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***Princess Baby* ...Where did that idea come from?**

Every project I create 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 keep all my current projects and ideas separated by placing them in different colored file folders that often get doodled on as I sit and think and stare into space, which I do a lot. One day as I was staring into space having a thought, I doodled a one-inch line drawing of a tiny baby girl with a crown on. I wrote *Princess Baby* across the top of her head and thought, "that's a cute idea". And that was that.

Months later I was meeting with Lee Wade to dream up a project we could work on together. We talked and I showed her some stuff I had thought about and we talked some more and we decided to do an "I Can Help, I Can Get Dressed, etc." series for toddlers. As I packed up my pencils and scraps and many file folders she pointed to the tiny doodle of the little baby princess that just happened to be on the front of one of the file folders.

"What's that?" she asked.

"I don't know, its just an idea I had for book about a little girl who wants to be a princess".

"That's our book. That's it! We will call it Princess Baby."

And that was the birth of the book.

Of course it took months of writing and painting before we had nailed it down but she saw something in that doodle, some kind of fantasy and charm...and I always trust Lee's vision.

Did the book involve special research or travel?

Oh, very special research! I got to go to toy stores and buy tiaras and flouncy princess dresses and wands and jewelry. Of course nothing fit me (except the tiaras and jewelry) so I hung it on all on my bulletin board. I really wanted to wear the plastic princess high heels but my feet are way too big.

How long have you been at work on this book?

The book took about six months to do from start to finish. I work on three projects at the same time so it's hard to really know how long it took. In the beginning of a book like this I need to figure out who my character is, what she is wearing, what color her room is and who are her stuffed animal friends. This takes a lot of fooling around and countless mistakes but once I get it all the rest of the illustrations fall into place. The beginning of a book is hardest part and always takes the longest.

What comes first the images or the words and is the process the same or different for each book.

The process is always a little different. I am a very visual person so even when I am writing words I see pictures in my mind.

Princess Baby started out as an inch high thumbnail sketch.

I blew up the thumbnail drawing on my computer and printed it out seven inches tall. Then I created a painting of the character and worked on her dress

and jewelry and crown. Once I had her figured out I started to do little thumbnail drawings of the story, which changed about twenty times through out the creation of the book. A lot of this book came out of my sketches and a tight collaboration of visuals and words. Lee and I really gave birth to this little princes together.

You have written and illustrated over 45 books, 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.

Do other artist influence your work?

I must own about 1000 children's books at this point. Some great illustrator is always influencing me and then of course I have to buy their book. I love kids art, folk art and outsider art.

Where do your ideas come from?

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, little drawings and paintings, and just about anything you can think of that has an idea connected to it. Everything is a potential idea for me. It's a bit of a problem sometimes because every time I open a drawer in my studio I'm off and running with a new idea. Sometimes hours can go by and I remember that I have a book deadline to finish!

What's a typical workday for you?

I get up around 6:30. Get my daughter off to school and usually go right into

my studio. (A lot of times in my pajamas) I work in a big loft space. Immediately I look at what I did the day before. I try to focus my mornings on my most creative work, which is usually my painting.

I am easily distracted so this is what my day goes like:

...Look at work from yesterday, lay it out on the floor, check e-mails (a big distraction,) check Amazon and B&N websites, (a big distraction,) see what I recorded on DVR, (a big distraction,) make a pile of errands to run, make a pile of mail to answer, make a pile of "to do" and throw it on the floor to remind me to do it. Get dressed. Sometimes throw on some makeup.

Go to drawing table and work on my current project. It depends what stage the book is in. In the beginning of a book it is thumbnail sketches, in the middle it is the final art to paint and at the end is the finishing of the book.

Sometimes I switch and work on the writing in the morning.

I'm usually distracted at least once with a new idea for a new book. That takes a good hour out of my workday.

