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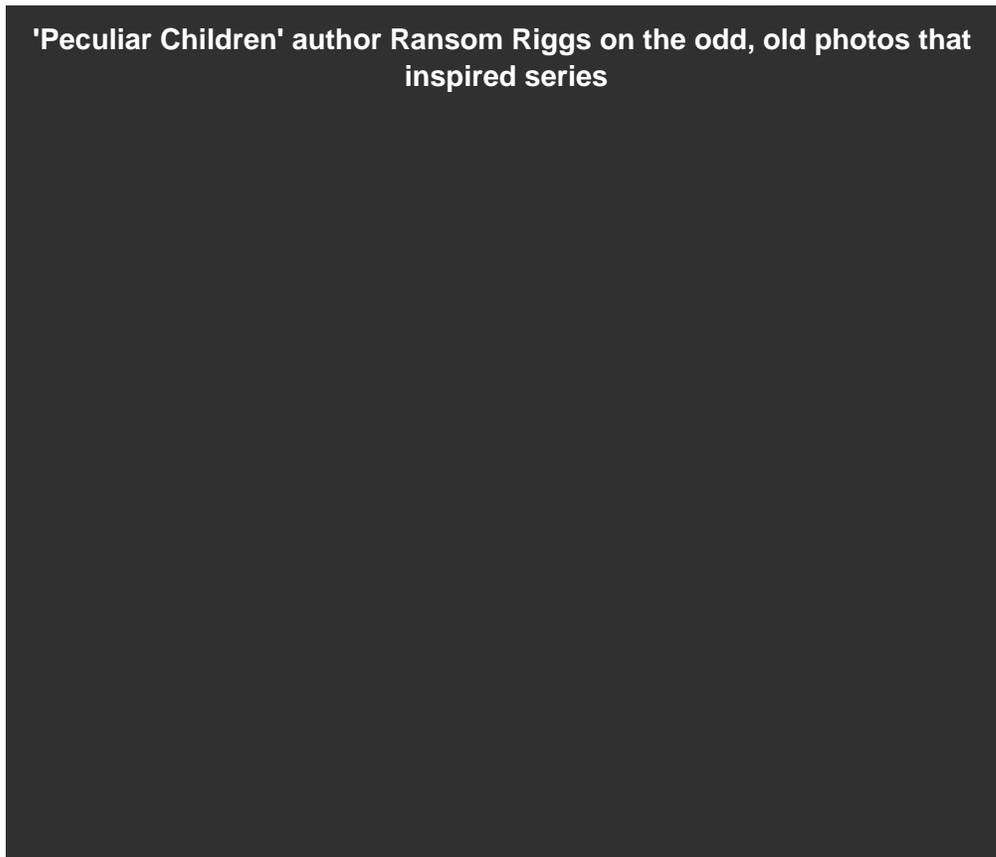
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## 'Peculiar Children' author Ransom Riggs on the odd, old photos that inspired series

■ Odd, old photos inspire books

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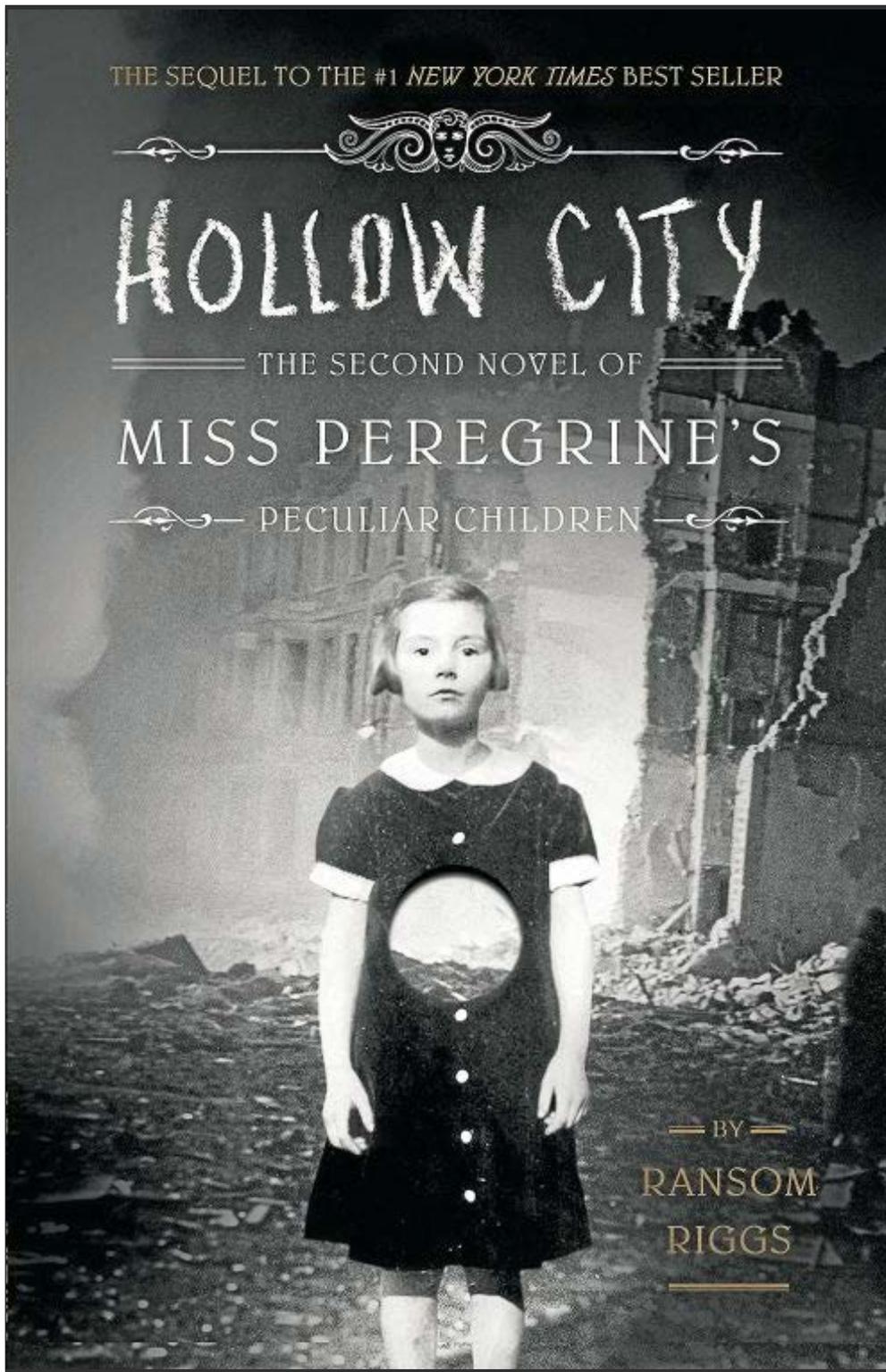
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By JAMES D. WATTS JR. World Scene Writer | 0 comments

