

Author Interview With Mary Bleckwehl 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 word nut. I believe words matter. They are strong; they can lift spirits or cause the world to feel like it's crashing. I enjoy using them to write, read, and say things that matter and-often as I can-to make people laugh, or at least smile a bit. I also love variety in my life and that applies to what I read and write. My published (and unpublished!) work includes poetry (I've got a long way to go on that!), picture books, nonfiction for the education market, middle grade to young adult. I'm even working on graphic novel manuscripts. My favorite thing is to create humor. I'm not a naturally funny person but, after reading tons of other humorous books, I'm catching on to that art. I select universal themes that are relatable to all ages and stages, create likable and quirky characters (like a piggy pirate!), and love seeing what readers "see" in my books that I didn't even know was there!

What lessons have you learned as a writer?

- That the only rule about writing is-there are no rules! And of course this one-not everyone is going to love what you write. It's a subjective business and that's okay.

If you won the lottery what would you do with the money?

- I would buy a truck for my autistic son (who loves trucks and doesn't drive), find a big open field to let him test drive it VERY slow, and watch him smile until the cows come home! There would probably be some money left so I'd give it to organizations that work on the global water crisis to bring clean, accessible water to those who don't have it. My 2023 novel, *Fetching Water*, is a fictional piece that focuses on that issue and how each of us can make a difference.

In your everyday life how do you give back to the world?

- Every year, I offer several complimentary author visits to preschools, elementary schools, and middle schools who don't have funds to host an author. I also donate my books to hospitals, clinics, and community literacy efforts. I am very involved with my church, am active in PEO-an international women's organization devoted to scholarship for women, sponsor three children in impoverished nations, and contribute to organizations that support the global water crisis and those with different abilities.

If your life was a song what song would it be and why?

- "Brave" by Sara Bareilles because I am nervous about taking risks and need to be encouraged! When I hear that song with Sara's powerful voice and words, I am empowered to do better, say something and/or do something to help, and not waste a day that God has given me by worrying about the what ifs.

Name two authors you wish more people knew about

- Nancy McConnell (wrote Into the Lion's Mouth); Nancy Loewen (The Everybody Club and many more children's books)

What are some of your hobbies?

- Reading and writing! closely followed by traveling to new places and experiencing new cultures and activities. And always: hanging out with kids who keep me young and doing most anything with family like biking, snowshoeing, crafting, and games.

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

- I love hearing how the story related to the reader, what they felt, and what meaning it has in their life. Also, to encourage other readers, I appreciate it when reviewers state who else they think might enjoy the book. A writer's dream is a positive review but I understand not everyone is going to love my books. If one feels they want to say what they missed, or didn't care for, it's good to balance it with something they especially enjoyed. As a reviewer myself, I restrain myself from negative comments because every book isn't for every person.

What are you currently working on?

- I'm in about the fourth draft of a picture book about a unique girl who has an interesting way of communicating and hope to get an early reader graphic novel published. Also I am busy submitting a narrative nonfiction story about the world's first giraffologist. Let me know if you know a publisher interested in these!

What books are currently in your to-read list?

- Oh boy! This is a long list. I'll abbreviate it to: The Light We Carry (M. Obama), Magic Treehouse graphic novels, A Very Mercy Christmas (K. DiCamillo), Red, White, and Whole (R. LaRocca).

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

- The Glass Castle (Jeannette Walls)

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

- That I planned to join a branch of the military after high school.

If you could slip into the life of one of your characters, would you? If yes, who and why?

If no, why not?

- Good question! I wouldn't mind being some of my characters but in my newest release, Arrrgh! Me HATE To Wait! I could never be any of the piggy pirate characters because they live on the high seas, wear skimpy clothes, and dive for treasure deep beneath the ocean surface. I'm not a fan of being on or in large bodies of water so I'll stick to imagining all the adventures and be very satisfied with that.

What is your favorite family tradition?

- When we're all volunteering together toward a needy cause, like making meals for the Feed My Starving Children program.

Its Release Day! How do you celebrate?

- Fireworks if I could! I tell myself I'm proud of me and get right back to promoting the book I feel so passionate about so youngsters can read, listen, look, and enjoy!

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

- If she's on her computer, back away slowly.

What gives you inspiration for the stories you write?

- The resilience and kindness of people, especially children, inspires my stories.

What is your go to snack of choice?

- Lol. Let's say I start with salty (think cashews, macadamias and other expensive nuts) and work my way up through buttery croissants to malted milk balls and caramels.

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?

- I have a plan in mind (outline) but my characters totally take control and I guess that means I'm a pantsier, someone who writes without an outline.

You are filling out this interview as part of a tour with Itsy Bitsy Book Bits. What made you choose Itsy Bitsy Book Bits?

- Itsy Bitsy Book Bits did my Book Spotlight Tour in 2022 for my debut middle grade novel, *The Worry Knot* (Immortal Works Press). I was over the moon delighted and impressed with the personal touch, the organized rollout, and professional looking social media graphics. And the price doesn't break this author's (small) bank account!