

## *The Many Hats of Robert Lytle*

By David Fleet, Editor, on May 26, 2016

From stories of the Northern Great Lakes to a boy orphaned on 9/11 to rural Michigan during the Civil War—author Robert Lytle has captivated readers with a mix of history, adventure and entertainment.

On Tuesday morning, donning about a half dozen different hats to illustrate what experiences he's had in writing his books, Lytle visited Sharon Voyer's fourth grade class at Brandon Fletcher Intermediate School. The class had been reading one of Lytle's 11 published books, "A Pitch in Time,"— the story of a modern day boy who falls from his bike and wakes up in the spring of 1864 in rural Michigan during the Civil War. His southern accent, cultural views and even the sport he loves all come in conflict with everything he has ever known. The story unfolds as his new 19th Century friend, Sally Norton, helps him learn the ways of this war-torn Northern community.

"I want kids to learn and be entertained," said Lytle. "Otherwise you're going to turn off a lot of the population. The idea is to get a few historical facts while learning at the same time."

Lytle was born in 1944 and grew up on Mackinaw Street in Saginaw. Lytle was 5-years-old when his family inherited a small cabin on the Les Cheneaux Islands of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He spent 13 summers fishing, swimming, and hiking, prompting several of his books. Lytle studied at Farris State College and later earned a degree in pharmacy at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He later purchased a corner drugstore in downtown Rochester and a home a few blocks away, where he lived for 35 years.

Lytle started writing the Mackinac stories in part to depict what life was like growing up in northern Michigan during the 1950s.



**Robert Lytle discusses "A Pitch in Time" at BFIS on Tuesday. The author has written 11 books.  
Photo by Mo Voyer.**

“When I was growing up we would put four kids in a boat and sail from the Les Cheneaux Islands to Mackinac on Lake Huron,” he said. “That would never happen today. It was an idyllic place that was really true—it was a different world then.”

In 1995 Lytle published his first book— “Mackinac Passage: A Summer Adventure.” then two more Mackinac stories followed by “Three Rivers Crossing,” published in 2000. A fourth Mackinac story, “The Mystery At Round Island Light,” followed in 2001. “A Pitch in Time” was published in December 2002, a fifth book, “Mackinac Passage: Pirate Party,” included the 1812 attack by British forces upon Fort Mackinac, was published in 2005. “Mr. Blair’s Labyrinth,” a time-travel, Great Depression-era story was published in 2011 and “Bulwick School: A Yankee Lad In London,” a post-9/11 story, was published in 2013. His latest work “Our Cherry Tree,” was just released in December of 2015.

Lytle admits there were plenty of surprises during the extensive historical research needed for his stories.

“When I wrote ‘Mr. Blair’s Labyrinth,’ I didn’t realize many of the hobos were teenagers,” he said. “I also learned that many of the hobos were good friends and knew each other. A lot of the families sent the oldest out to work for food. They just could not feed everyone in the family so they had to leave.”

In 2000 Lytle joined the Rochester Grangers, a vintage baseball club—the Ballists, who dress in period uniforms and compete with other clubs from around the Midwest. The vintage baseball was part of “A Pitch in Time.”

“We play by the gentlemanly rules of the 1850s and ‘60s—no gloves, spitting, cursing or sliding,” commented Lytle.

Lytle admits being a pharmacist does not allow for a lot of creativity.

“Writing is my chance to do something creative,” he said. “It’s always been my release.”