



A Conversation with *Shennen Bersani* author of *Achoo!* *Why Pollen Counts*

What Sparks your creativity?

When I go outside to walk or ride my bike, everything around me sparks creative ideas and visual images that I can later create on paper. There is an endless source for everyone just outside their doors.

When did you become interested in writing?

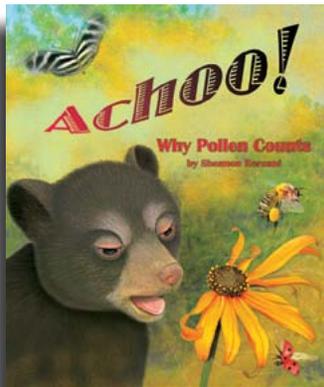
I was always writing. When I was very young, I was writing poems and songs, composing music to them on my guitar. The first chance I had - middle school - I jumped on the opportunity to take a creative writing course. By high school I knew I ultimately wanted to combine my love of art and words together in children's picture books.

What was your incentive to write this particular book?

To educate children about the importance of pollen to life on earth.

What made you decide to write on this topic?

The honeybees, black bears, and the other pine forest plants and animals. Black bears are extremely intelligent, and the amazing life of a honeybee is only now beginning to be understood. Pollen research has also uncovered important facts about our bodies



and the air we breathe. The disappearance of large numbers of honeybees around the globe (along with the drastic decline in bats) will have a significant negative impact on human health and food sources, and it needs to be everyone's concern.

How has pollen affected you, or do you suffer from allergies?

Over the years I have suffered from asthma. I also have some food allergies, however, everyone including me sneezes from pollen when it is blown in my face, or my hand gets it from a car door handle and I rub it on my nose.

After illustrating books for many years, what is the most difficult part of the transition from illustrator to author?

That's easy! As an illustrator, you try very hard to make the author happy by creating an accurate graphical depiction and pagination design to match the written words that the author intended. When you're the author AND illustrator, you're still trying to satisfy the author.

Only, the author is even more difficult to please!

What is most rewarding and/or challenging about writing children's books?

The most rewarding is having what you wrote read by children, parents, and teachers. The most challenging is trying to keep a reasonable work-life balance while doing all the work that goes into writing a book.

How have other children's books/authors influenced you in writing Achoo?

I have worked with many different authors

and editors over the years. I'm in a number of online groups with published authors and fellow illustrators. I have taken creative writing classes and have been a member of writer's critique groups. All of their comments and input have influenced my writing. I like the energy of being supportive of one another.

Do you have any advice for parents?

I definitely have advice and facts to share related to pollen and its effect on people and our planet, saving our honeybees, and the intelligence and roles of black bears. I can aid teachers, parent groups, and

government agencies in regard to education and awareness.

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