



“the colors of us” interview

Let’s talk about *The Colors of Us*. When did you have the idea to write this book?

When my daughter was 5 years old in kindergarten she asked why she was a different color than my husband and me. She is adopted from Guatemala. We talked about it. The next day I was at her school looking at all the beautiful kids in her class and I thought. These kids are brown and tan and peachy they aren’t just black or white. It was then I decided to do do this book as a celebration of the beautiful colors of kids.

The Colors of US is a lovely journey through the world of diversity starting from skin colors and its many shades and nuances. Choosing food metaphors meant making children easy, close to their world and fun to identify the different colors of the skin?

Yes and I didn’t plan it that way. It just happened as the book took shape.

You are the adopted mother of Lena who is originally from Guatemala, and you wrote a book about this experience “*Over the Moon*”. When Lena came part of your life did you ever thought, at the beginning, you would be asked one day about skin color and diversity?

Yes, I knew one day that question would come. I thought I was ready when she asked but still it was a touching conversation. Over the years she never asks anymore because now she understands and is proud of her color.

How did Lena’s coming in your family change your life as a person and as an artist? Did you ever-faced racist behaviors from outside?

When Lena arrived I was at last a mother. Now I had the greatest gift of love in my life. We have always thought our daughter is the most beautiful girl in the world. As an artist I have admired the beauty of diverse peoples around the world so having Lena, as a daughter was just an extension of those feelings. Of course now we have a special place in our heart for Guatemalans!

We never experienced any racism towards our daughter but we do live in NYC and it is a multicultural and sophisticated city.

What is the best recipe a kid should know against intolerance?

I am not an expert on intolerance, I am a children's book author and illustrator but I can give you my opinion as a mother and person. I would say there is no recipe but to teach your child that there is intolerance in the world and remember it is only other people's ignorance. It does hurt and kids will be hurt by prejudice but if you have a strong sense of self that will carry you through. Children learn by your example so make sure you are aware of your own feelings.

You wrote about adoption, diversity. How being an artist helped you in answering "big" questions of life?

I don't know that I'm any wiser than anyone else in answering the "big" questions of life. Believe me I ask them all the time! I do think artists are more open and accepting of things that are different.

From an external (as a mother) point of view, how is living between cultures? How did you and your husband valorize Lena's diversity? Does she (+you) have any relationship with her country of origin (culture, language, traditions, etc...)?

We have always talked about Guatemala to her and showed her photos. Last year we made bunuelos, Christmas cookies from Guatemala. This winter we are taking a trip to Guatemala to show her country. She is very proud of her heritage. It's just a natural part of who she is.

What will you suggest to parents and teachers to inspire children in reading books?

Find a book that attracts a child. It can be anything from a board book to a YA novel. As long as they have interest in it.

What were your favorite books as a child?

I really didn't have any but I do remember looking at the artwork in a Grimm's Fairy Tales Book. The illustrations were very scary!

Can you tell us at least three titles of children's book you enjoyed reading to Lena? (Most likely multicultural)

There are hundreds of books I love:
Mama Do You Love me? / Joesse
Abiyoyo / Pete Seeger
Tar Beach / Faith Ringgold
The Patchwork Quilt / Valerie Flourney
Isla / Arthur Dorros
Diego / Jeanette Winter
Why The Sky is far Away / Mary Joan Gerson

