

• Meet the Author •

Deborah Bruss

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit www.tonibuzzeo.com).



Deborah Bruss did most of her growing up in rural New Hampshire and especially enjoyed wandering the woods on her pony, Echo. She wrote her first children's story while in college, but didn't take the idea seriously until after her two sons were born. When one of them struggled with reading, she wrote a story for him, which she later submitted to an editor and nearly had published. She then decided to take writing more seriously. For several years she wrote for newspapers about the interesting things in her life—migrating salamanders, mud-loving children, hungry porcupines... She continues to live in rural New Hampshire with her husband, two sons (when they are home from their travels), two daugh-

ters and two of everything else: horses, dogs and cats.

Book! Book! Book! is a story about libraries, reading and books. Please talk about the role of each in your childhood.

DB: As a child, my favorite picture books were *Blueberries for Sal* and *Make Way for Ducklings*, both by Robert McCloskey. I was not a child who liked to sit down, so reading was not a big part of my life. I really fell in love with children's books when, as a teenager, I read to my little brother. The Paddington books got me laughing so hard that reading out loud was nearly impossible. Now I have four children. For years, reading to them was a favorite nightly ritual.

I am a children's librarian, and so I was very interested in the character of the librarian in Book! Book! Book! What is your personal connection to the librarian in the story, or do you have stories to share about the librarians in your life?

DB: After my two sons were born I went to work in a library

at a very small elementary school with just eighty-five students. My favorite times in the library were: reading to the younger children and taking on the voices of the different characters; helping the students find books that interested them; and buying books for the library. Though I no longer work as a librarian, I have several friends who are children's librarians. They are incredibly creative, and I wish that I could be in their classes.

An essential aspect of this charming story is the animal sounds, for it is the hen's "Book, Book, BOOK!" that finally grabs the librarian's attention and answers the animals' wish for something to do. Please talk about the creation of Book! Book! Which came first, the story or the animal sounds?

DB: The story and the animal sounds came at the same time. My father had told me a joke about a chicken who knew how to ask a librarian for a book. I am not good at remembering jokes, but this one stuck with me. I knew it would make a wonderful children's story. The story developed from the joke. Every fall, when my children returned

to school, our pets—dogs, pony, cats and rabbits—became bored. I knew that the animals in *Book! Book! Book!* felt this way, too, and this is why they went to the library.

Traditionally, animal characters stand in for child characters in children's books. In *Book! Book! Book!* the reader meets a cast of animal characters including the horse, the cow, the goat, the pig, the duck, the bullfrog and the hen. What were you like as a child? Were you the idea generator, sometimes overshadowed by larger children but ultimately triumphant, like the hen?

DB: I was always the smallest in my class, and still am shorter than most people I know. I was quiet when I was young but learned to speak up for myself as I got older. One of the ways I like to make my voice heard is through writing.

The collection of animals in this story forms a delightful team. How did you decide on these animals? Have they (or you) even considered another adventure for them off the farm?

DB: Since my son has a pony named Rhapsody-in-Blue there had to be a horse in the story. Tiphanie Beeke, the illustrator, did not know this when she created the pictures. I was quite surprised and happy to see a blue horse. As far as the other animals? A farm must have a cow. I think pigs are wonderful. (Who wouldn't

after reading *Charlotte's Web*?) As a child we had a very stubborn goat. The duck just waddled her way into the story. The mouse was the wonderful creation of the illustrator.

These animals have gone on several other adventures, but none have made their way onto the pages of a picture book. I hope they will soon.

How can readers learn more about you and your writing?

DB: Readers can go to www.deborahbruss.com. Sign my guest book while you're there!

