

First off, thanks so much for joining us for an up-close and personal interview for TeensReadToo.com!

My name is Jen, and I'll be your server toda...oh, wait, wrong job! Anyway, thanks so much for taking time out of your writing schedule—which I'm sure is busy!—and answering a few questions for your readers and fans.

It's my pleasure, Jen! Thank YOU!

Let's get some of the typical interview questions out of the way first. When did you first know that you wanted to be a writer?

I've loved reading and story-telling from the time I could talk. In elementary school, my friends and I invented stories and songs and dances about Bottlebugs, some magical creatures I first imagined during a creative writing assignment. I continued creating and writing stories all the way through college, but it wasn't until I lived in Mexico for two years after college that I felt motivated and confident enough to try to complete and publish a book. In the meantime, I got my Masters degree in cultural anthropology, and when I was faced with the decision of whether I wanted to get my PhD in anthropology or write books for kids and teens, I chose to try for the latter. Four years later, *What the Moon Saw* was published.

Can you tell us a little bit about your road to publishing?

In a pretty disorganized fashion, I sent various somewhat finished versions of *What the Moon Saw* to about ten publishers and agents over the course of a couple years. Everyone rejected it except an editor at Cricket books, who gave me a wonderful three-page letter of revisions. I addressed all her comments, which made the manuscript much, much stronger. She ended up passing on it because of changes happening in her publishing company.

One day, I found, tucked away in the Publishers' Corner section of my SCBWI newsletter, an announcement that a new editor at Delacorte was open to unsolicited submissions. She was looking for magical realism, unusual story telling devices, friendship themes— all of which my manuscript contained! A few months later, she offered me a contract, and my husband and I rode our bikes to the fanciest restaurant in town to celebrate.

Tell us a little bit about either your latest or upcoming release. If you could only tell your readers one thing about the story that had to convince us to buy the book, what would it be?

My latest release is *Red Glass*, about a teenage girl's road trip to Mexico and Guatemala with an eccentric cast of characters— along the way, they find love, family, and hope in each other.

Hmmm. One thing about the story to entice you? The main character has one epiphany beneath a starry sky in small-town Mexico and another epiphany in a crap-filled bathroom in small-town Guatemala. You've got some magical beauty and some gritty ugliness all in one package. (It's easier for me to write books than to give sales pitches about them. Sorry if I inadvertently grossed you out and sent you running in the other direction...)

What, or who, has been the greatest inspiration for your stories?

Friends of all ages in Oaxaca who've welcomed me into their homes and lives. Indigenous women healers have been especially inspirational to me.

Let's hear about your family, who I'm sure are thrilled to have a published author among them!

I have a husband with beautiful blond hair nearly down to his butt (plus he's smart, nice, funny, etc.), a black long-short dog named Luli (half corgi, half lab) who is currently having behavior problems related to jealousy. Which brings me to the third and most recent member of our family, the object of Luli's jealousy, our one-year-old son who came from Guatemala in December 2007. He is mind-bogglingly adorable, and we're sure Luli will warm up to him soon if he keeps tossing her Cheerios and avocado from his high chair.

Now for some fun facts. What's your greatest comfort food?

Tea with lots of milk and honey. Always makes me feel good.

What are the first three things you do when you wake up in the morning?

- 1) Play with baby in bed (hubbie's already in the living room reading the paper).
- 3) Pee as baby practices opening and closing the bathroom door, which he finds endlessly fascinating.
- 4) Prepare tea with lots of milk and honey for me and a bottle for baby. (He's already a tea fiend— chamomile in a sippy cup for him, of course.)

If I came to your house and looked in your closet/attic/basement, what's the one thing that would surprise me the most?

The dusty boxes of vintage View master reels, which my dad gets for me from his flea market buddies. 3-D images have always felt magical to me, especially when they depicts something bizarre like the 1950's Barbie Family taking a vacation around the world. Or fluorescent sea anemone and squid from 10,000 Leagues under the Sea.

Everyone asks the question about "if you could be a tree, which tree would you be?" so I want to know: If you could be a color, which color would it be, and why?

The color of dusk—that blue-purple color. I love how everything seems to melt into each other at this time of night—like the boundaries between things are disappearing into the dusk color.

Who is your favorite cartoon character?

Hmmm. Someone on the Simpsons, for sure—not sure who—they're all great.

Which cartoon character is most like you?

Probably Lisa Simpson. We've got the somewhat neurotic artsiness and passion for social justice in common.

If you could beam yourself to anywhere in the world ("Beam me up, Scotty!"), during any time in history, where and when would it be—and why?

Hmm. The first thing that comes to mind is mid 20th century, a beach in Chile, early in the morning, when the poet Pablo Neruda is taking a walk and composing poems in

his head. It would be nice to cross paths with him on the beach, chat a little, and then keep on walking.

So what's your favorite type of music to listen to? Favorite musical artists? Do you listen to music while you're writing?

I have eclectic taste in music—I like old stuff, and international stuff— especially music from South and Central America—cumbia, salsa, meringue, reggae, folk, bachata, trova... Silvio Rodriguez, a Cuban trova singer/guitarist/songwriter, is probably my all-time favorite. I listened to his music while writing *What the Moon Saw*, and included some lines from his songs in the book. Lately, I've been listening to lots of Lila Downs, whose mother is Oaxacan and father American. Several of her songs are sung in indigenous Oaxacan languages (which, if you've read my books, you'll know is my cup of tea.)

Do you have any favorite T.V. shows? Movies you watch over and over again? What was the last movie you saw at the theater?

I'm addicted to LOST. I even dream about the characters. I'm guilty of lurking on LOST fan chat groups after the particularly mystifying episodes. Movies I watch over and over? *The English Patient, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Red, Hideous Kinky*. The last movie I saw was *There Will be Blood* in a cinema café near my house. I wasn't crazy about it, but I loved the second to last movie I saw in that cinema café —*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. I would watch it again and again.

You have the chance to give one piece of advice to your teen readers. What would it be?

Let yourself fly!

One last question. What stories can we look forward to from you in the future?

I have a book coming out in Fall 2009. I've finished writing it, but I'm still undecided about the title. The main character is a teenage girl who travels around the world with her flighty, ESL-teaching mother, having adventures and romance and figuring out the meaning of everything!

Again, thanks so much for joining us at TeensReadToo.com!

It's been delightful-- thank you!