



## ***A Conversation with Susan Detwiler***

Illustrator of

***One Wolf Howls,***

***Panda's Earthquake Escape, Big Cat Little Kitty***

And coming 2013

***On the Move: Seasonal Migration***



You have a very creative professional background—what led you to children's illustration?

I have loved making art from early childhood, and was always attracted to books with great illustrations. By the time I was in high school I decided that being a professional illustrator was my goal. I went to the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and studied graphic design and illustration. While I was a student I worked part-time as a sign painter. After that I got a job in the art department of a printing company, where I learned about how artwork is reproduced. Eventually, I was hired as a staff illustrator for an advertising agency and while I worked there I also began freelancing at night and on weekends. I liked freelance work so much that I decided to do it exclusively. My favorite assignments are for children's publishing and so I seek them out, with help I have found from the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators.

What type of medium do you use for your illustrations? Any particular reason you prefer this?

Pencil is my favorite medium for drawing, but I like watercolor and gouache for painting, and I enjoy drawing in ink, either with a pen or a brush. The illustrations for *One Wolf Howls* were done in watercolor on Strathmore illustration board, but *Pandas' Earthquake Escape* was done entirely in soft pastel on variously colors of paper, which was a fun departure from my usual style. For *Big Cat, Little Kitty*, I combined the two – I applied pastel details to watercolor paintings – because I wanted the colors to be vibrant. Also, I have become more adept at digital media, and use it to augment my images.

## How much research do you do when getting ready for a book?

I spend a lot of time at the beginning of a book assignment doing research at the library and online. I like to have many photographs in front of me when I work so that I can fully understand the structure, texture, and light/shadows of what I am trying to depict. It also helps to know other details about the subject, so along with gathering pictures I also read about what I am illustrating.



## What is the most frequently asked question you are asked as an illustrator?

I am often asked how long it takes me to do an illustration. Each spread takes several weeks from start to finish.

## Any tips for aspiring artists?

Make art often and practice different styles by mimicking your favorite artists' work. Eventually you will have a style that is all your own. Use your ability to make images wherever possible in school, to illustrate reports, make posters for school events, etc.



## What is your favorite aspect of the illustration process?

My ideas feed off the ideas of others. When I am given an exciting assignment, my head fills with images and I cannot wait to start to work in the morning. Each new job is an exciting challenge; sometimes I can hardly believe how lucky I am to get paid to do this! My new goal is that my pictures touch people in the same way that I was affected by the illustrations I saw as a child.

