

# • Meet the Author •

## Kathleen Krull

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).



Kathleen Krull is the award-winning author of biography and nonfiction for young readers, known particularly for her “Lives Of the” six-book series. Her picture books include *Pocahontas*, *The Boy on Fairfield Street*, and *Harvesting Hope*. Her well-received newer series, “Giants of Science,” profiles individual scientists such as Isaac Newton, Sigmund Freud, and Marie Curie. She is married to children’s book illustrator Paul Brewer, who has illustrated two of her books. From their home in San Diego, California, they have also collaborated on the text for a most unusual title, *Fartiste*, a biography illustrated by Boris Kulikov.

**It would be hard to imagine a person, young or old, who would not be inspired by the story of courage and perseverance that you**

**tell in *Wilma Unlimited*. How did you first become interested in Wilma Rudolph?**

**KK:** I first became interested when I saw Wilma Rudolph’s obituary. She died in 1994 of a brain tumor, at age 54. I hadn’t really known about her before, but I was in the midst of research on *Lives of the Athletes*, so this piece of news caught my eye. I did include her in *Athletes*, but she sounded like such a person of strength, with such an utterly dramatic arc to her story, that I felt she deserved her own picture book. I loved that she went on from the Olympics to become a second grade teacher.

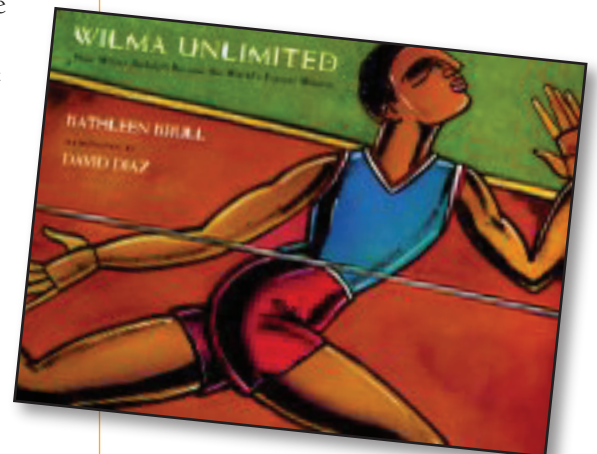
**How did you conduct your research? Do you have any interesting stories to tell about it?**

**KK:** I read every book and article I could find. That gave me more than enough to write about. I didn’t interview any relatives, but since the book has come out I have been to her hometown of Clarksville, Tennessee (where she is still a hero) and met her descendants—of which there are many, given her twenty-two brothers and sisters.

**What things do you hope that your readers take away from a reading of *Wilma Unlimited*?**

**KK:** It’s so common for people these days to try to blame their circumstances for their actions. But here was a person who had everything against her, and she never gave up. I’ll admit I’ve thought about Wilma during some of my own trying times—her story carries so much meaning beyond a simple sports setting. After the final book came out, it took me a long time to read it aloud without crying—I hope *Wilma Unlimited* reader’s theater participants find themselves equally inspired by her character and values.

***Wilma Unlimited* is the story of a notable American athlete. It is also the story of a particular time in American his-**



### tory, a time of segregated races and extreme prejudice. How did that history influence your telling of the story?

**KK:** Racial prejudice shaped Wilma's life from the moment she was born and couldn't get decent medical treatment because she was black. It was one of the many "limits" placed on her that she had to break through to become her "unlimited" self. Just showing Wilma having to sit at the back of a bus to get to her physical therapy—that says so much.

### Do others of your books deal with injustice, inequality, or prejudice? If so, what leads you to write on this topic for children?

**KK:** *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* deals most directly with these topics in dramatizing the struggles of the 1960s Civil Rights hero. So does *A Woman for President: The Story of Victoria Woodhull* (our amazing first woman candidate for president, way back in 1872), and *Pocahontas: Princess of the New World*, the Powhatan Indian who played a role in the survival of Jamestown, the first American colony. All of my biographies are in some way about people surmounting obstacles, and social injustice is one of the most interesting to me. All children can relate to being the underdog, so it's a useful hook to catch their attention.

### You have written widely in the field of biography for children, including your acclaimed *Lives of the ... (and What the Neighbors Thought)* series. How did you come to write biography for children and what is it in biographical writing that attracts you?

**KK:** I see my role as trying to make history come alive. I'm taking the valuable work of scholars and distilling it into a form that I hope will make children love—or at least like—history. Stories about real people are one of the best ways to do this—we're all nosy.

### How can readers learn more about you and your books?

**KK:** Please come for a visit to my Web site [www.kathleenkrull.com](http://www.kathleenkrull.com). Or you can get my husband's perspective at [www.paulbrewer.com](http://www.paulbrewer.com). And thank you for this reader's theater adaptation and these nosy questions, Toni!

◆◆◆

Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist and member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. She is the author of seven picture books, most recently *R is for Research* (UpstartBooks, 2008) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).

