TRANSCRIPT

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EPISODE NAME: A Discussion with writer and illustrator Martha Lang of Burlington Vermont

Today on across the fence we will meet the Vermonter who is a writer and illustrator of children's books. Her books include unique characters and drawing from her own childhood she has a recipe book that highlights the fun and importance of cooking together through the generations. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson. My guess this afternoon is not only of writer and illustrator she also teaches people how to write draw and get a book published. It's a pleasure to welcome Martha Lang of Burlington and thanks so much for being here.

Martha.: Thank you so much.

Judy.: You've written and illustrated 10 books. Can start out by telling us about the books you've written and how you got started?

Martha.: The first book that I wrote and illustrated is called quack is a very simple book. Quack is a Duck. Quack says quack quack. Bright colors very simple wood lots of drawings. From there I went on to another children's book. Snuggles is about our rabbit and Benny the bunny and Benny the dog with big years that fly. These are illustrated books that are for young children with lots of pictures.

Judy.: When did you start writing?

Martha.: Long have I've been doing a lot of writing over the years. Short stories and sat but I started about two years ago putting together ideas for children's books and I've been working on it steadily since then.

Judy.: Most of your books are children picture books so talk a little bit about the difference between a picture book and a chapter book and where children make the transition between the two.

Martha.: A picture book is generally read by an older person to a child lots of pictures with text a chapter book is generally read by the child themselves and it has more words and fewer pictures. That's not to save a chapter book can't be read by an adult's to a child but that's just the general rule of thumb.

Judy.: Our director roger Lewis is going to show us a few more of your children's books. As we take a look tell us where the ideas for your books have come from.
Martha.: I was read to a lot as a child so we all had Beatrix Potter in the house rabbits and bunnies and ducks. Then I took my own ideas of experiences quack the duck the ocean swimming and incorporated it into a little book. It's from reading a lot and having been read to and seeing the books around the house.

Judy.: Two you tell me a little bit about the process of writing and illustrating and then what I love is testing them which is the great part.

Martha.: Generally one gets an idea for writing a children's book. Is the idea that you start with and you write the text. Even if it's 10 sentence is there you go on to writing more sentences. Then you put out pictures. You have ideas for pictures generally for the most part its 32 pages for a children's picture book. Once you get the picture sketched and the rough draft on you go back. I do and this is the general way you do it you go back and edit the text to work with the pictures then you go back to edit the pictures to work with the text and it's a process of back and forth. A lot of its just rough drafts editing and then you have what you consider a completed first draft.

Judy.: That's just the first draft because you make changes after that. Tell me a little bit about how you make those changes and the side of the changes need to be made.

Martha.: I always take my first draft of the both color pictures text I think it should be published and test with different groups of children at the library in South Burlington and Burlington library and the schools. I see how children react to these books. What's making them laugh the most what they're finding confusing and I go back and tried to eliminate the parts that are confusing them and do more of the illustrations that they think are so funny.

Judy.: Can you give me some examples?

Martha.: In one of the books Benny the bunny. Benny has two sisters and the children were getting the sisters confused. One is a writer and one as a painter. So in order to clarify that which one is which I gave the painter of beret and the writer a sun hat. That seemed to clear up the problem.

Judy.: OK that's something you probably wouldn't rely to until the kids were looking at it.

Martha.: They couldn't tell the difference even though they had pencils and the paintbrush.

Judy.: So you have more examples too?

Martha.: I have the story Teddy about a dog was very big ears. Teddy helps all the neighborhood children. One of the ways he helps the children is Margaret lost her father. Before I read the story at the library the library and realized that I didn't have Teddy find the father before the end of the book. So I immediately change the book when I read it to them. Margaret does find her father and teddy helps her. There are major changes by doing these pilot tests.

Judy.: You probably assumed that it was evident the father would be found but the children didn't realize that.

Martha.: Correct the librarian and of course the children need concrete proof that the father was found.

Judy.: And then you are talking about your main character quack at the beach.

Martha.: One of the things the children found interesting was when quack when to the beach he took a beach ball an umbrella sunglasses they like this play on it in the building and building and one of the children said his suntan lotion. They like this idea that quack and quack also sings. He sings
songs in the shower he sings songs in the shower with the radio playing. And like the idea of things building one after the other.

Judy.: Nice. What about self-publishing, maybe you can explain that process. Because that was the road you chose to go on because I've talked to various other authors through the years and they say publishing can be a problem.

Martha.: I decided to do self-publishing for any number of reasons. The most difficult part was finding a publisher whose prices I could afford and who had of setup that was something I want to work with. One thing you have to remember when you self publish. Don't give away any of your rights to the book. A lot of the publishing companies even though yourself published take your rights to work with this book layer on. The first thing you have to make sure is this book belongs to you all the rights. Then you talk to them and work with them and I had a very successful experience the first time so I went back to second year to the same printing house. Very very helpful.

Judy.: As a self-published author how do you promote your book because isn't that something the publishers usually do too?

Martha.: Yes I go to a different bookstores and do signings. I've gone around selling my books at all the local bookstores in the Burlington Montpelier and Stowe area. My books are available if the local bookstores. I get them reviewed in the local papers. I'm on talk radio and also here. A number of different things and it's a lot of fun. I also go to the nursery schools selling my books. It's been a very interesting experience.

Judy.: Let's talk about your cookbook it's called family fun cookbook granny mommy and me. What is it that prompted you to write this book?

Martha.: I always liked to cook with my mother. I found all of my grandmother's recipes and I have my mother's recipe book and all of her recipes and I thought that this would be a very nice way to have a memoir in memory of my grandmother and my mother and I always still bake now. This was a wonderful time doing this one.

Judy.: This is nice because we actually get a chance to meet your mother and your grandmother. There are pictures and original recipes printed in beautiful script handwriting you just don't see any more these days. Family pictures.

