



questions from mitchell college students

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 long have you been writing?

I have been creating children's books for almost 20 years, ever since Lena was born. But I would like to clarify that I started out just wanting to illustrate books, never thinking that I would write them. My first editor asked me if I wanted to do a children's book about adoption after seeing some of my illustrations. I said "of course but who will write it?" She said, "you will". I was flabbergasted... me write a book? I did write that book and 40 more books in the last 20 years. I was very lucky to have an editor who was willing to take a chance with me.

How long does it take you to write a book?

That depends upon which book it is. When I do a 32-page picture book it usually takes me between 5 to 6 months from beginning to the end of the process. When I do a six-page lift the flap board book, it generally takes about two months from beginning to end. The process for both books is the same. First I think of the idea and get the words down on paper. Usually I make little thumbnail sketches to go along with the words. Then I get it approved by my publisher. After that I have to translate these little sketches into large drawings and then I paint the final pictures. Once I have finished with art I scan it into my computer and create layouts in Adobe Illustrator. Then I send it to my publisher. So you can see there are a lot of steps involved.

What is your favorite book you've written and why?

That's a very difficult question and I have been asked it a lot! The book that is closest to my heart is the first book I ever did called *Over The Moon*, an adoption tale. It is the story of how we adopted Lena from Guatemala and this book has more meaning to me than any other book I've ever done. In terms of writing I would have to say that my second favorite book is *The Colors of Us* because not only does it have a lot of meaning for me, but also I really like the words. I like the words that I wrote in *Twelve*

Hats for Lena because the words are like little poems. Where's Baby's Belly Button is my best-selling book so I would have to say that the favorite to, but the words are so simple I wouldn't consider it actually writing!

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 one 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.

Do you enjoy writing children's books?

I consider myself one of the luckiest people on earth to get to do what I do. Every day I get to wake up and go in my studio and paint pictures and create books with words. As an artist I can't think of anything I would rather be doing and I consider myself extremely lucky to have succeeded in this career. But you should know that sometimes the work is very difficult and I get frustrated when things aren't going the way I hoped. Some times the words sound terrible, sometimes I paint pictures that don't look good, the colors are wrong and the babies' faces are strange. Then I have to start over. It's not as easy as it looks but I love what I do.

How long is the process of the book?

Again that depends upon what kind of book it is. If it's a 32-page picture book it takes between 5 to 6 months. If it's a six-page lift the flap book I can do that in six weeks to two months. But there are always interruptions in life... like having the flu or having to

go to the dentist or just the craziness of a busy life getting in the way. So sometimes it takes a lot longer to do a project than I think it will.

Which one of your books is your favorite?

I think I am already answered this question.

Thank you for all of your questions. I really enjoyed answering them and I hope my answers were helpful.

All my best... Karen

