

Doodlebuds interview

www.doodlebuds.blogspot.com interview with Heather Zschock:

As the first installment of [my author/artist series](#), I contacted the [Karen Katz](#), author/illustrator of Jake's new favorite lift-the-flap books. I asked Karen if she would be kind enough to share her experiences in the publishing world, and to share her insight and advice about her journey to becoming a super-successful author/illustrator who has published over 45 children's books, won countless awards, and currently has over 3 MILLION books in print! But, to summarize the true measure of her success, she says, "I am living my dream. I couldn't think of anything I'd rather do than children's books."

Here are some of her responses to my questions (*my comments are in italics*):

1. How did you get your first book published?

After my husband and I adopted our daughter from Guatemala, I decided I wanted to illustrate children's books. For nine months, I painted pictures of kids and anything that looked like it could be in a children's book. I put together a portfolio to show. My second appointment was at Henry Holt with someone I had known from 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. This talk developed into my first book.

2. What is your educational background? (*I've summarized*)

Karen attended the Tyler school of Art in Philadelphia, and Rome, Italy. After graduating, she went to the Yale Graduate School of Art and Architecture. Before doing children's books full time, she created costumes for magician Doug Henning, and illustrated and designed for over 50 publishers. (*It helps a little if you know someone in the field. Use contacts to try to find someone...anyone in the publishing field*)

3. 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.

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

I did two books called NO BITING! and NO BURPING! (retitled EXCUSE ME!) 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.

5. What advice would you give to someone just starting out as an author?

- Get the words down on paper.
- Write the manuscript and watch out for putting too many words in it.
- Keep your age group in mind.
- You do not need an illustrator to illustrate your manuscript (*as a creative director, I completely agree...this can often hinder your submission unless it is dead on!*)
- Get the book: [Children's Writers and Illustrators Market](#). This book told me everything I needed to know.
- Read, read, read other peoples books.
- Make time to write and do the work...there will never be a perfect time.

6. What advice would you give to someone just starting out as an illustrator?

- Make a portfolio of at least 15 excellent pieces of art in a consistent style
- Make sure you have children in some of the art

- Look at what is being done by other illustrators (*you can see many on-line*)
- Keep at it!

And, lastly she says, "I encourage everyone to write books. Lots of publishers will read manuscripts without an agent submitting it."

If you go to [Karen's adorable website](#), there is additional information about her, and [helpful hints for illustrators and authors](#). I love the photos of Karen in her studio! It's always fun to see where people create!

Good luck everyone, and thank you to Karen for sharing her experience! I hope to be reading your books soon!