



A Conversation with Andrea Gabriel

author and illustrator of
Wandering Woolly

illustrator of
Little Gray's Great Migration

What inspired you to create Wandering Woolly?

I have always wanted to illustrate a book about a baby woolly mammoth. I had written an earlier, non-fiction text for very early readers, but it never found a publisher. I decided to rework it into more of a story format, and that became *Wandering Woolly*.

Did you run into some unusual problems while writing about the Ice Age?

One of my favorite lines involved a woolly rhinoceros. I was very excited to draw a woolly rhino. Luckily, I did a bit more research and learned that they lived in Europe, not here.

Have you always been interested in writing?

I became interested in writing when our fourth grade class was allowed to write and illustrate our own stories, which were laminated and bound by the teacher. So excited to have published my first book! (It featured a pet mechanical shark

named...Sharkie...by the way.) I have written and illustrated one other book: *My Favorite Bear* (Charlesbridge), and am now working on my very first novel (for adults) called *Wreckage*.

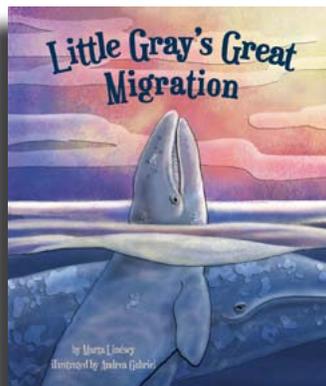
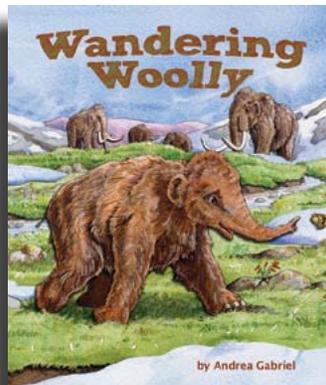
What is the most rewarding part of writing books for children?

For me, the most rewarding part of writing and illustrating children's books is the opportunity to visit students in the schools and at young author conferences. I love the energy and ideas of these young future writers and artists, and I often get great ideas from the audience.

When you do presentations, is there one question that is asked over and over?

"What is the hardest part about being an author?" Kids always ask this at school presentations.

My answer: "Sitting my butt down in my chair." They always laugh, but it's true. Since beginning the novel, I have learned to get up every morning and write for an hour,



whether I feel like it or not. I have to write every day, regardless of how I feel about it. Most of the time, even when I'm feeling kind of cranky about it, I eventually start having fun.

Do you have a certain time that you set aside for writing each day?

In the early morning, more than anything else, my creativity – whether drawing or writing – usually comes from simply starting to work. Inspiration hits most often when I am working.

Having just illustrated Little Gray's Great Migration with Arbordale, were you inspired by experiences with gray whales on your coast like the author?



The same week that I learned I would be illustrating Little Gray, we were canoeing and happened onto a group of Grays feeding near Whidbey Island. So I took that to be a good omen for the book, as I'd not seen any whales for years at that point.

I was (very unexpectedly) checked out by a gray whale while kayaking near my home in Bellingham. It swam right under the boat, then spouted all over me. I've never felt so small or shocked in my whole life. It was a very gentle and curious whale, and the two of us spent about a half hour together just off the cliffs.

There are plans afoot to recreate a mammoth using ancient DNA extracted from a mammoth frozen in the tundra. Would you want to check out a woolly mammoth?

Argh! I have two very strong opinions that go in opposite directions. I think it would be a very hard thing to be the only mammoth in the whole world, and there are so many questions about whether such a thing could be done without creating a situation where the creature would suffer from illness or inadequate parenting. Also, there is a reason these animals went extinct – namely that conditions were no longer right for them to live here, whether those conditions were caused by disease or climate or human hunters.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I selfishly would be the first in line to see a brand new baby woolly mammoth. So I am completely at odds with myself.

Finally, if kids are interested in learning more about mammoths do you have any advice for parents?



In addition to some great non-fiction books about the Ice Age, there are several documentaries on the Discovery Channel. I would highly recommend these, as the animation has become so lifelike it feels like an opportunity to really see these creatures in motion!

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