



I'm an artist, a mom and a wife, a visual thinker, a lover of stories and adventure. If stranded on a desert island, I'd survive if I had music. I would thirst for color and hunger for something with which to write. I would think up things, write them in the sand and learn to just let them go with the tide, every day, while I searched for food.

I entered the world in Pittsburgh, PA, 1957, the year of the Frisbee, American Bandstand, and The Cat in the Hat. Sputnik 2 went into space with a dog on board and two years later our family traveled cross-country to the City of Angels. My sister was born and we promptly headed back to PA on the Monongahela River, where my other little sister was born. We three girls lived in a rental house owned by real cowboys who went west. What they left behind were the seed dreams for adventure. Free to roam for hours in the woods, the fields and fish pond without supervision, we found crayfish in the creek, caught sunfish in the pond, rescued animals into shoe boxes and took in strays. With no sense of boundary, distance, of maps or measured miles, the woods seemed to hold magical passages. You entered in one place and somehow emerged somewhere else entirely, in another

town. I had found magic right there the wooded hills of western Pennsylvania. It was everywhere, you just had to look. Reading was encouraged and there were plenty of books in the house. I still have my Blue Fairy Book, the first in a series of 12 titled by their different colors. I never knew of the other eleven books. Mine is a cloth hard cover edition with black and white ink drawings and color plates. When I look at the color illustrations now, they are garish, out of register, and yet this book was completely sacred to me as a child. It was my introduction to fairy tales. We had a tiny room with built in bookcases floor to ceiling where the Encyclopedia Britannicas lived next to my mom's sewing machine. We were allowed to use the junior version for homework, but the dense onionskin pages of the massive set were full of wonder for the endless mysteries of life's possible knowledge. The Companion Library was my favorite, two titles in one, upside down, Gulliver's Travels, flip it over and read Treasure Island. Just more fuel for the fire of adventure.



My relationship to color began with a set of 72 crayons bearing color names as mysterious as their visual sensation; periwinkle, maize, bittersweet, midnight, mulberry... colors that inhabited other worlds. I would be dazzled and sometimes overwhelmed by color for the rest of my life. I was a day-dreamy kid. Coloring was something I did to explore my thoughts. In first grade we were given a gigantic piece of paper that covered the desk along with some

crayons. "Draw something," Mrs. Hickman, our frighteningly ancient, cardigan wearing, glasses hanging on a beaded necklace, teacher said. I could fill a stack of coloring books but what should I draw? I was excited and a little daunted. Just then, the chubby girl with the leotards threw up all over the floor. Right next to me. Chaos ensued, the janitor came in with his mop contraption, the wild ropey strings twisting and squeezing through the wringer, like my grandma's forbidden washing machine. Next came the banana-chemical spray that permeated your nostrils and your memory forever. It was almost worse than the puke. I drew a tiny girl in the corner of my paper and filled the page with throw up; decorative swirls and colors of barf, chunks and dots making a fantastic swirling pattern. Could you blame me? Mrs. Hickman snatched up my paper, wrinkled it into a ball and threw it in the trash. I was dumbfounded if not horrified and insulted. I rose to her challenge, but that is another story. School book reports were always fun especially when I realized that by adding illustrations, I earned a better grade. Zoom forward to high school graduation and not a clue as to what to do with my life. I went to commercial art school and learned how to do art. But, just before I finished school, I met a real artist who impressed upon me that art is not just something you do, but something you become. I wanted to "be" an artist. I went on to study art history, printmaking and painting in college, and my journey westward began.

I still thought you had to make money as an artist to really be an artist. Actually I got that impression from one very intimidating interview with one extremely successful person in one highly sought after company. He leaned back in his executive chair with his long ponytail and bare feet up on his monumental desk and told me so. I went down many roads working with

different kinds of art and always working lots of other kinds of jobs to keep making art. I did graphic design, painted signs, printed t-shirts, painted clothing, jewelry, painted arty furniture. When I tried scratchboard for illustration, I discovered that I loved the black and the white of it, the hard edge and the process of reducing an image down to its bare bones. But, watercolor has become my favorite medium, for its ability to be simultaneously fluid and hard-edged, and always luxuriously luminous.

Reading inspires me to write down my own stories. I began with comic strips when I was young and it is still something I enjoy, a kind of journaling. I like reading the kind of books that I would love to write; the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Alice Hoffman, and then those who write as if ordinary living is a kind of magic, Margaret Laurence, Alistair MacCloed, Barbara Kingsolver, Mark Helprin. Before I went to Alaska I read Nancy Lord's, *Survival* thinking there was something in it I needed to know. Once I got there, I carried Margaret Muriel's, *Two in the Far North* with me like my guidebook to life. I wrote her a letter to reach out and let her know that the book was important to me. Authors have always held a kind of hero status. Stories lead us away from our everyday kind of worries and momentarily we step into someone's shoes. You might find relevance for what's happening in your own life and gain a little perspective.

I love language. I play with words to discover different sounds and meanings, just as I experiment with one surprising color next to another. Words have a different kind of power than pictures or even music. When I write, it is the images

that create the words for me. C.S. Lewis says it perfectly. "I have never exactly 'made' a story. With me the process is much more like bird watching than like either talking or building. I see pictures...Keep quiet and watch and they will begin joining themselves up...I have no idea whether this is the usual way of writing stories, still less whether it is the best. It is the only one I know: Images always come first." Writing and illustrating picture books allows me to move between two worlds. Pictures are an underlying force behind words in picture books, they tell a part of the story outside of the words. I believe that children have feelings and understanding beyond their capacity to express in language and that pictures speak in a language that words cannot. I write fairy tales set in real places right on the edge between believe and make-believe, a place where you allow magic to be real. Fairy tales give us permission to live the promise we made as kids, to remember that anything is possible and that we are put on this earth to partake in adventure. Magic is simply something we knew as children but had forgotten. Each year we move farther and farther away from it and when we are lucky it appears in brief flashes. Not the magic of rabbits in hats, but those briefest of moments when we step away from ourselves, let ourselves be taken away by a song, a memory, a beautiful sight, when we create something from nothing, these are all glimpses at a magical realm. Magic was always about believing, and believing is about faith. Where would we be without that? With story we can keep magic alive. Everyday. Once upon a time is right now.

My very first job was a photo re-toucher. After a short stint as

a package designer, I moved on to furniture maker, forest service ranger, art supply sales clerk, visiting artist, official band mom and bass player for our bluegrass band, freelance illustrator, mom and pop signmaker/t-shirt shop/gallery/graphics business, graphic designer, and now author-illustrator of children's books.

I have always lived in beautiful places or maybe it's that I've learned to see beauty in place...from my steel town river valley to the Rockies, the Great Northwest and the wilds of Alaska. Finding beauty and discovering the magic of everyday is the secret to art and the knowing that there is a story in everything. Our home now is in a village-sized town on the San Juan de Fuca Straits, on the Olympic Peninsula with lots of wind and water, right between two mountain ranges, under a rain shadow.

My husband and I have three kids who are growing up to be amazing people that we are both proud to know and love spending time with.

*"And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it." - Roald Dahl*