

Author Interview With Terri Sabol by Itsy Bitsy Book Bits

For those new to your work, please tell us a bit about yourself, your books and your genre/s

- I am a children's book author, known for my heartwarming and entertaining stories featuring the real-life adventures of my two beloved rescue kittens, Oscar and Emmy. Born and raised in Texas, I developed a love of writing and storytelling at a young age, and I always dreamed of one day becoming an author. Thinking that was out of reach, I focused on my other dream... teaching.
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- After graduating from college with a Master's degree in education, I worked as an early childhood teacher, and it was during this time that my passion for picture books truly blossomed. I was inspired by the joy and wonder that children experienced when reading and listening to stories, and it was this love for inspiring young minds that led me to create my own series of children's books.
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- My debut book, "Oscar and Emmy Get Rescued", was published in 2016, and it told the heartwarming story of how I came to adopt my two kittens from the animal shelter where I volunteered. The book was an instant hit with children and parents alike, and it quickly became clear that there was a demand for more stories featuring Oscar and Emmy and to help educate children on the importance of being involved in pet care. Over the years, I have continued to write new books in the series, each one capturing the unique personalities and quirks of my two adventurous cats. My books not only entertain children, but also promote the values of compassion and kindness towards animals, as well as the importance of rescue and adoption.
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- In addition to my Oscar and Emmy Series, I have also written several other books showing off my writing skills, including "Green With Envy", "Kneading a Winning Idea", and "Raccoon Reunion". I have a new series featuring animals from all over the world that will be released in early 2025. My literary works have garnered critical acclaim, further cementing my status as a respected and beloved children's book author.
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- When I'm not writing, I can often be found spending time with my two rescue kitties, Oscar and Emmy. I also love traveling and exploring new places and visiting old favorites, all the while taking inspiration for my next book. Through my stories, I hope to inspire children to explore the world around them, to embrace their imaginations, and to always be kind and compassionate towards others, especially animals.
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What lessons have you learned as a writer?

- I learned that with being a picture book author, you aren't spending the majority of your time writing. Most people don't realize that publishing a book is so much more than having an idea and writing the book. There are so many layers of revision and editing (including by peers and paid editors), researching and hiring an illustrator, graphic design, formatting, book sizes, knowing printing options, website design and upkeep, social media content and engagement, newsletters, blogs, author visits to schools, in-person events, digital author visits, keeping up with inventory, tracking royalties, ads, sales taxes, IRS taxes, etc. Plus, I like to aim to read up to 10 new picture books a week.
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- For some people, writing a book may just be a passion project. For others, they want a career of being an author and must learn the business side of it. In the beginning, it might be a lot of trial and error. If this is what you really want, do the research, surround yourself with a great team, and don't give up.
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In your everyday life how do you give back to the world?

- I've always volunteered a lot, whether in animal shelters, women's shelters, or church. I love the feeling of giving back to the community. Since writing books, my focus has been on spreading awareness to as many people as I can about helping animals. By myself, I can only personally help so much or adopt so many cats, but I hope to inspire many people to do what they can. Also, on my social media, I post a positive and uplifting quote twice a week. I also include funny cat-related memes and comics too to bring a little joy to people's days.

If your life had a theme song what would it be?

- Currently, I think "Life is a Highway" by Tom Cochrane is a perfect fit.
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- This song embodies a sense of freedom, adventure, and taking life's journey head-on. The lyrics talk about the ups and downs of life, which I've had a lot of, but it also emphasizes the need to keep moving forward and exploring new horizons.
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- Also, the upbeat and lively melody of "Life is a Highway" captures the determination and optimism required to face life's obstacles. It serves as a reminder to enjoy the ride and make the most out of each opportunity that comes your way.
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Name two authors you wish more people knew about

- Stacy McAnulty and Tara Lazar are among my top picks for children's literature authors. With over 30 books to her name, Stacy's writing spans across various genres, but her

Solar System series is my personal favorite, as it is incredibly clever. On the other hand, Tara is a master of wit, and her Private I series is an absolute delight.

What are some of your hobbies?

- Traveling is my favorite thing to do... whether solo, with friends, or with family. And by ship, plane, car, or foot. I love cruise ships, long airplane rides, road trips cross country, and hikes (including the Camino de Santiago). I have also recently started cooking and baking. I love watching movies, binging tv shows, doing puzzles, and playing board games.

When reading reviews, what is something you love to see written?

- The most satisfying aspect of reading a review of my book is realizing that someone not only enjoyed it themselves, but also recommended it to others.

What are you currently working on?

