

http://www.unifiednewsgroup.com/fitchburg_star/community/fitchburg-author-publishes-third-picture-book-more-in-the-works/article_778ef99d-003f-530d-ac6b-19aa79f2c5aa.html

Fitchburg author publishes third picture book, more in the works

By Samantha Christian

Nov 26, 2015



Everyone had a Pat Zietlow Miller in their class.

You know, the kid who loved books so much they secretly read under their desks while the teacher taught math – or any subject, really.

An avid reader of the Encyclopedia Brown, Boxcar Children and Anne of Green Gables series, Miller knew she wanted to become a writer since she was in the seventh grade. But it took her decades before she acted on her dream of becoming a published book author.

“When I turned 39, I (thought) if I don’t try, I’m always going to regret it, and I’m always going to wish ‘What if?’” she told the Star. “Some people self-publish, and that’s awesome, but I wanted to see if I could get one published with a large, traditional publishing company.”

Miller, who has lived in Fitchburg for nearly 13 years, started out her career as a newspaper reporter and now writes corporate insurance information by day and, for the last eight years, children’s books by night.

“I’ve always been paid to write, but there’s a big difference between interviewing someone and writing a feature story and making something up totally from scratch,” she said.

Before Miller started crafting her own stories, she was busy researching the publishing industry, going to conferences, joining writing groups and checking out every picture book she could get her hands on. Once she had an idea in mind for her own book, nothing could stop her.

“I received 126 rejections and worked for four years before selling my first picture book,” she wrote to the Star. In the four years since then, Miller has sold nine other books.

“It just shows, I think, that if you really want something and you’re willing to put in the effort ... you probably can do it,” she said.

Her third picture book, “Sharing the Bread,” was recently published in time for her favorite holiday, Thanksgiving, and more stories are set to hit the stands in 2016.

Creative process

The first two lines of “Sharing the Bread” randomly popped into Miller’s head while working at American Family Insurance. The story started with a mother in a kitchen doing a certain task to prepare a meal.

Then, Miller assigned different tasks to other members of the family and wrote the story in rhythmic verse. When she sent the story to a publisher, she was asked to make the everyday meal a holiday meal, instead.

“It was not a minor revision; every stanza I had to rip apart (because) it rhymed,” Miller said.

As with all of her stories, the edits helped. She chose a Thanksgiving-themed meal set at the turn of the 20th century, and made sure to rework sentences so the words “turkey” and “cranberries” didn’t fall at the end.

Miller said she thought about her parents and how meals came together while writing the story, which ends with the lines, “We will share the risen bread. / Our made-with-love Thanksgiving spread. / Grateful to be warm and fed. / We will share the bread.”

“My books are kind of a mix of things inspired by one of my kids and then just random imagination,” she said.

Miller's first book, "Sophie's Squash," was inspired by her youngest daughter after she took a butternut squash home from the grocery store, named it, put a face on it and carried it everywhere.

"I added a bunch of stuff that didn't really happen to make it a better story," she said.

Published in 2013, the book has received numerous accolades and is Miller's personal favorite. "Sophie's Squash" won the Golden Kite Award for best picture book text, and it was an Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Honor and Charlotte Zolotow Honor. A sequel, "Sophie's Squash Go To School," will come out in June.

A big part of what makes her picture books come alive is the illustrations. Each publisher picks an illustrator from around the world who will be the best fit for a story, and Miller has yet to be let down. While she sometimes gets a peek at sketches early on, she generally just sees the product in one of its final stages.

"I think these illustrators are so good at what they do that I wouldn't want them looking at my text and changing things, so I tend not to change what they do because they're just so talented," she said.

Her second book, "Wherever You Go," made the Midwest Independent Booksellers list, but Miller wasn't expecting to see a rabbit on the cover. Although she never described the characters, they were always people in her mind.

"(When I first saw the book it was) three minutes of like solid shock, and then I went, 'But it's an awesome rabbit,' and it is," she said. "And now I can't imagine it any other way."