

A Conversation with Katherine Rawson *author of If You Were a Parrot*



What led to your becoming a writer?

I have always been interested in reading and books. As a child, I spent so much time reading that it was natural for me to think about writing books myself. As I grew up, I went on to other things, but I came back to the idea of writing books when I was teaching elementary school.

I used a lot of storybooks in my teaching. There are so many wonderful books around that are delightful to read and that kids can learn from. I spent a lot of time reading children's literature and having fun sharing books with kids, so I started thinking again about writing my own stories.

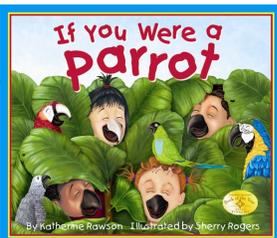
Soon after that, I got my pet birds, so I think it was the combined inspirations of working with kids and living with parrots that finally got me writing.

After reading your book, it's obvious you know a lot about parrots. How did you become interested?

A friend gave me a pair of parakeets that she could no longer keep. I thought they would just sit in their cage in the living room and be part of the decor. Was I wrong! Those two small animals came with big personalities that filled the entire house. Soon after the parakeets came to live with me, I got my parrot, Shadow, who I still have.

Did you have to do a lot of research before writing *If You Were a Parrot*?

I had read a lot about parrots before I wrote the book because I own parrots and am interested in them, but I didn't specifically do research in order to write the book. My inspiration for the book came from watching my pets and a few other parrots I know. I just wrote about the things they did that I thought were funny or interesting.



My parrot, Shadow, really does most of the things in the book. She climbs curtains, she chews up telephone books, she loves baths and broccoli, and so on. There are a few things in the book that she doesn't do. She chews popsicle sticks but doesn't eat popsicles. But I have seen a parrot, a large white cockatoo, eating a popsicle. It was quite a sight!

The one thing in the book that I haven't actually observed is the part about the parrot imitating the sound of a telephone ringing. But I do know that that is a talent that many parrots have. Shadow doesn't do telephone rings, but she does imitate the beeping sound the telephone makes when you dial. Every time she sees someone pick up the phone, she starts beeping.

Owning a parrot sounds fun! What advice do you have for families considering getting a pet a parrot?

Read my book! Seriously, it gives a lot of information that can help you understand what it is like to have a parrot living with your family. Parrots are playful, delightful birds, but they are also very demanding, and anyone considering getting one as a pet should thoroughly understand a parrot's needs and habits.

Many areas have parrot clubs that put on bird shows and bird marts. If you haven't been around parrots much, it would be good to visit some of these shows. Then you can see some of the different kinds of parrots and what they are like and talk to breeders, who can give you lots of information

What is a typical writing day like for you?

I don't really have a typical writing day. It changes a lot. I have periods where I do a lot of writing and times when I do very little. When I am not working on a particular project, I still try to do some writing everyday, so I write in my journal. My favorite time to write is in the early hours of the morning, between 5:00 and 7:00. I have the most creative energy then. When I'm working at the computer, my parrot, Shadow, likes to sit on my shoulder. She is almost always with me when I write. When she is not on my shoulder, she plays in her toy box, which is on my desk.

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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