

*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 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.

*The Colors of Us* all started when I saw this beautiful black man in the lobby across from my loft. I was inspired to do a folk art painting of him, and I'm not sure why. A week later I was inspired again to paint another folk art painting of my daughter. I wrote across the top of the painting "My skin is brown". I showed my editor the painting and she said "Wow, that is your next book!"

It took a year to get the text correct. That became *The Colors Of Us*.

*Counting Kisses* was done first with little tiny thumbnail sketches and a few words. I sold that book with one page of magic marker thumbnails and 6 sentences.

*What's one of your favorite stories about what inspired you to write and illustrate one of your books?*

When my daughter was 4 yrs. old we began having talks about the differences in our skin color. She is Guatemalan and I am Caucasian. One day I was at her school and I looked around at all the beautiful kids and noticed that they were lovely shades of brown. They were browns like cinnamon and butterscotch. I wanted to celebrate those differences and inspire kids to see themselves as not either "black" or "white" but something unique.

That was the inspiration for *The Colors of Us*.

On the other hand, giving sloppy wet kisses on my daughters belly button was the simple inspiration for "Where's baby's belly button?"

*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 Tivo, (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 in case the Fed Ex guy comes)

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.

Around 2pm I remember to eat some lunch (and often get dressed 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 NY and its very stimulating. I do a few errands and come home. From four 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 reruns of Will and Grace. I chat with my husband, chat with daughter (if she will let me...she's 15...and go to bed...that's my day.

*What's one word of advice or encouragement you would like to offer to Writer Mama's just getting started writing Children's picture books?*

Get the seat of your pants into the seat of your chair and make time to do the work. It will never be the perfect time and you will never have enough time to do everything. But do it -do it -do it. Read ,read, read and look at great children's book writers and illustrators. Love what you're doing. Send your stuff out. Keep at it.