Daniel Haack, Ed.M.’19

When DANIEL HAACK was growing up on a dairy farm outside Madison, Wisconsin, dreaming of becoming an actor or director or TV news host, he was also always writing. Screenplays and short stories, mostly. They were always epic — fantastic tales where his superheroes went on sweeping adventures. It makes sense then that his first book, Prince & Knight, published last May, would be the same kind of story — but with a twist.

Modeled after a traditional fairy tale, in Haack’s book, a prince roams the countryside with his parents looking for a fair lady to marry. In the process of trying to defeat a dragon threatening his village, the prince meets a knight who helps him when he falls, and the two quickly realize they are perfect for one another.

Haack, who has spent the past few years heading up marketing for StoryBots, a digital learning program for kids that includes a popular television show on Netflix (and for which Haack won an Emmy), isn’t the first author to write an LGBTQ-friendly picture book for kids. But, he says, most don’t feature people.

“A lot of other books in this space have animals as main characters — penguins and bunnies,” he says. “One of the main things I decided before I wrote the book was that it was going to have human characters.”

Human characters show kids from gay families that their parents “are just as capable of being the brave hero and worthy of being in love” as anyone else, he says. He also hopes that these universal, accessible themes of love and adventure resonate with kids who don’t know anyone who identifies as LGBTQ (or at least anyone who has come out to them). “It’s just as powerful for those kids as for someone who sees a family member in the stories.”

Although Prince & Knight (and a second book coming out in the spring, Maiden & Princess) are still considered “unique” fairy tales because of their twist, he hopes this isn’t always the case.

“One of the coolest things for me in this process has been seeing how many straight parents are buying the book for their kids,” he says. “I’m really excited for the point where the books offering nontraditional leads become a dime a dozen and aren’t so defined by the lead characters.” LH