



my inspiration

Inspiration 1

Where do you get your inspiration?

- My early ideas all came from my daughter when she was a baby. I collect toys, pages from magazines, greeting cards, napkins I've scribbled on, and just about anything you can think of that has an idea connected to it.
- Every project starts as a doodle or a scrap of paper. I gather and collect ideas as I go along and save them for...Well...I'm never sure when I will use them.
- I must own about 1000 children's books. Some great illustrator is always influencing me. I love kids art, folk art, and outsider art.

What were some of your first rejections, and what made you keep going?

I did two books called NO BITING! and NO HITTING! early on in my career. Simon and Schuster passed on them, but I later sold them to Grosset and Dunlap. That taught me to keep moving forward no matter what. I have had a bunch of books rejected and it taught me what I was good at and what I wasn't so good at. I never let rejection stop me, and I always just got back out there and knocked on another door. I kept my expectations low, so any acceptance felt great. My career has been filled with an amazing amount of good fortune. I haven't spent too much time being rejected. I am so lucky.

Inspiration 2

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 this book as a celebration of the beautiful colors of kids.

Inspiration 3

I have always been interested in folk art from around the world:

Indian miniatures, Mexican ceramics, fabrics, Chagall, Matisse, children's art, and primitive painting, and I love to paint and experiment with pattern, texture, collage and color.

The careers I've had – as a costume designer, a quilt maker, a fabric artist, and a graphic designer – have taken all these interests into account. Looking back, I can see that these passions and career choices have played a large part in influencing me to become a children's book author and illustrator.

But most importantly, it was after my husband I adopted our daughter from Guatemala that I was inspired to do a children's book for her. My first book, *Over the Moon*, was the story of that magical experience of welcoming our daughter Lena into our lives. I painted, I drew, I collaged, and I wrote, and after working very hard . . . a beautiful book was born! Twenty-two books later, my daughter – fourteen years old – still is an inspiration for me.

I am fascinated by babies and little kids. The simplest words and gestures can make them laugh. Sometimes standing in line at the supermarket and watching kids in grocery carts, my best ideas are born. I am fascinated by people from all over the world, what they look like, how they live and the differences that make us all unique.

Inspiration 4

[You have written over twenty-five books now, how did you originally break into children's book writing and illustrating?](#)

After my husband and I adopted our daughter from Guatemala I decided I wanted to illustrate children's books. I had been a graphic designer for many years. For nine months I painted pictures of kids and anything that looked like it could be in a children's book. Then I put together a portfolio to show. My second appointment was at Henry Holt with someone I had known in adult publishing. She asked if she could pass my portfolio on to one of the editors. There were paintings in my portfolio that represented a poem that my husband had written about adopting our daughter.

Two weeks later I got a call from Laura Godwin a senior editor who wanted to meet with me and talk. We met and talked for an hour about adoption and what my experience was like, what Guatemala was like etc. She told me she loved my art. Finally I said "I love talking to you, but I'm not quite sure why we are having this conversation."

"Oh," she said, "I'd like to publish a picture book with you about adoption".

I was so elated I could barely act normal.

“ Great! And who is going to write it?”

“ You are,” she said.

“ But I’m not a writer.”

“ Yes you are. I can tell. Just write your story from your heart in your own words”.

I went home and wrote the text for that book the next morning. She loved it. That was the beginning of my career. I was very lucky to meet someone who had great vision and was willing to trust in my potential.

What was your inspiration?

My inspiration for each book was different. In general the inspiration for my early books was all due to Lena. I was a new mom with a little baby and everything she did inspired me to come up with an idea for another book. When she got a little older I was inspired to do *The Colors of Us*, *12 Hats for Lena* , and *Over the Moon*. My inspiration still comes from memories of when Lena was little.

How do you think of topics for your books?

