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Issue Date: September 2015 Issue

Magic Show

The past comes alive in a new supernatural thriller that examines family.
Vince Guerrieri



Jaci Clark

Christopher Barzak spent seven years writing — and rewriting — *Wonders of the Invisible World*.

During that time, the Youngstown State University creative writing professor did other things, too. Barzak lived and taught in Japan for two years. He produced two collections of short stories and finished a different novel, *The Love We Share Without Knowing*, based on Japanese ghost stories and folklore.

He even saw his first book, *One For Sorrow*, adapted into the film *Jamie Marks is Dead*, which starred Liv Tyler and premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival.

Still, Barzak wrote draft after draft of *Wonders of the Invisible World* (Knopf, \$17.95), which debuts Sept. 8. The coming-of-age supernatural thriller is set in Temperance, Ohio, a fictional version of Barzak's Kinsman hometown, and tells of a high school student plagued by a faulty memory and a nagging feeling he doesn't fit in.

"In the original first few drafts, I was trying to do too much, more than a novel can actually contain," says the 40-year-old Barzak. "Finally I said,

"I've just got to start over from Page 1."

What emerged is a tale that centers around Aidan Lockwood, whose childhood friend returns to their hometown and brings with him a flood of memories, including some with dire consequences. Like *One For Sorrow*, it contains elements of the supernatural, including a family curse and visions of long-dead relatives.

"I'm interested in creating stories that are of this world but also have a layer of magic," he says. "I want it to be a metaphor for lived experience."

For Barzak, growing up in a small, rural town made him feel like an outsider longing to fit into a wider, more open outside world. So after college at YSU, Barzak spent a year living in Carlsbad, California, and then worked as a clerk at a bookstore and library in Lansing, Michigan. "I sympathize with [Lockwood] as a gay person growing up in a small town where that is perhaps viewed strangely or negatively," says Barzak, who wanted to write a family saga that remained true to the reality of teenage lives.

"A lot of young adult books have teenagers existing in vacuums," Barzak says. "Your family is a large presence. You're trying to ... create your own life, but you're also mixed up with the history of the people you live with and are shaped by."

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