



A Conversation with Sherryn Craig

Author of
Midnight Madness at the Zoo

What was your incentive to write this particular book?

My oldest son inspired me to write *Midnight Madness at the Zoo*. It's what we imagined the animals do when everyone else goes home for the day. While several people cautioned me about writing a book in rhyme, my kids tend to enjoy those books the best. The rhythm and rhyme helps them to remember the story and they "read" the book out loud as I do. It was important to me that my boys enjoy the story, and they're the audience that I know the best and that I love the most.

When did you become interested in writing?

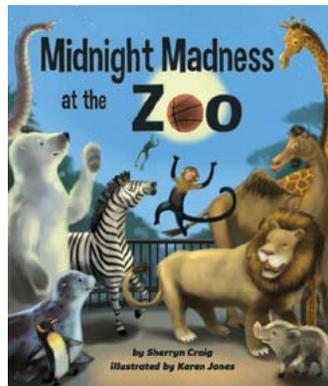
Since elementary school, I've always wanted to become a children's writer. Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume were my favorite authors growing up and I would devour anything that they wrote. Having children has reawakened my love of children's literature as I've introduced my kids to the picture books that I grew up with, and I've enjoyed discovering new writers and stories as well. One of the most exciting moments in my life, so far, was meeting my childhood hero, Judy

Blume, at the National Book Festival in 2008. My oldest son was only seven months old, and she graciously signed my copy of *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* and *Tales of the Fourth Grade Nothing* for my son. I consider those books two of my most valuable possessions.

When are you most creative?

By necessity, I've become a night owl. I'm most creative after everyone is tucked in for the night. Anything can spark my creativity – I find that observing things around you, listening to what is being said, or more importantly, not said, will generate an idea or question in my mind. I try to be open and aware of my surroundings. I'll also go for a long run or do yoga to clear my mind and calm my thoughts, if the chatter is preventing me from writing. I have a lot of voices going on in my head – maybe too many – and sometimes I have to train my brain to tune some of them out so I hear the quieter ones trying to break through.

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



I blogged about this topic on my website this past fall. The two questions I'm commonly asked are: "How do you do it all?" "What is your secret." While I consider myself to be a creative writer, my answer to the perception that I do it all or that I have a secret is quite simply, I don't. I'm a work in progress. And I do the best I can with what I have each day. It takes discipline and commitment to sit down and write. Especially on those days (and there are many – trust me) when writing is the last thing in the world I want to do, I break out the good ol' egg timer. I set it for ten minutes and I write until the b e e p i n g i n t e r r u p t s my thoughts. Sometimes I give myself permission and stop because it's ten minutes more work than I had before I started. But more times than not, I'll keep going. Ten minutes turns into one hour and then two. Writing for me is like exercise. I have to do a little bit every day, or else those muscles atrophy. The power of ten can be quite transformative: you can do anything for ten minutes.

If you could be any animal, what would you choose?

I would probably choose to be a dolphin. I grew up around the water, and I've always been fascinated with how dolphins talk to each other and how they interact with other animals, including humans. I think they're smart, gentle, sensitive, helpful creatures. Those are all characteristics that I look for in my friends, so I would certainly love to be

one of theirs.

What is most rewarding about writing children's books?

As a working mom, the most challenging thing I find about writing is actually sitting down and doing it. By the time I get my little ones in bed and finish the chores for the day, it's late, I'm tired, and I want to go to bed, because the next day is only a few hours away. But to do something, and to do it really well, you have to do it a lot. To

improve in writing, just like in sports, you have to practice.

Taking a risk and being prepared to fail is another important lesson - in writing, in sports, in life. You're not going to win every game. So too, everyone is not going to like the story you write. There's going to be disappointment, and you just have to fight through that, keep putting yourself out there, and try, try again. That's all we can do. It's tempting to get wrapped up in all the no's, but equally important, perhaps even greater than that rejection, is the realization that it only takes one yes.

The greatest reward is certainly getting to tell a story and finding people, like Arbordale, that believe in that story – who, too, are willing to take a risk on someone and something unknown.

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