

Author Spotlight with Chris Barton



How did you discover the story of Bob and Joe Switzer?

I saw Bob Switzer's obituary in the *New York Times* in 1997, and the raw story of how he and his brother had invented daylight fluorescent colors had these unlikely elements—a magic act involving a headless dancer and a terrible accident involving ketchup bottles—that made it unforgettable.

What was it about the Switzers' story that appealed to you?

A big part of it was just the notion of how cool a picture book printed with those colors would look. But there were so many other aspects of the story—getting along with a sibling who's very different from you, making it through tough times, setting out for a new life in a new city, borrowing your family's stuff and returning it in less-than-pristine condition—that I could definitely relate to.

How did you go about researching the story? How involved was the Switzer family in this project?

I began by getting in touch with one of Bob's sons, tracking him down through that original obituary. From there, it seemed that the entire Switzer family just opened up to me. I got to see the actual, original notes and correspondence that Bob and Joe kept while they were doing their initial experiments and selling their first glow-in-the-dark paints. And Bob's widow, Joe's first wife, and Bob and Joe's little brother, Fred, provided me with enough old photos and old articles and anecdotes to support a much longer book—which helps explain why the original manuscript was about three times as long as the published version.



What hurdles did you overcome in writing the Switzers' story and getting it published?

Getting the science right, and then integrating it into the narrative without overwhelming the story—those were a couple of the larger challenges in getting the book written. As for getting it published—well, for some reason, a lot of publishers were reluctant to take on an untested author's picture book biography of obscure inventors, a book that called for using expensive ink.

What were some interesting elements of the Switzers' story that you did not include in the book?

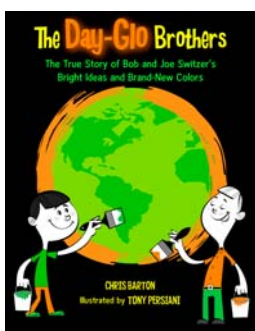
There was their entirely separate invention of a flaw-detection product called MagnaGlo—dramatic and exciting in its own way—that I had to cut. Sadly, I also had to leave out the episode where Joe's first fiancée dumped him and married the minister instead.

How long did the whole process take, from inspiration to publication?

Eight or twelve years, depending on how you look at it. I saw Bob's obituary in August 1997, but it didn't occur to me to turn the Switzers' story into a children's book until the middle of 2001. Either way, it took me longer to do the book about Bob and Joe's invention of daylight-fluorescent colors than it took them to invent those colors in the first place.



Books by Chris Barton



ISBN: 978-1-57091-673-1 • \$18.95 • HC
Ages 7–10

A discovery that made the world a brighter place.

The Day-Glo Brothers: The True Story of Bob and Joe Switzer's Bright Ideas and Brand-New Colors is an illuminating account of two very different brothers—Bob, a studious planner and aspiring doctor, and Joe, who liked entertaining people with magic tricks. After an accident confines Bob to the basement, the brothers come together to create a new kind of color, one that glows with an extra special intensity—Day-Glo.