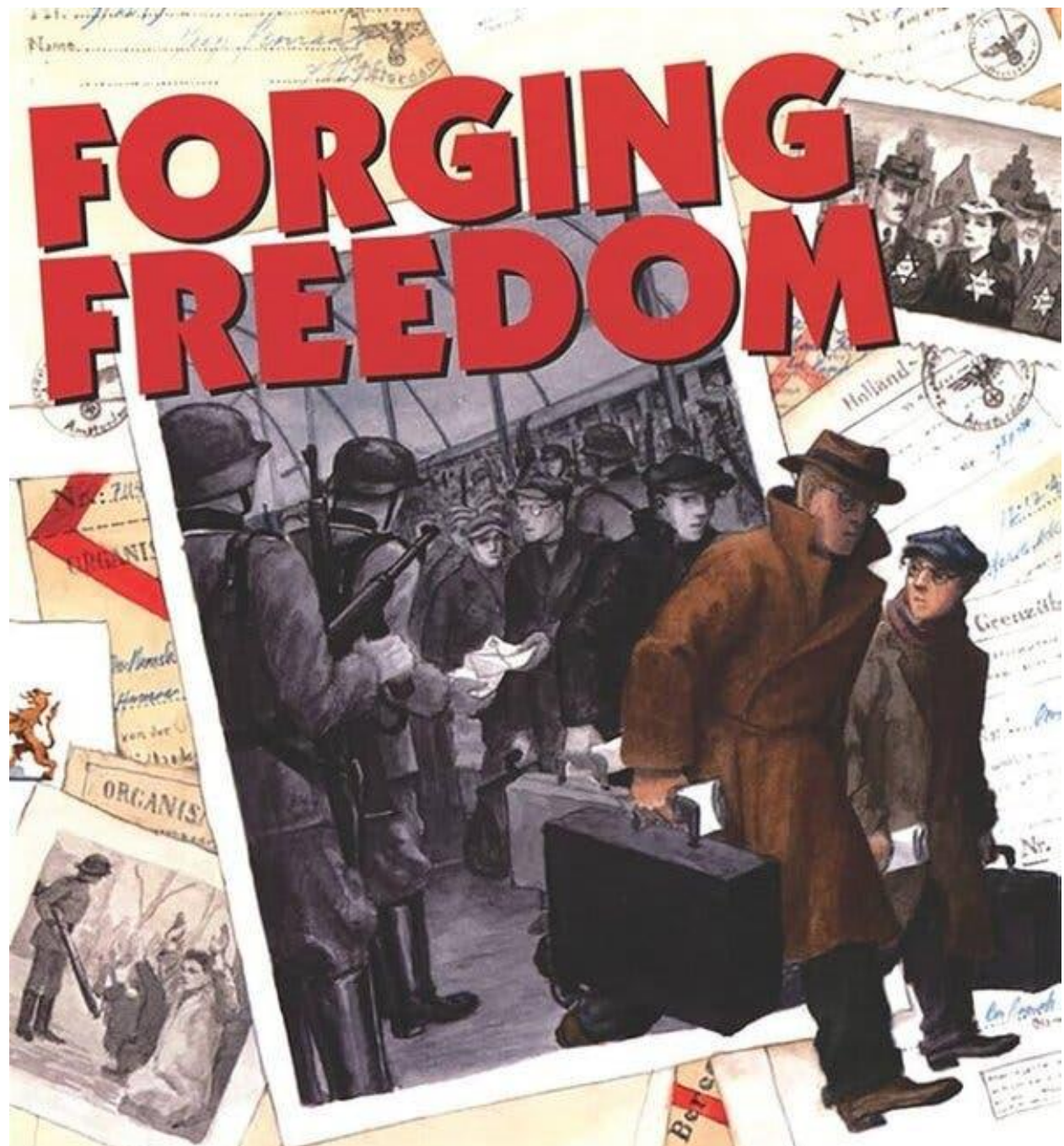
The accompanying illustration shows a terrified boy running from a sky full of books flapping their pages like Hitchcockian birds.

He attended the University of Cincinnati and then transferred to Temple University’s Tyler School of Art (now Art and Architecture) in Philadelphia, where he studied painting and sculpture. He spent his junior year at the school’s campus in Rome and received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1971.

After working as an artist in Europe and Hong Kong, he moved to New York in 1974. Over the next dozen years, his clients included the Museum of Modern Art, which hired him in 1985 to illustrate his first children’s book, [“How to Show Grown-Ups the Museum,”](#) and Bloomingdale’s, for which he created greeting cards, calendars and posters to commemorate the Statue of Liberty’s centennial in 1986.

After “We’re Back!,” Mr. Talbott’s books included two more about dinosaurs and four about Arthurian legend, including “King Arthur: The Sword in the Stone” (1991). Another, “Forging Freedom: A True Story of Heroism During the Holocaust” (2000), focuses on [his friend Jaap Penraat](#), who saved more than 400 Jews in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands by giving them forged documents; in 1997, Mr. Penraat was designated [Righteous Among the Nations](#) by Yad Vashem, Israel’s official memorial to victims of the Holocaust.

FORGING FREEDOM



A TRUE STORY OF HEROISM DURING THE HOLOCAUST

HUDSON TALBOTT

“Forging Freedom,” published in 2000, focuses on Mr. Talbott’s friend, Jaap Penraat, who saved more than 400 Jews in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands by giving them forged documents.

One of the most arresting images in “Forging Freedom” is of Hitler depicted as an octopus, with dozens of barbed-wired tentacles spread over Europe.

Mr. Talbott won the Newbery Honor for his illustrations for Jacqueline Woodson’s “Show Way” (2005), tracing the history of seven generations of girls and women in Ms. Woodson’s family — all of them quilters — from enslavement to freedom.

Nancy Paulsen, the president and publisher of an imprint at Penguin Young Readers, who edited over a dozen of Mr. Talbott’s books, said that he was more confident in his artwork than in his writing. In painting, he employed various styles and was inspired by work from the Renaissance and the Hudson River School.

“He was very sophisticated about what he showed kids, but it was very easy to understand,” Ms. Paulsen said in an interview. “In ‘A Walk in the Words,’ when you see the wall of words, a kid knows what he’s doing there.”

In one part of the book, the boy cowers before the wall of words; in another, he tears down a wall of shame.

In addition to Mr. Lesenger, an opera director, Mr. Talbott is survived by a sister, Betty Stallard; and two brothers, James and Peyton Jr.

Mr. Talbott's final book, ["The Next Shiny Object."](#) is scheduled to be published later this year. It is another semi-autobiographical story, about a boy with an extremely active imagination — the term "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder" never comes up — and a roaming curiosity, and the challenges he faces.

The book is a natural sequel to "A Walk in the Words," which ends with the boy learning to read by going slowly and savoring the words.

In 2022, [Mr. Talbott spoke by Zoom to dyslexic students](#) at a school in Richmond, Va., telling them that, as a child, he had dealt with his own challenges by spending too much time alone — "and nobody was there to help me, and it wasn't their fault because I was hiding it."

"If I could go back in time," he added, "I would try to say to me, as a little boy, 'Don't be ashamed. There's nothing to be ashamed of. You are who you are, and you read the way you read.'"

[Richard Sandomir](#), an obituaries reporter, has been writing for The Times for more than three decades.