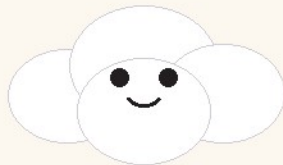


A FREE MINI-GUIDE FROM BRYAN FAMILY BOOKS

From Kitchen Table to Amazon

*How our mom's handwritten story became a real,
printed children's book — and how yours can too.*



by Grayson Bryan
the son / editor / producer half of the operation

This actually happened.

My mom wrote a story about a little cloud named Whisp. It lived in a notebook. It was 290 words long.

A few weeks later it was a real 32-page, full-color picture book on Amazon — watercolor illustrations, a consistent lovable character, a real ISBN, a real barcode, delivered to her door in print. Her name on the cover. Dedicated to someone we love.

Then she wrote a second one. It's even better.

Since then, people keep asking her the same question: how?

This little guide is the honest answer. There's no secret and no gatekeeping — just a process, a handful of free tools, and a few traps we already fell into so you don't have to.

"The quietest stories deserve real covers."

You need less than you think.

- **A story (even a tiny one)**

Ours was 290 words. Picture books run 100-500 words. If you can tell it out loud in two minutes, it's enough.

- **A character with ONE signature detail**

Whisp is a cloud with a little cowlick tuft. That one detail makes him recognizable on every page. Pick one memorable feature and never change it.

- **A phone or computer**

Everything else — writing, illustrating, layout, publishing — can be done with free tools from a kitchen table.

- **About \$5**

Not for software. That's roughly what a printed proof copy of YOUR OWN book costs before you release it. Amazon's publishing platform (KDP) is free, and they give you a free ISBN.

Six steps, start to shelf.

1 — Write it, then cut it

Write the story your way. Then cut every word the pictures can say for you. Our biggest lesson: the first draft describes the scenery; the final text just carries the story. (Book 2 went from 605 words to about 145 — and got better.)

2 — Lock your character

Before illustrating anything, write one paragraph describing your character exactly: shape, colors, the signature detail, what changes with emotion. This paragraph goes into EVERY image you make. It's the difference between a character and 13 different clouds.

3 — Illustrate with AI (carefully)

Modern image models (we use Google's Gemini image models) can produce genuinely beautiful watercolor art. The trick: attach a reference image of your character to every single generation, and re-roll until it's on-model. Expect to regenerate 20-30% of pages.

4 — Lay it out on the 32-page skeleton

Picture books are almost always 32 pages. Art on the left page, a few words on the right. The next page of this guide is the exact skeleton we use — steal it.

5 — Set up on Amazon KDP (free)

Kindle Direct Publishing prints and ships on demand. Free account, free ISBN, no inventory. You upload two PDFs (interior + cover), set a price, done.

6 — Order a proof, THEN publish

Always hold the physical proof copy (~\$5) before hitting publish. Colors, spine, feel — you'll catch things on paper you never see on screen.

STEAL THIS

The 32-page skeleton.

Page 1	Half-title (just the book's name, pretty)
Page 2	Copyright + ISBN line
Page 3	Dedication (make it personal — this is the page people cry at)
Pages 4-5	Title art + title page
Pages 6-31	Your 13 story beats — art on the left page, words on the right
Page 32	The End + a little colophon

The 13 story beats follow a rhythm every picture book shares:

world (1-3) → characters (4-5) → joy (6-8) → a quiet problem (9-10) → the try (11) → the payoff (12) → home (13)

Map your story onto those beats and the page count takes care of itself.

Five traps we fell into.

1. Putting the scenery in the text

If the picture shows a busy beach, the page should say 'The beach was busy' — not list the volleyball, the bubbles, and the frisbees. Trust the art.

2. Character drift

Without a reference image attached to every generation, your character slowly morphs. By page 9 you have a stranger. Reference image, every time, no exceptions.

3. Letting AI write NAMES

AI illustration loves adding text — and it will misspell your own mother's name on her own cover. (Ask us how we know.) All words get typeset in real fonts, never generated.

4. Decorating the barcode zone

Amazon reserves a 2 x 1.2 inch spot on the back cover, bottom-right. Leave it PURE white. Any decoration there and they reject the cover. (Ask us how we know — again.)

5. Publishing without a proof

The screen lies about color and scale. The \$5 printed proof is the best money in this whole process.

What it actually costs.

Writing the story

\$0

Your words.

AI illustration

\$0-20

Free tiers cover a whole book if you're patient; a paid tier makes it faster.

Layout + typesetting

\$0

Free tools. Or a Python script if you're nerdy like the son half of this family.

Amazon KDP account + ISBN

\$0

Genuinely free.

Printed proof copy

~\$5

The only near-mandatory spend.

Your finished book, per copy

~\$4-5 print cost

Sell at \$12-15, Amazon pays the difference as royalty. Or order author copies at print cost for family.

Total to hold your own published book: about the price of two coffees. The catch was never money — it's the forty small decisions between the story and the shelf. That's the part we've now done twice.

Do it yourself — or do it with us.

PATH ONE — DIY.

Everything you need is in this guide. Take the skeleton, dodge the traps, and go make something your family keeps forever. Genuinely: go. This guide is yours.

PATH TWO — WITH US.

If you'd rather skip the forty small decisions, we're opening a small number of spots where we walk your story through the exact Whisp pipeline: manuscript polish (your voice, kept), a locked character design, full watercolor illustration, print-ready layout, and Amazon setup — until you're holding your own proof copy.

We're keeping it small on purpose. It's a family operation; that's the point.

Interested? Just reply to the email that delivered this guide.

Say "tell me more" — that's it. You'll hear from Grayson, a human.

Small cloud.
Big heart.

Bryan Family Books · est. 2026

Whisp · Whisp at the Lake · more to come

www.askgrayson.com/yourbook