

• Meet the Author •

Karma Wilson

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



Photo from www.karmawilson.com

Karma Wilson is the bestselling author of “the Bear Books” (including *Bear Snores On*, *Bear Feels Sick*, and more) as well as many other books for children (including *Frog in a Bog*, *Moose Tracks*, and *Never, EVER Shout in a Zoo*). She lives in the wilds of Montana with her husband, three children, four horses, two dogs, and one extremely spoiled and fat cat. In addition to her many picture books for children, she has written a collection of poetry titled *What’s the Weather Inside?*. Other hobbies include photography, reading, bread baking, and watching Mixed Martial Arts.

The Bear series has been such an ongoing success. Can you speak a bit about what it is in the series that children and adults find especially appealing?

KW: I believe that there are several elements that contribute to the success of the Bear

series. Rhyme is a part of it. Children naturally gravitate toward patterns in language. The animal characters are also a draw. Nobody feels left out when the main protagonist is a bear. Everybody can relate. And I think a lot of parents and teachers are grateful for the emphasis on friendship, love, and unity. I also try not to “gimp” my language with vocabulary restrictions. I like books to have rich, vibrant words. The child may not know them, but how else will they learn? All these things bring readers back.

Bear Feels Sick and the other books in the series are written in rhyme that just begs to be read aloud. As an author, you seem particularly adept at rhyme. Can you share the joys and challenges of writing in rhyme?

KW: Well, rhyme for me comes more naturally than writing prose. I’ve always been very musical and I enjoyed reading stories written in verse as a child. When I read to my own children, I gravitated to rhyming stories. When writing, I like the boundaries of rhyme. I can only use so many words. When I write in prose the choices available to me

seem almost endless! Writing in prose feels like trying to pick out a “little something” for dinner at Costco! However, some stories just don’t work in rhyme. But whenever I write in prose I still try to establish a reading pattern and flow.



How did the character of Bear come to you in the very first book, *Bear Snores On*? And do you feel that he has changed over the course of six books?

KW: Bear has grown a lot. Here’s how I feel about it: the woodland friends and bear have become almost like one big character . . . they are a family. I first wrote about bear on a whim and had no idea there would ever be a follow up book. *Bear Snores On* was such a huge hit that I decided to write *Bear Wants More* and as the titles continued to come, I worked very hard for a consistent approach—the rhyme pattern is always the same, the

characters are dependable, I try to provide some sort of silly surprise/twist at the end, there is always an emphasis on love and friendship. I strive to create Bear books which give the readers that consistency while also providing new and entertaining plots.



Given the longevity of the Bear series, do you and your illustrator, Jane Chapman, have a collaborative relationship regarding the illustrations?

KW: No, not really. Jane has given Bear and friends her own special interpretation. If anything, my vision of bear has adapted to her artistic version. When I am writing a bear book now I am always picturing what Jane might do. But we don't communicate much during the process.

What Bear titles might be in the series in the future? Do you create a full manuscript before you share with your editor or do you the two of you agree on a next adventure before you write?

KW: I am planning on doing some spin offs; board book, concept books for babies, etc. but I want to avoid being

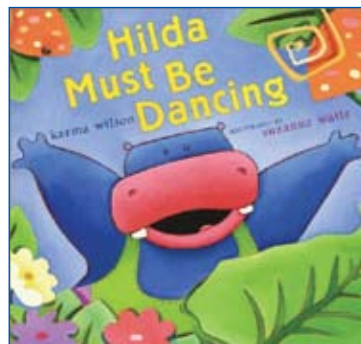
generic and uncreative. I want anything related to Bear and Friends to remain true to the series and my vision for the series.

Sometimes I come up with the idea for a new book and run it by my editor. Sometimes I just write it and send. As with everything in my life, it's rather up in the air how I go about things.

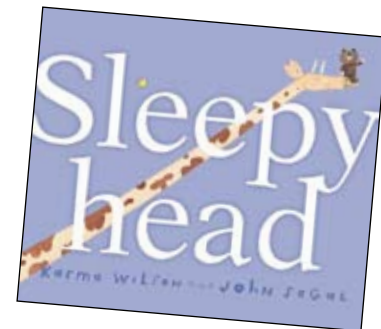
In what ways are the Bear books different from your many other picture books?

KW: Bear has definitely established himself. While many of my other books share similarities too (many of my other books are written in fun rhyme or employ silly endings, for instance), I hope they are all very different because who wants to write the same story over and over?

Bear has developed into a very distinct personality. And he surely puts the pressure on, because the most repeated phrase I read in reader opinions about my other books is, "It's certainly no *Bear Snores On*." My editor tells me that being compared to myself is ultimately a good thing, but I have to wonder if the same



standard would be applied to my other books if they had no way of knowing I was the author. Let's put it this way: I don't want all my books to be *Bear Snores On*. I want to create books that fulfill other niches. *Sleepyhead* is a bedtime lullaby. *Hilda Must Be Dancing* is about being an individual. *Moose Tracks* is always to be read for giggles—no deeper meanings. The Little Pip books are about family dynamics and childhood milestones



How can readers learn more about you and your books?

KW: The easiest way is to visit my website; www.karmawilson.com. A visit to the local library may also help.

❖ ❖ ❖

Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of ten picture books, most recently *The Great Dewey Hunt* (UpstartBooks, 2009) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.