Around 2pm I remember to eat some lunch (and often get out of my pajamas if I haven't already) I am always working on three projects at once so by now I have juggled a little work on all three projects. After a bite to eat I switch to writing and doing research. Keep in mind that through out this whole day I am also shopping on the Internet and talking on the phone and reading a paragraph here and there from Oprah's Magazine. Oh yes, and making the bed and picking up everyone's socks and loading the dishwasher. (Although my husband does a lot of that)

Around 3 o'clock I go outside to get some air and take a walk around my neighborhood. I live in New York City and its very stimulating. It's a little too stimulating so sometimes I find myself in the Art Store, Kate's Paperie or Urban Outfitter for hour and then remember I have to go home and work. I do a few errands and come home. From five to six o'clock I say hi to my daughter, give her some food, make sure she has started her homework and prepare dinner. After dinner I clean my studio and flop on the couch and watch whatever I have DVRed. Lately it's Grays Anatomy. I read a bit too. Sometimes I go back into my studio and peek at what I painted that day. I chat with my husband, chat with daughter (if she will let me...she's 17)...and go to bed... that's my day.

What books did you read as a child?

When I was little I actually didn't read much. I played with a lot of paper dolls. I do remember looking at the paintings in an edition of Grimm's Fairy Tales .The paintings of Snow White and Red Rose, Rumpelstiltskin, and Thumbelina. They were very scary, but I loved them. They were mysterious and ornate and fed my imagination. I think that's what a good illustration or story does.

What strikes me is that now I am an avid reader and I adore children's books ...so it's never too late to learn to love books.

Do you have a few childhood memories to share?

I used to go in the crawlspace in our basement and set up all my dolls and hold court there. It was pretty dirty and dank down there but I didn't know the difference. It was my secret domain. My sister hung out there with me. Sometimes my mom couldn't find us for hours.

I had a very vivid imagination. I used to think someone lived in the drainpipe that was on the side of our house. I used to talk into it.

We had a dogwood tree that had one very low branch. I used to jump on that branch and pump it up and down with my foot. As I pumped that branch Easter eggs came out of the tree...in my mind.

I also thought the boogie man lived under my bed. Didn't everyone?

But my all time favorite fantasy was that I had a tiny friend that lived in my pocket. She could fly...and so could I. I could make myself as small as her too. She came with me to school but no one ever saw her. I still think that would be the greatest thing ever. To fly and be able to shrink myself down and have a little friend in my pocket.

Did you want to be an artist when you were young?

I think I did. When I was in 2nd grade we all made posters for the Strawberry Festival. I painted a merry go round on mine. I found some plastic horses and had my mom slice them in half from head to tail so they would lay flat on the poster. Then I glued them on my poster right where the merry go round horses were supposed to go. The teacher told me I was very original and talented. She hung my poster up in the front of the class. That stuck with me my whole life. That encouragement.

What kind of hobbies do you have?

When you get to do what I do all day you don't need a lot of hobbies. My painting is my hobby! But here's some things I like to do too, I like to read, watch movies, Showtime and HBO. I like to rearrange my furniture and shop for beautiful, sheets, textiles, pretty plates and bowls. I like to have dinner with my girlfriends. I like to hang out in toy stores and bookstores. I like to sit on the roof of my building in NYC and watch the airplanes go over my head. I love to go to my daughter's basketball games and travel. I like to make soup and I like to sleep.

Some interesting info about me:

1) I work in a loft in NYC in the winter and a studio in the country in the summer. I look out my window and see buildings and lots of people in winter and I see trees and flowers and squirrels in the summer. I like the contrast of both places.

2) I work in my pajamas a lot.

3) Sometimes I put the potholder in the refrigerator. Mostly when I'm busy working. I'm very distracted.

4) I love to sit in cafes and watch people.

5) I love to sit in playgrounds and watch kids

6) I love to sit in movies in the dark and listen to people before the movie starts.

7) I am living my dream. I couldn't think of anything I'd rather do than children's books.