



Leigh Ballance was born and raised in rural Hyde County close to the real Gum Swamp. As a child, fearing he would not do well in math, Ballance began dreaming of numbers. Instead of being something to fear they became his friends. In his dreams each number, from 0 through 9, had its own personality and gender. Now with the numbers being his friends math came much more easily to him.

Today, Ballance lives with his wife, Patsy, in Raleigh, North Carolina where he is at work writing more stories about his friendly, brave, adventurous numbers.

Leigh Ballance is a North Carolina-based writer who wrote *The Secret of Gum Swamp*, a read aloud book for ages K-5. Raised in rural Hyde County close to the real Gum Swamp, Leigh's story is based on his own experiences. Like Henry, the book's main character, Ballance began dreaming of numbers while in grade school in response to fears about mastering math. Instead of nightmares Ballance's numbers were friendly: they helped him conquer his math fears and instead of being something to fear the numbers became friends.

Obviously, having number friends helped Ballance with math of all sorts. After graduating from The Citadel in 1968 with a B.A. in Business Administration, Ballance served in the Army from 1968-1972. He spent a year in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot.

After his service Ballance enjoyed successful careers in many math-centric fields. He spent 16 years in the banking industry; starting Unity Bank in 1989, then began a second career in real estate development, investments and now owns a successful general contracting business, Prime 1 Builders.

Throughout this time Ballance enjoyed writing poetry and reflections on his flying experiences in Vietnam. While working at Peoples Bank in Rocky, he met award-winning illustrator Marion Clark Weathers. In 2000 Ballance shared his real-life story with Weathers about how the numbers came to him as a second grader. As he described each number and related a little about their personalities, their gender and clothing, Marion began sketching each number.

The resulting sketches became the catalyst for *The Secret of Gum Swamp*, the first of a three-book series about the main character Henry and the numbers. Other books in the pipeline includes *The Hay Bale Fort Battle* and *Lou and the Professor Scytodes*.