

• Meet the Author •

Jane Kurtz

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



Since 1994, Jane Kurtz has published twenty books—nonfiction books, professional books for teachers, picture books and novels that draw on her own childhood memories of growing up in Ethiopia, on living through the Red River flood of 1997, on her great grandmother's adventures traveling the Oregon Trail and on the minor crises of her children's lives (from a friendship gone sour to the grouchiness of a rainy day). Her books have gathered accolades, starred reviews and awards. A former elementary, secondary and university teacher, Jane is a frequent and popular visitor to schools around the world and is the co-founder of the first free library for children in Addis Ababa.

Rain Romp is quite different from many of your other picture books. What was your inspiration for Rain Romp? Do you have a personal connection to the story?

JK: In 1997, my family and I went through a tough time when a flood hit Grand Forks, North Dakota, where we were living. After the Red River went back within its banks, it seemed as if everyone in the city was mad and sad. Our house was torn down to make room for the new dike, and for a while, we lived in one of the trailers that the Federal Emergency Management Agency provided. One gray morning, I was driving my grouchy daughter to school when the first lines of *Rain Romp* popped into my head.

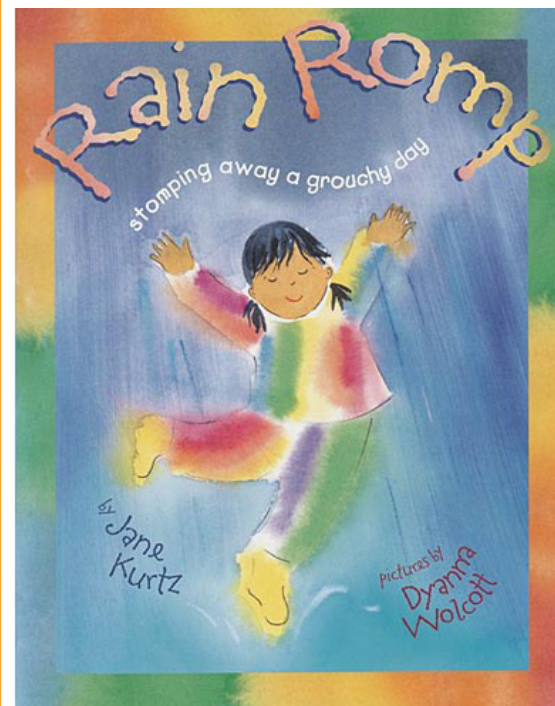
What were you like as a child? Were you ever a howling, growling wolverine?

JK: Unfortunately for me, my older sister was naturally good and responsible and always seemed to do the right thing. As a second child, I was much more likely to let my frustrations get the better of me. Whenever I complained about my own children's behavior, my mom was

happy to point out that I wasn't a very easy child to get along with, myself.

You grew up in Ethiopia where the weather is very different from the weather here in the United States. Please tell us about Ethiopian weather and what role it played in your life and games as a child.

JK: Ethiopia has two major seasons—rainy and dry. During the rainy season, it's not unusual to get a drenching downpour every day. While it rained, my sisters and I loved to climb into the attic of our house and create long sto-



ries about the families we cut out from the Sears catalogs my mom brought from the U.S. Crackling wood fires made the house with its mud walls and tin roof a cozy place. After the rain stopped, we could invent all kinds of games with the puddles.

Your language in this book is quite poetic, sometimes rhyming, sometimes metered, resulting in a charming read-aloud. Can you tell us more about the process of writing this book?

JK: I spent a lot of time reading aloud when I was a girl. My sisters and I also memorized our favorite poems and made a game out of seeing whether we could say the long ones from beginning to end. Some people play music “by ear” instead of by looking at notes. I always feel that I write by ear, listening to the sounds and rhythms of words—and sometimes my stories end up with a strong sense of rhythm and/or rhyme.

Does *Rain Romp* have connections with any of your other picture books?

JK: It might be interesting for young readers to compare *Rain Romp* with two of my other picture books—*Do Kangaroos*

Wear Seat Belts? and *Water Hole Waiting*. All three have a strong sense of rhythm and rhyme.

Another good connection is my picture book *River Friendly, River Wild*, about the Red River Flood of 1997. Looking especially at the poem “Mad” in that book, readers might want to ask how the girl narrator in both books is similar (and different).

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

JK: I speak in schools and at conferences all over the U.S., so maybe some of your readers will meet me in person some day. A good way to meet the virtual me is to visit my Web site at www.janekurtz.com.

Books by Jane Kurtz

- ***American Southwest Resource Book: The People, Vol. 1.*** Eakin Press, 1996.
- ***Bicycle Madness.*** Henry Holt & Company, 2003.
- ***Do Kangaroos Wear Seat Belts?*** Penguin, 2005.
- ***Ethiopia: The Roof of Africa.*** Silver Burdett Press, 1991.
- ***Faraway Home.*** Harcourt, 2000.
- ***The Feverbird's Claw.*** HarperCollins, 2004.
- ***Fire on the Mountain.*** Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- ***I'm Sorry, Almira Ann.*** Henry Holt & Company, 1999.
- ***In the Small, Small Night.*** Greenwillow Books, 2005.
- ***Jakarta Missing.*** Greenwillow Books, 2001.
- ***Johnny Appleseed.*** Aladdin, 2004.
- ***Memories of Sun: Stories of Africa and America.*** HarperCollins, 2003.
- ***Mister Bones: Dinosaur Hunter.*** Aladdin Books, 2004.
- ***Only a Pigeon.*** Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- ***Oregon Trail: Chasing the Dream.*** Simon & Schuster, 2005.
- ***Pulling the Lion's Tail.*** Simon & Schuster, 1995.
- ***Rain Romp.*** HarperCollins, 2002.
- ***River Friendly, River Wild.*** Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- ***Saba: Under the Hyena's Foot.*** Pleasant Company Publications, 2003.
- ***The Storyteller's Beads.*** Harcourt, 1998.
- ***Terrific Connections with Authors, Illustrators and Storytellers: Real Space and Virtual Links*** with Toni Buzzeo. Libraries Unlimited, 1999.
- ***35 Best Books for Teaching U.S. Regions*** with Toni Buzzeo. Instructor Books, 2002.
- ***Treasure of the Southwest: Resources for Teachers and Students.*** Libraries Unlimited, 1992.
- ***Trouble.*** Gulliver Books, 1997.
- ***Water Hole Waiting.*** HarperCollins, 2002.