

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Authors of Children's books

Author: Tracy Bryan

Fly Away

I glanced back at my previous life, said goodbye with little hesitation and began a journey that would transform me.

My family and I moved to Florida about three years ago. We live in a unique Fly-In community that's also an airport. You can literally fly a small plane down onto the runway, across a taxiway and park it right beside your house. My husband is a pilot and had been trying to get me to move here for sometime. Finally, after watching my two kids grow into young adults, I succumbed and we found our new home in Spruce Creek Fly-In.

Up until we moved here and for as long as I can remember, I had been a reluctant flyer. Actually, I was pretty much afraid to fly. Yet here I was, living among pilots in a place that revolved around aviation. What was I thinking? I decided to embrace this fear and learn all about flight. I spent hours researching the basics of lift. I asked many questions and physically took rides in our small plane whenever I could.

This is really where my writing journey began. This is when I transformed, lifted off the ground and began to fly. At first I wrote children's books about the fundamentals of flight, airplanes and the aviation world. I wrote simple stories about flying with my family and what life was like in our unique community. I didn't really have a goal or a market in mind, I just enjoyed writing again after so many years of not.

I didn't take myself seriously back then. I simply loved writing. The only problem was that I just didn't have the passion for what I was writing about. Then it occurred to me, if I could overcome the fear of flying, why not empower kids to do the same? Why not help kids gain the courage to face all their fears? The writing of these aviation books then somehow morphed into creating books about emotions, self esteem and coping skills.

I wrote voraciously. My first creation was called Fly Away. A simple book of prose for little kids. It dealt with the feeling of needing to get away from something that feels uncomfortable. It was inspired by a family holiday visit that had left me feeling stressed. Miraculously, I channeled this feeling creatively and made a book. Looking back, it's not my best work, but it was so personally healing and it introduced me to a new way to write. I believe this was when I found my own writing "style."

Obviously illustrations are crucial to a picture book. Well I have no formal training in drawing and wouldn't want to attempt to bluff my way through this. However, I was determined to find pictures that would compliment the text in my books. I already had invested in a stock image membership and had used real pictures of airplanes for my aviation-themed books. Why couldn't I use stock images of different kids to illustrate the text in these books too?

I think this is some of my most unique work. As a child, I loved books with real photographs, especially if they were photographs of kids my age. I felt like I had a friend in my book that I could visit whenever I opened the page. A kid that was similar to me and could relate to the same things that I did. A kid that felt just like me.

A year later and I was starting to feel complete with my works and decided to refine some of the books I had written. At this point, I had quite a few series books for different aged kids from 4-8. I had created a website, developed a business and marketing plan and even purchased my first set of business cards. I joined some writing groups, (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Florida Writers Association and Florida Authors and Publishers) found a professional critique group (The Yellow Brick Road), entered some contests, and started to connect more on social media. I felt legit.

Enter my writing voice. For the next year I continued to write non-fiction books about all sorts of important topics. My bookshelf grew incredibly as did the age group that I wrote for. I started to notice a pattern in my writing and I found my voice. I'm convinced that writer's like to call it this because it's like hearing a voice in your head that compels you to write. What was streaming through my head during this time was unstoppable and I dared not silence it.

Two years into my journey and I was super motivated to create books for contemporary kids. These involved relevant and age-appropriate topics that affected kids and their families. It seemed like there were so many picture books out there with cute, fuzzy animals dealing with human emotions. How were kids going to relate to these sugar-coated versions of themselves and their world? I wanted to communicate with these kids through my books. There was a movement happening for more diversity in children's book publishing and I wanted to contribute and help address this. I felt there were very little kids books in the market that dealt with real kids or that represented them honestly. Suddenly my goals became writing about social issues- particularly mental health and mindfulness. My mission had just begun.

Mental health and illness is probably my favorite topic and one that I have witnessed and lived with. I am constantly doing research about mental wellness and I try to practice mindfulness and other Cognitive Behavior skills in my everyday life. Finally, I have gathered a following of interested readers with this topic. Parents and educators are buying my books, and based on their children's reviews of them, these kids are actually liking, relating and being inspired by them. That's all I need to know.

The cool thing about what I do is that while I'm educating kids how to understand and regulate their emotions, how to overcome their adversities and face their life challenges, I'm also teaching and reinforcing all these skills in myself. I hope and like to think that I am inspiring in kids the belief that armed with the proper tools, anything is possible and that they can accomplish anything.

Above all, I want kids to feel like, regardless of what they look like, or how different they may feel, they are so totally awesome just the way they are and they have a friend in the book that I've created for them!