Sometimes ideas just pop in my head when I see a young baby on the street or in the park. Watching Lena grow up inspired my early books. When she was tiny I did a book called *Counting Kisses* about how to kiss a baby all over their little chubby soft bodies. As she got older I was inspired by other experiences in her life, like being in a multicultural school, and learning life's little lessons. For instance I did a series of books called *No Biting!*, *I Can Share!*, and *Excuse Me!* When I do my baby books I try to think of ideas that will be really fun for babies to interact with. Like one of my new books is called *Where's Baby's Puppy?* The baby looks for a little puppy under big flaps... how much fun is that!

What made you start writing?

When Lena was a year old I decided I wanted to live my dream and be a children's book illustrator. I had a free lance design business at the time .I spent about a year working on a portfolio in my free time and at night. Finally I took the portfolio out to show some publishers. I was hoping that someone might hire me to illustrate some other author's words. My story is one of those magical ones, where on my first appointment the publisher not only wanted me to illustrate the book but also asked me

to write it. That was Over the Moon. I wrote the text from my heart and soul and it came out pretty good. After that I was considered a writer. I think everyone can write given the chance.

Inspiration 5

Books I love:

1) [The Little Fur Family / Margaret Wise Brown / illustrated by Garth Williams](#)

This is an odd book about a little "fur child" who is a bear. I love this book because it is a sweet story about a day in the life of a little fur bear and the love of his fur family. You must get Goodnight Moon also by Margaret Wise Brown / illustrated by Clement Hurd.

2) [Maisy Takes a Bath / Lucy Cousins](#)

All the Maisy books are simple, have bright colors and take us on very quiet adventures with Maisy and her special and somewhat kooky friends. The endings of these tales are always charming. I love her paintings and bath books are a must for every collection.

3) [Are You My Mommy / Carla Dijs](#)

My daughter loved this book as a baby. The book asks the timeless question, "Are you my Mommy?" Babies love to answer this question with a big "no, no, no!" and then of course, at the end...a big "YES you are my mommy."

4) [More More More / Vera Williams](#)

I love this book because Williams shows us with her beautiful and energetic paintings the lovely ways we all like to hug and dance around with our children. The love spills out of every page.

5) [Do You Know Colors / J.P. Miller and Katherine Howard](#)

This is very old book my daughter loved . It is not sophisticated or modern but it simply gives your baby a way to point to animals and objects and say the colors. Basic and fun.

Or

[One yellow Lion / Mathew Van Fleet](#)

Everyone should have a book about colors in their baby's library. This one is simple, fun and big and bold. Each page has a colorful and fun surprise.

6) [Owl Babies / Martin Waddell / Illustrated by Patrick Benson](#)

A classic story of mommy coming home after a short separation from her owl babies. It is reassuring and beautifully illustrated. The writing is wonderful. My daughter used to love to say at the end, "WHATS ALL THE FUSS?" their Owl Mother asked. You knew I'd come back."

7) Tickle Tickle / Helen Oxenbury

Helen Oxenbury draws the best babies. Her books are extremely simple with adorable artwork. She is my favorite illustrator of babies.

8) Little Bear Goes to the Moon / Else Holmelund Minarik / Illustrated by Maurice Sendak

This is one of my favorite stories by this author. Little bear is so determined to go to the moon, but in the end he lands right back at home. The end is priceless when Mother bear says, "For you are my little bear, and I know it".

9) Nicky Upstairs and Down / Harriet Ziefert / Illustrated by Richard brown

A wonderful hide and seek book. Nicky is just like all little babies who want to hide and seek and ultimately be found. The drawings of this cat make you want to hug him!

10) The Napping House / Audrey and Don Woods

I love this book because it is just so silly. The artwork is funny and buoyant and outrageous. Quick As a Cricket by the same author/illustrator team, is another favorite of mine.

11) Winnie the Pooh / A.A. Milne / Illustrated by Ernest H. Shepard

Winnie the Pooh is such a sweet befuddled bear and all the characters in this world are so lovable. All the classic Pooh stories are not to be missed.

12) Hazel's Amazing Mother / Rosemary Wells

Rosemary Wells tells her stories in a unique voice. This is one of my favorite books because it is filled with such love but done in very unsentimental and punchy way. Any of the Max and Ruby books are winners too.

