What inspired you to write ABC Safari?

I never even dreamed of being a writer. I was in the early stages of my children’s book illustration career and was working on expanding my portfolio to include more animals. I sketched a few of the animals native to Florida where we were living at the time - manatee and alligator among them. But I realized that I needed some sort of structure to hold them together, so I began the little four line poems that eventually became ABC Safari. It took several years, many revisions, and a lot of studying of the craft before I was satisfied with them. But along the way, I discovered a joy in engaging in the entirety of creating a book.

What do you hope children will learn from your story?

I focused on some interesting facts about each animal, their environment, behavior, or appearance. I hope in reading this book, kids further their innate passion for animals and develop a curiosity that will encourage them to further their understanding of animals and the world around them.

What are the most frequently asked questions you encounter as an author?

I get a lot of questions about the creation of the art and the writing – the time involved, the method of finishing the art, and then the publishing process. Kids, in particular, want to know when I began doing art, and I make sure to tell them that I began as a kid like them, and all it takes is years and years of practice. There is some comfort in knowing that I wasn’t born with the ability I have now, and it is something they can also achieve if they want. I always show them my cruddy sketches, too. I hope it shows them that the main ingredient to becoming better at drawing is just to do it, be willing to make mistakes, and then try again.
What sparks your creativity?

Being around kids! Time spent with my own kids and their friends feeds my ideas and entertains me endlessly. People-watching is an excellent creative resource, too. Little observations, anecdotes, jokes, characters and mannerisms may sit in the dusty storage room of my head for years before another idea draws it all together like magnets. Then, in time, the idea begins to grow into something that isn't quite in the dusty back room, and every observation I make is offered to the little magnetic story starter with the question – will this stick? This can go on for months or years until the story has enough of a core to come out of the little back rooms, and I can begin making it a reality.

What has writing taught you about yourself?

Writing is hard work for me. It is like solving a puzzle – gathering pieces and painstakingly putting them in a place that makes sense. I've spent decades practicing my drawing and painting abilities, and they flow in a more comfortable way. Because the writing is harder, it has taught me that with perseverance and dedication, I can achieve my dreams. I hope, in time, that the writing will flow easier, but I also understand now how important it is to set goals that seem beyond my ability to achieve in order to accomplish more than I dare to dream.

What is the most interesting part of illustrating books for children?

When I first began illustrating picture books, I didn’t understand the complexity of what it takes to carry a story from cover to cover. There is so much work that happens before you get to the final art. Each character must be developed into a believable, likable being. Their environment needs to suit the tone of the story. The page design needs to add interest and encourage the reader to both dwell on the page and be eager to turn the page to see what happens next. I try to extend the words of the story to add an extra level of meaning and interest. My very first steps – the brainstorming, the little thumbnail ideas and scribbles - become the foundation for all of this, and for me it is the most creative and mentally engaging process.

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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