



A Conversation with Linda Stanek

Author of
Once Upon an Elephant

What was your incentive to write this particular book?

I only learned about the concept of keystone animals in 2010, while working on my Beco book. At the time, elephant expert, Harry Peachey, explained to me how truly vital elephants are to our world, and how without them, other species would die. This is such an important concept, and I felt a little embarrassed that I didn't already know about this. As I talked to other people, I learned that it was a new concept to most of the people I knew. At that point, I knew this was something I wanted to share with the world—especially children, my favorite people of all!

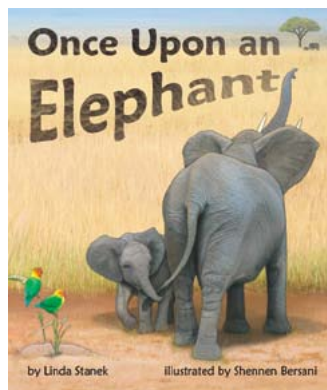
When did you become interested in writing?

When I was raising my kids, I needed a pick-up-and-go hobby. I was always taking them somewhere and then waiting for them. I wanted to have something fun to do while I waited. One day I decided to write a story for them. So I picked up a notebook and a pencil and started taking it with me. I wrote what we call a Middle Grade novel,

and it took me two and a half years to write it. By the time I finished with it, I knew I wanted to continue writing for children, so I began attending conferences and writing events to learn about the business.

What sparks your creativity?

The world is a fascinating place. My creativity is sparked whenever I learn something new and think, "Wow! That's interesting!" At that moment, I start thinking about whether this is something that kids would like to know about, or should know about (like the keystone animals). If the answer to either of those questions is "yes," I begin thinking about how I would like to tell that story.



What is the most frequently asked question you encounter as an author and what is your answer?

The question I often get from children is, "Is it hard to write books?" My answer is, "Yes, writing *is* hard work, but anything you try your best at is hard work. You might work hard at soccer, or singing,

or at learning to ride a bike. And like learning to ride a bike, writing gets easier and more fun the more you practice it. So I like kids to know that if they think writing is hard for them, stick with it—it gets easier and more fun as you go!

Did you always love to read?

Believe it or not, the answer is no. I didn't catch

the reading "fire" until I was in the third grade and found the right books for me. My older sister loved reading, but I was bored with it until I found the Little House books. I loved those books

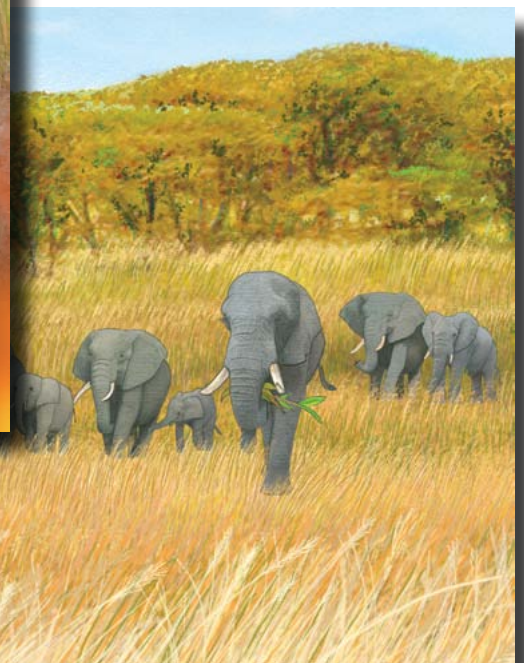
because I was fascinated with how people lived a long time ago. Now I tell children that if they don't think they like reading, it's because they haven't found the right books yet, but those books are out there! Ask your friends what books they are enjoying. Ask your teacher. Ask a librarian. Every reader is different, and I promise you, when you do find the right books, reading will be awesome!

Do you have any advice for parents?

As an educator, my advice for parents is to read to your children every day and let them see you reading for your own pleasure, too. Studies have shown that this simple act is one of the most impactful things you can do to help your children succeed in school.

What is most rewarding about writing children's books?

For me, the most rewarding thing about writing for children is feeling that I can make the difference in a child's life. I strive to educate them about their world, but in an interesting way—a way that will engage them and help them enjoy the process of reading. So really, my mission is two-fold—to teach them about their amazing world, and to build a love of literacy.



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