

By Julie McLaughlin

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A LOCAL author has written his second book for children.

Annalong resident Charlie Graham's new book, which is called 'Missing Monkeys', comes out this month.

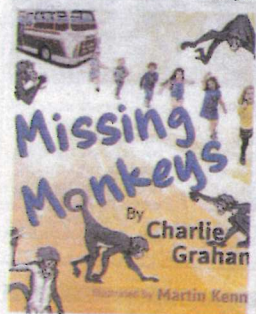
"Missing Monkeys" is about an old, mysterious, shortsighted, wacky teacher, who takes her extremely boisterous class to the zoo with unusual consequences," Charlie explained.

Charlie's first children's book was 'The Giraffe with the Chocolate Bellybutton', which came out in 2019.

He has also written a book of poetry, titled 'With Love as Always', and has penned some short stories.

Before becoming an author, he taught for many years and served as the principal of Bridge Integrated Primary School in Banbridge for 17 years.

After retiring from this role "the best part of a tidy few" years ago, he did some voluntary teaching in Ethiopia and Kenya



The cover of 'Missing Monkeys', the new book by local author Charlie Graham.

before coming back to Annalong. Although he had done some writing previously, it was after his retirement that he found he had more free time to write.

Charlie said he came up with the idea for his newest book many years ago when he was on a school trip to the zoo with a class he was teaching.

"I was sitting on a bus. I was daydreaming," he said.

"Staring out of the window while the children, well behaved children, were looking forward to their day out at the zoo.

"And I imagined what it might be like if those children weren't good. Weren't well behaved.

"And I imagined what might happen if their teacher was not as bright or as observant as she might be.

"So I sketched out the story in a notebook, and there it stayed for years until I decided to work on it last year."

He said that one of the challenges about working on this book was coming up with the title.

"As it is about a day at the zoo, I thought the word 'zoo' should be in the title, and as the main character is Mrs Goggles (so called because she wears very thick goggle-like spectacles), I thought the name should also be in the title. Eventually we hit on 'Missing Monkeys'. It's intriguing and will hopefully entice people to look further than the front cover," he said.

Charlie hopes people who enjoyed his first book will also read 'Missing Monkeys'.

"The book isn't a sequel to 'The Giraffe with the Chocolate Bellybutton', though the animal theme does link the two.

"Kids love stories about animals and there are lots of animals in both stories," he said.

"I read this story to my granddaughter, who is six. She loved it.

"But I think it could be enjoyed by any primary school kid or young at heart oldie," he said.

"A major reason for writing my stories is to provide a legacy of sorts for my children and grandchildren. I always enjoyed telling stories to kids; seeing their eyes transfixed and their imaginations fired up. Wonderful!"

For his new book, Charlie teamed up again with Belfast illustrator Martin Kenny to provide the artwork to go with the story.

Martin also did the illustrations for Charlie's first book.

"Martin Kenny is a fantastic illustrator. In fact, his illustrations could be the major reason why 'The Giraffe with the Chocolate Bellybutton' sold so well.

"In fact, in many instances, it was the first comment or observation about the book that was made.

"And I would go so far as to say that the illustrations in 'Missing Monkeys' are even better," Charlie said.

Charlie will be having a book launch event at Ark Community Gardens, located at Carrigs Road, Newcastle, at 3.30pm on Thursday, 7 September. There will be refreshments and Charlie will be reading and signing copies of his new book.

He also plans to visit Bridge

Integrated Primary School to speak to the pupils there about his books.

principal, Charlie has not just written books, he has got involved in a number of his

and short stories too.

"I am hoping to have a collection of short stories published later this year.

"I think I'll call it 'Did I Ever Tell You?', a phrase my father would use when telling one of his yarns.

"Retirement has also afforded me time to study reflexology and obtain a qualification to practice from Southern Regional College.

"I've recently taken up playing the ukulele with the Anchor Ukes group in Newcastle.

"I'm not very good, but it's fun and the guys are just great."

Charlie, who grew up in England, and his wife, Glenda Graham, previously lived in Banbridge, but moved to Annalong in 2013.

"My wife, Glenda, wanted to live near the sea and I wanted to be close to the hills, so Annalong is perfect; we have the best of both worlds. We've been blessed, he said.

"I have been out in a canoe on a summer's evening and found myself accompanied by a pod of dolphins, whilst watching the glory of the mountains bathed in the colours of a summer's sunset."

Charlie and Glenda also enjoy travelling together but love coming back to the beautiful South Down area.

"My travels have taken me to many parts of the world, as far west as Ecuador and as far east as Korea," he said.

"I have visited Ethiopia a few times, where I've taught, lectured and advised and though beautiful in their own right, no other place has more breathtaking scenery than we have here in County Down."

More animal magic as Charlie pens new book



Local author Charlie Graham's second book for children, titled 'Missing Monkeys', comes out this month. P18-160823



Book illustrator Martin Kenny works on his illustrations for the book 'Missing Monkeys' at his office in Belfast.

"The book will be for sale locally in the Barbican in Annalong, as well as Smyth's (Centra) in Newcastle and further afield," Charlie said. Since retiring as a school

favourite hobbies.

"I swim regularly, either in Newcastle or Annalong, in the leisure centre in Kilkeel and occasionally in Newry. I write poetry when the spirit moves me,