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Juvenile Fiction

Seldovia Sam and the Very Large Clam
Susan Woodward Springer
Amy Meissner, illustrator
Alaska Northwest Books
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Eight-year-old Sam is living the life of Riley. His home in Seldovia, Alaska allows him to go clamming with his dad, watch his mother fly her Bush plane across the sound to the bigger cities, and come face-to-face with sea otters. In first book of the boy's misadventures, Sam becomes stranded during a clamming trip with his father, when he focuses too much on the biggest clam and not on the incoming tide. In the second installment, Sam finds an abandoned baby sea otter while building a driftwood fort and cares for it through the night while waiting for a biologist to arrive.

The author is well qualified to write about the real-life town of Seldovia, Alaska, because she's been a resident there for eighteen years, operating a mercantile. An author, artist, and historian, she has previously published a non-fiction historical portrait of life on Herring Bay, Alaska. Sam's stories closely mirror her own life in this remote place, which can only be reached by Bush plane or boat. Springer includes in the front of the book a map of the state and a short blurb about Seldovia and Sam's relationship to it.

Beginning readers will enjoy Sam's adventures, because he always seems to find mischief, even when he has the best intentions. The illustrations bring Sam and his dog, Neptune, to life for readers and will help those struggling with the story to better understand it and the characters that Springer has created. The illustrator holds degrees in art and textiles, and has previously illustrated the children's picture book Ollie Jolly, Rodeo Clown. Young readers love series books, and the outdoor settings will appeal to children who may not always be interested in books. Also, because Seldovia is so different from the homes of most children, young readers will be intrigued to see how another eight-year-old lives.

Sam is a delightful young person who will draw beginning chapter book readers into his rugged life in the Alaskan wilderness.

Lynn Evarts