

An Eagle's Origin Story

Meet the writer behind 'The Adventures of Supergirl.'

When they're not busy saving the planet, superheroes offer a window into the human condition, says

Sterling Gates, the Eagle Scout who writes DC's *The Adventures of Supergirl* comic-book series based on the *Supergirl* TV drama.

Batman must deal with the trauma of his parents' murders, Wonder Woman searches for answers in her past and Supergirl strives to meet the standard set by her cousin, Superman, who happens to be the biggest superhero of all.

"She's a teenager, she's fairly new to the planet in most versions of the character and she's going to make mistakes," Gates says. "The strength of the character is, 'Does she own up to those mistakes?'"

Gates knows about mistakes. As a 16-year-old Life Scout, he stepped away from Tulsa's Troop 73 for a year, thinking he had plenty of time to become an

Eagle Scout like his older brother, Alex. Then their father, Shaun, died unexpectedly. "I remember standing at the casket and looking down and seeing the one Eagle tie tack and

being so angry at myself that I had put it off so long that he wasn't around to see it," he says. "The day after Dad's funeral, I started work on my Eagle project."

Within seven weeks, he had completed that project and passed his Eagle board of review.

"It's one of my proudest accomplishments, but the motivation behind it is so tough," he says. Two decades later, he still lists Eagle Scout on his website and in every bio he writes, calling it the most important achievement of his youth.

Gates grew up surrounded by superheroes. His family owned Sooner Books and Comics and sometimes kept stock at home. "My entire house at one point was stock for the store," he says. "We were setting drinks down on boxes of comics instead of a coffee table."

He drifted away from comics about the time he drifted away from Scouting — high-school girls didn't seem interested in guys who could name everyone in the Legion of Super-Heroes — but he came back to comics after his father died and his family decided to sell the store. As he looked through some of the stock, he first rediscovered Wally West, the sidekick who took over for the Flash. Then he found a Starman comic that was all about fathers and sons. (In the 1990s, a character named Jack Knight carried on the Starman role after his father, Ted.)

"It didn't speak to me; it sang to me," Gates says. "It was so potent. It was everything I was feeling put on the page."

Gates wanted to give other people the same gift he'd received, but he knew the odds of making a living were long indeed. Thinking practically, he enrolled at the University of Oklahoma, where he studied art with a



specialization in film. He made a number of short films in college that he now hopes no one ever sees, then moved to Los Angeles after graduation in hopes of landing a job on a TV show.

A chance encounter with comic-book legend and TV producer Geoff Johns landed Gates a production assistant job in the writers' room for *Blade: The Series*, which Johns co-produced. When that series ended, Gates became Johns' personal assistant, a job that became a yearlong comic-writing apprenticeship. "Every day I would go in with a new thing I had written," Gates says. "Geoff would sit down at his desk with a red pen and, like a professor, grade my work; he would tell me everything I did wrong and what could be better."

Johns eventually introduced Gates to an editor at DC and, after a few attempts, he sold his first manuscript, a Green Lantern story that ended up being drawn by one of his heroes, Jerry Ordway. Now, 10 years later, he's working with Supergirl, whom he calls an optimistic character for a cynical age.

Among his contributions to the Supergirl character is a new motto: "Hope, Help and Compassion for All."

"That's what the character stands for, and that's what I think we as people should aspire to," Gates says. "I love 'Truth, Justice and the American Way,' but I don't know that I can aspire to that personally."

But hope, help and compassion? Those values come naturally to this Eagle Scout. 

