

# *A Conversation with Valarie Giogas* *author of In My Backyard*



## **Where did the idea for *In My Backyard* originate?**

The idea for *In My Backyard* began around 2004 when my son was in preschool. We always drove by a gaggle of geese and he would giggle when I told him the group name. When the geese had goslings, the idea for the book was cemented.

## **What are the most frequently asked questions you encounter as an author?**

People often ask me when I met the illustrator. Actually, I've never met the illustrator, Katherine Zecca. In fact, we had no contact with each other until all the illustrations were complete. Katherine emailed me then, and we have since emailed back and forth. I feel very lucky to have Katherine's illustrations for the book. I love how they turned out, and think they complement the text beautifully..

## **What gets your creative juices flowing?**

For ideas, virtually anything: My kids, other children, a phrase/conversation I overhear, animals, nature, history. As for the actual writing, I think the community of other writer friends I have really inspires me.

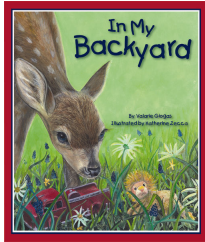
## **If you weren't a children's author, what would you be?**

When I was younger, I was a competitive figure skater. I always thought that would be my future. Today, I love being a mom and author. The fact that I can combine the two with my love of children's literature is a dream come true. I've always wanted a job that had something to do with kids. I was a teacher briefly, but when I went home, I would still be in teacher mode all the time. It got to be too much. I also dreamed of working for a toy company in product development or testing. How fun would it be to get paid to play with toys or games all day?!

## **I hear that you've lived in and traveled to many places. Where's your favorite?**

It's true. I've lived in different parts of IL, MI, CT, NY & MA. My favorite is where I am now – Burlington, MA. We're close to my extended family and my husband's, so our kids have that. Also, we're so close to the ocean, lakes, mountains, etc. and the weather is always changing. It doesn't get much better. As for visiting, I can't pick a favorite. When I was younger, my dad worked for the airlines, so we were able to fly free. I have been very fortunate to have traveled to many places.

## What was most challenging about writing *In My Backyard*?



I had two major challenges. The first was with the rhyme. By virtue of the group names and baby names, the meter wouldn't match in every stanza. I focused on the last two lines in each, and I made sure the third line flowed as best as possible.

The other was with the research. Firstly, each animal had to be able to have the number of babies that it represented (for example, I couldn't have a raccoon as number ten because raccoons can't have ten babies at one time).

Next, I wanted to tell something about each animal — what it eats, where it lives, or how it sounds. In order to make the whole book interesting, I wanted to make sure I did not repeat verbs in the third line, and I tried to mix up what information conveyed (food/habitat/sound).

## And most rewarding?

The most rewarding part of writing *In My Backyard* was getting all of the above to work. I am also humbled to hear stories of children (and adults, too) learning new things from the book.

**Want to continue this conversation?** Schedule an interview!

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