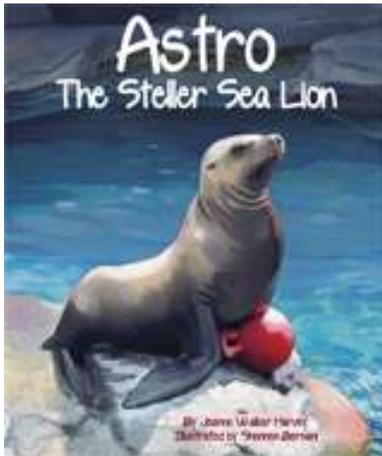


*A Conversation with
Jeanne Walker Harvey
author of Astro: The Steller Sea
Lion*



What was your incentive to write *Astro: The Steller Sea Lion*?

I was fascinated by the story of Astro when I read about it in my local newspaper. So, I wanted to share this compelling story about Astro and his journey from being a stranded baby to a rehabilitated full grown Steller Sea Lion. And, I wanted to write a story that conveys the love and care given by the numerous dedicated volunteers at the Marine Mammal Center (the “Center”) to wounded, sick and stranded animals, and those caring for Astro at his new home at the Mystic Aquarium.

I wanted to educate people about the negative effects humans can have on marine mammals by explaining the types of injuries these animals suffer, such as fishing net entrapments, fishing net cuts, boat propeller cuts and gunshot wounds. Also, people need to be educated to stay away from those cute baby seals that they see on the beach. Sometimes they are not abandoned, but instead the mother is out at sea catching fish and will be returning. Once humans get near to the baby (or even worse, pick it up and take it home which people actually have done), it will never be reunited with its mother. Instead humans need to stay away and call the professionals, such as the Center (or wildlife care facilities for other animals).

When did you become interested in writing?

Ever since I was a child, I always dreamed of being a children’s book author. I saved my allowance and bought magazines on writing. In high school, I was the editor of my high school newspaper, and entered writing contests (“write-offs”) on weekends which gave me a love of journalism and nonfiction writing. Along the way, I have had many wonderful writing teachers and mentors beginning with my high school journalism teacher, Mrs. Hallenbeck.



When are you most creative?

I need to write when it is totally silent. If I hear any other words (from music or conversations), I get distracted when I am initially putting words to paper. So my black Lab is a good companion because she keeps her sounds to snoring or whining (when she feels we have been sitting still long enough and it's time for a walk).

What is the most frequently asked question you encounter as an author?

When I teach a writing workshop to fifth graders, I use the articles I have published in magazines as examples of types of writing. The question that I am asked the most is where do you get your ideas? I always say, "I write about what fascinates me."

What tips do you have for parents regarding instilling a love of reading in their children?

I think my area of expertise is as a writer and a teacher. So as a teacher, I would like to share my observation and belief that if parents share their love of reading, the children will become just as excited. Read aloud as much as possible to young children and then talk with older children about the books they are reading. Ask their opinions. What do they like/dislike about a book? Also, I've seen a direct correlation between students who read a lot and their writing ability. So get stacks of books of all types for your children and let them read, read, read!

What has been the most challenging or rewarding in writing *Astro: The Steller Sea Lion*?

I love finding a true story that is inspiring and fascinating, and then using my creativity to tell the story in a way that will hopefully captivate the reader.

What was the most unusual job you've ever had?

Well, I've had quite a few different jobs, but the one that was most unusual was when I worked as a Ride Operator on the Corkscrew Roller Coaster at Knott's Berry Farm in Southern California the summer before I went to college. I was actually paid to sit in the control booth and operate the train! I loved running the train! And then, of course, the other Ride Operators and I got to ride the roller coaster after the park closed at night which was really fun.

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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