

Everyone loves the little mole who never gave up



Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Author Werner Holzwarth said he's just as persistent as the mole he created

It may be the most natural thing in the world, but Werner Holzwarth was one of the first to write a children's book about it. It came as a surprise to some that a story about shit became an international hit.

It's all just a load of shit - there's really no other way to put it. And shit is something author Werner Holzwarth has thought a lot about.

"At that time, in the mid-1980s, my son was maybe three or four years old, we were going for a walk in the park in Frankfurt," Holzwarth said. "He noticed all of the dog droppings and wanted to play with them. And I thought, to keep him away from them, I'll buy him a book."

While shitty books abound, there was no book about shit available in German, so Holzwarth wrote his own.

The simple plot unfolds over 20 pages with large pictures. One day, a mole comes out of his hole and - plop! - something lands on his head. Naturally, he is disgusted.

But instead of washing his head, the mole decides to get to the bottom of it and find out exactly who was responsible for the rather stinky and unpleasant mishap. He goes from animal to animal, comparing their patties, droppings and poop to the pile on his head. Whether pigeon, horse, pig or goat - no one seems to be the culprit.

Still, the mole remains persistent.

"He's my kind of character," said Holzwarth. "He doesn't accept just any answer."



Bildunterschrift:

The little mole goes from animal to animal, asking who pooped on his head

He who seeks shall find

The book's universal theme went over well. Since it came out in 1989, 1.2 million copies of the German version have been sold. But it's also been translated into 33 languages. Whether in China, Bolivia, Saudi Arabia or Iceland - everyone knows the stubborn little mole.

Holzwarth said he is amazed at the reception his book has received.

"In the beginning, everyone thought it was gross," he said. "The topic was taboo. What grandma is going to buy her grandchild a book about shit?"

The author spent two years trying to sell his story to a publishing house, but no one was interested. Some called it "unappetizing" or said it was too alternative and reeked of 1968.

But instead of giving up, Holzwarth remained as unrelenting as the mole he had created and went in search of an illustrator. He found Wolf Erlbruch, who he had met while working in the advertising industry. Finally, a small publishing house - the Peter Hammer Verlag - agreed to publish the experimental work.

For Erlbruch, it meant the beginning of a successful international career as an illustrator.

"It filled a market niche," said Holzwarth.



Bildunterschrift:

Obviously, it wasn't the cow

An eye for an eye

Now over 20 years old, the little mole - who still remains nameless - has taken on many forms. In addition to the traditional children's book, the story has also been performed as a musical and recorded as an audio book.

"The most beautiful version of the mole is the French edition for the blind," commented Holzwarth.



Bildunterschrift: [Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Werner Holzwarth was inspired to write about shit by his son](#)

The persistent mole, of course, discovers the poop perpetrator: It was the butcher's dog Hans-Heinerich.

And the mole promptly gets his revenge.

"The dog wakes up and notices that there is something on his head and can't let it rest," explained Holzwarth. "It's clear that he continues" and conducts his own investigation - the perfect opportunity for a sequel.

Author: Stefanie Duckstein (kjb)

Editor: Sean Sinico