The origins of the group of seemingly ageless, surreally gifted youngsters known as "Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children" began with a boyhood crush.

"I grew up in Florida, which is the land of flea markets and swap meets," Ransom Riggs said. "My grandmother loved to go



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A box of old photographs inspired Ransom Riggs' "Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children" book series. Courtesy photo



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these places, and she'd take me along. Now, these places aren't a whole lot of fun for an 11-year-old kid.

"But then I found a booth with these boxes of old photographs. One was of this girl who reminded me a lot of a girl I knew from summer camp. So I bought it for, like, 10 cents, took it home and set it next to my pictures of Nolan Ryan and Ken Griffey Jr."

It was years later that Riggs took the photograph out of its cardboard frame and read what was written on the back. That's when he learned that it was the photograph of a young girl named Dorothy, taken when she was 15 years old, before she died of leukemia.

"It really shocked me this pretty smiling girl, who was a few years older than me, and who had died so young," Riggs said. "The whole thing made a real impression on me."

Years later, after moving to Los Angeles to pursue his dream of writing movies, Riggs' childhood interest developed into a fascination.

"I was looking for some vintage furniture, and I came across this booth where they sold old pictures," he said. "This guy didn't just have things in a box he had really curated his collection. Each image was like this little folk masterpiece."

Riggs started assembling his own collection, and soon he was finding what he called "these creepy Victorian pictures" a boy's head on a dog's body, one child-sized clown pulling a long string of something out of the mouth of another, a young girl standing in front of trees wearing a giant teacup like a helmet.

These images became the inspiration for Riggs' first novel, "Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children" (Quirk Books, \$10.99). Published in 2011, it became a surprise best-seller, spending 60 weeks on the New York Times Young Adult Best-Seller List, and has been translated into 34 languages.

The book, which is illustrated with dozens of bizarre vintage photographs, is told from the point of view of a teenage boy named Jacob.

Jacob grew up hearing his grandfather tell stories of growing up on an island with children who possessed extraordinary powers. When his grandfather dies, Jacob receives a cryptic message that leads him to Wales and to the house his grandfather had described to him, where he meets a girl named Emma, who can control fire.

Soon, Jacob is caught up in the world of Miss Peregrine, which is under attack by evil entities known as "hollows" monsters only Jacob has the ability to see.

Now, Riggs has published the sequel, "Hollow City" (\$19.99), the middle book of a proposed trilogy.

Riggs will be in Tulsa next week as the guest of BookSmart Tulsa.

"When I first thought of doing a book based on these photographs," Riggs said, "I envisioned a kind of Edward Gorey-type thing, with little rhyming couplets. But my editor at Quirk

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Books suggested I do it as a novel take all these images and weave a story out of them.

"I had always secretly wanted to write a novel," said Riggs, whose work includes stories for such websites as Mental Floss and the nonfiction work "The Sherlock Holmes Handbook."

What ultimately triggered his imagination was a photograph of two figures perhaps an adult woman and a child walking toward the light at the end of a tunnel.

"I kept coming back to that picture," he said. "It just seemed to me like they were about to enter a whole new world."

Originally Riggs envisioned the novel to consist of letters that Jacob was writing to a girl friend back home but decided instead to "commit to the fantasy and make it real," he said.

The first volume's plot was dictated in large measure by the photographs ones from Riggs' own collection of more than 2,000 images, as well as pictures borrowed from fellow collectors.

With "Hollow City," the story was already well-established, so it was more of a challenge to find appropriate images to serve the story.

"When you collect photographs, you're sort of at the mercy of the gods," Riggs said. "It's a lot easier to tweak a story to fit the photos you have than it is to find the exact image you need."

"Hollow City" picks up immediately after the first book, with the Peculiar Children on the run from their enemies. The action moves from a Welsh island to London, where the children "loop" through various time periods, including the Blitz of World War II.

"I've always loved stories that, even though they are fantastic, have some grounding in reality," Riggs said.

A third novel in the series is in the works, but Riggs is reluctant to say it will be the last time he will explore the world of Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children.

"I really haven't decided," he said. "I really don't want to close the door on this world."

## BOOKSMART TULSA

Ransom Riggs will be in Tulsa for a BookSmart Tulsa event, 6:30 p.m. Monday at the Hardesty Regional Library, 8316 E. 93rd St. He will discuss his work, including the two novels in the "Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children" series, answer questions from the audience and sign copies of his books. Admission is free.

James D. Watts Jr. 918-581-8478

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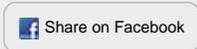
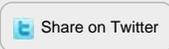
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