Martha.: All of the recipes for the most part our ones that are takes cookies pies sweet treats.

Judy.: Well yeah.

Martha.: It's wonderful it's once that children would like to have. Each recipe that I have in the book has the special story attached to the family a holiday something about the recipe has a special story attached to it.

Judy.: Let me share the one on tollhouse cookies. In Stowe Vermont where I learned to ski the beginner area was called the toll house. I thought the cookies are named after it. Toll has cookies were always in the cookie jar when I was growing up. Skiing and tollhouse cookies are two very happy memories. These cookies remain in the winter when there was little chance of the chocolate chip smelting in the heat. My nieces and nephews love them and I'll make double recipes when I knew they were coming home. That something very special.

Martha.: Very special the tollhouse cookies.

Judy.: This is one of your more popular books.
Martha.: It is it's sold at the Shelburne country store and a lot of the different Health Food Stores. I was actually quite surprised it was so popular but I'm delighted.

Judy.: It's all the family recipes that a lot of us remember all in one collection city don't have to go through. If you ever seen my recipe box it's nothing is labeled correctly where should be so it takes forever to find the recipes.

Martha.: Yes it was fun.

Judy.: Why would this be a good cookbook for kids do you think?

Martha.: It's very simple it's not a lot of recipes. It's the recipes that children like to make. Fudge taffy cookies pies. All the things that a child wants to eat.

Judy.: A lot of things that traditionally revolve around holidays as well.

Martha.: Yes I have the recipes so that thanksgiving dinner with the gravies and stuff things roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. All the meals are complete meals lamb with the lamb sauce so it makes it easier to pick a meal.

Judy.: Let's talk a little bit more about your illustrations. Are you an artist?

Martha.: I do a lot of artwork. I spent a lot of time doing our work. I've taken some lessons in New York City but I'm very much an amateur artist.

Judy.: How long does it take you develop one of your characters when you're illustrating?

Martha.: I spend a lot of time thinking about it then the sketches. 30 or 40 sketches. It'll take me at least three or four weeks working on it cleaned down working on it and then I have to finalize it and color it in. But it's fun.

Judy.: What about the children's books how long does it take to put the books together between the illustrations and the writing?

Martha.: I do it over the course of the year it would take at least a month. But as the ideas. Even now I'm thinking of ideas for my next book and I will write for a while illustrate write. The thing is every day I do something tortes the books. I either write illustrate draw something is being done course the book it's a rare day that I don't do something towards it.

Judy.: Is that discipline really important if someone wants to write books.

Martha.: No doubt you have to say to yourself any to work every day. It might not be a lot. Some days as the deadline gets closer for my books I might work 12 hours a day editing I have an editor I have to send it to the editor to get it back. Discipline is key to all of this yes.

Judy.: You actually help other people and answer questions and give seminars.

Martha.: I do yes and teaching a course on creative memoir writing at the University of Vermont in October. And I'm also teaching a course on writing and illustrating books. At the request of a library or a senior center I do go out and give free seminars on writing and illustrating children's books and it's very popular.
Judy.: I was going to say everyone seems to think that a gravitates tours to children's book because we all have great memories of books to read as children and I can do that.

Martha.: And the audience can I think they just need encouragement some suggestions. The lectures are very well attended and as lots of fun I mean so many nice people doing this I really do.

Judy.: You musket a lot of great stories.

Martha.: I do I do and I'm so delighted people want to do it and they want to leave it for their children for the most part. Either they want the memoir for their children or they want to tell a story of their own life through the book illustrations.

Judy.: That's interesting point because it seems to be very important to a lot of people is family history.

Martha.: Yes and there's different ways to put family history together. Cookbook photographs poems this is what one of the courses will be creative memoir writing.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about what you have coming up in the future? Are you going to be doing more? You have a couple additions of quack.

Martha.: Right I have quack and I have quack is back. And I'm working on another one. Quack is so popular with a bright colors. Quack again. I have Elizabeth's world a memoir on my mother. I finished writing two young Nancy drew mystery novels. The mystery of the haunted house and kidnapping at the beach so those will be out. I have Jen the genius story about a little girl who's trying to become a ballet dancer and the fairies that help her. And the wise school of magic about Winnie wise and there magic school.

Judy.: Where you find time to do all this these are a lot of projects?

Martha.: I'm a very hard worker very disciplined and its priority. These are ideas. There's a lady named Mrs. Wise there was a lady named Mrs. Wise near as at Cape COD so I'm working with her son who's about my age on the wise school of magic. It's fun every time I go back to the house I think of another story which is part of what I like to think about.

Judy.: Do you draw on a lot of your own personal experiences between people that you have met at or childhood experiences?

Martha.: Yes definitely. Quack is back. Fluffy is a story about a little bunny and a boy who gets a bonnet from his grandmother and fluffy wants the bonnet. It was my mother who was always making little bonnets for my nieces and nephews. I thought that was a cute little story.

Judy.: If someone's interested in finding out more on how to write or to find out more about your books what should they do?

Martha.: I have a webpage great art and books.com one word or my e-mail address is great art and books at aol.com. Or they may call me my Vermont number is 802-862 1094 and I can give them information on the course I'm teaching at the University of Vermont or set up something at the senior center school for seminar.

Judy.: OK also local bookstores carrier books?
Martha.: They do. All of the bookstores in the Burlington area are carrying them. The toy store in Stowe has it bear pond books in Montpelier and healthy living and the Shelburne country store. They've been very supportive of the local bookstores and of deeply appreciative.

Judy.: Martha thanks so much for joining us and bringing in your books it's been fun.

Martha.: Thank you it's a lot of fun to be here. Thank you so much.

Judy.: That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on across the fence.

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