- My 8th book in the Oscar and Emmy series, Oscar and Emmy Foster a Kitten, illustrated by Roksana Barwinska, was released this spring.
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- One of my favorite past illustrators, Pei Jen, illustrated my latest book, "Raccoon Reunion". This was our 3rd book together. I also have a new illustrator, Paula Piechna, working on my upcoming The Know It Owl Series which will showcase a new animal in each book in a fun and different way.
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What books are currently in your to-read list?

- For fun light books, I have a couple of Sophie Kinsella's books. I also have a couple of memoirs, many of Amazon Prime's First Reads, and a laundry list of picture books.

What is your favorite book made into a movie/tv show?

- The Book Thief stole my heart. The performance of the young actress portraying Liesel completely amazed me. I was able to attend a special screening of the movie with a Q&A with some of the cast and crew.

What is something people would be surprised to know about you?

- In my younger years, I was a devoted cat person, while the mere presence of a dog would make me anxious and uncomfortable. I required my friends to isolate their furry companions when I visited their homes. However, as I spent more time with dogs in my 20s and 30s, I developed a fondness for dogs. I have even noticed that in people's homes, dogs seem to always come to me for petting and belly rubs. It's like these dogs are on a mission to convert me from being a cat lover to a dog enthusiast. Now, I even do house and pet sitting for dogs (and cats, of course).

Its Release Day! How do you celebrate?

- Ideally, I would have some kind of launch event... either at a local, indie bookstore or a virtual event. If not, I would definitely have a celebratory lunch or dinner with a couple of my biggest supporters. I will be on social media a lot that day, posting and then engaging with everyone who comments. Plus, I'll send out a newsletter to the fans of my books and make sure they know how much I appreciate them.

What is your writing routine with a new book? Do you outline your stories or do you do what the characters tell you to do as you go along? Mix of both?

- Although picture books have a lot fewer words than novels, I still prefer having an outline. To start, I brainstorm the concept and title for my book and do any necessary research. The Oscar and Emmy Series is inspired by real life with my cats, so the concept is usually easy. Next, I divide the story into three acts. After this, I utilize a story mapping sheet to create a phrase for each double spread of the book. Once I've finished this process, I begin writing.

What got you into writing?

- I've always felt writing was my best form of communication. As a child, I would prefer writing a note over talking to someone if I really wanted to express my feelings well and clearly.
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- I also feel like I have important messages to get out there. Being an author gives me that voice.

If you could have any super power, what would it be and why?

- I would love to have teleportation. Even though I love the journey of travelling from one place to another (via car, plane, or ship), I would love to be able to pop back and forth for a day or two so I don't miss birthdays and special events. It would also make author visits in different cities really easy.

If you came with a warning label, what would yours say?

- Ear plugs optional. Since I might talk your ear off if we are one on one. In larger groups though, I tend to be an introvert.

What do you need in your writing space to help you stay focused?

- I always need two monitors, especially if I'm doing research and editing. Having a detailed to do list helps me stay focused and on task, specifically if I have many tasks to get done. It helps keeps me from getting overwhelmed.

What comes first for you – the plot or the characters – and why?

- It varies by book. Sometimes it's the title, sometimes it's the topic or theme, and sometimes it's the characters. I love participating in Tara Lazar's StoryStorm, a one month challenge every January to come up with 30 different story ideas after being inspired by a series of daily blogs. I highly recommend this challenge to all picture book writers.

What is the most difficult part of your writing process?

- Although I find research a fun part of writing, it can be difficult when you find conflicting information. Always consider your sources.

Who has been the biggest supporter of your writing?

- I have a big support team... Candice has been there since my first book in technical and creative support, my parents are a huge emotional support (and my dad physically helps me at most of my in-person vendor events), my author mentor Kim has been a godsend in many professional ways, my editor Tamara helps me perfect my writing, and my boyfriend encourages my vision and helps creatively.

What time of the day do you usually write?

- I used to always write at night, was nicknamed Night Owl, and named my publishing company Burning the Midnight Oil Publishing. Now, I tend to try to keep normal 9-5 weekday hours.

What movie could you watch over and over again?

- I like a rom-com or an action-adventure. Or if I'm going to be traveling, I like to watch a movie that is set in the place I'll be visiting. Movies I've probably have rewatched the most include Notting Hill, Love Actually, and Dirty Dancing.

What's your favorite snack?

- I love the black & white fudge drizzle kettle corn from Popcorn Indiana. I also love chocolate covered pretzels or dried mango. Fresh fruit is always good too.

You are filling out this interview as part of a tour with Itsy Bitsy Book Bits.

What made you choose Itsy Bitsy Book Bits?

- Kim Ann highly recommended you and your service to help bring more exposure to my book series. I enjoyed your service for my Oscar and Emmy Gain a Friend, Oscar and Emmy Lose a Friend, Oscar and Emmy Weather a Hurricane, and Kneading a Winning Idea, so now I'm a repeat customer.

