

*A Conversation  
with  
Donna Love,  
author of  
Henry the  
Impatient Heron*



**What was your incentive to write this particular book?**



My greatest incentive to writing *Henry the Impatient Heron* was a sixteen-nest heron rookery near our home. It was so much fun to watch the young herons growing up – from just small birds in the nests to tall gangly chicks flapping their wings and learning to fly. It was also great to see what dedicated parents great blue herons are. They were always coming and going from the nearby river to the nest and back again as they fed their chicks. (They eat the food first and then regurgitate into the chick's mouth!) Later I had the chance to watch a pair of fledged chicks learning to hunt. The silly antics of the young herons, both in the nest and the pair that had fledged, became the inspiration for *Henry*. The young herons hopped and flopped after food of all sorts, while the mother patiently fed nearby, keeping a watchful eye on her chicks. A great

blue heron must stand still for long periods of time to catch its prey. I wondered what would happen if a young great blue heron couldn't stand still for very long.

**When did you become interested in writing?**

I've always loved to write. I wrote my first book when I was in third grade. I loved horses and that first one was "Horses of the World," that I even illustrated. I still have that little book. Then I got busy with school and marriage and raising children. I channeled my creative writing into long, descriptive baby books about my children growing up. I didn't just record their age and weight; I wrote about their likes and dislikes, their birthdays, funny things they said, and where we went on vacations. I also wrote long letters home to Grandma telling her about their likes and dislikes, their birthdays, funny things they said, and where we went on vacation... well, you get the picture. Anyway, many years later, when we moved to Seeley Lake for my husband's work, I watched a pair of common loons nest and raise their chicks on the lake near our home. That resulted in my first published book in 2003.

**What is the most frequently asked question you encounter as an author, and what is your answer?**

My most frequently asked question is how do you come up with ideas? I'm tempted to answer that with the rhetorical question, "How many things are there in the world?" My real problem is I have too many ideas. I think that's because I stay busy watching and thinking. When walking, driving, traveling, anytime, I notice things and ask myself, "Why is that?" or "Why does it do that?" Also, keep reading. Read, Read, Read, Read, Read!



**When are you most creative? (Or what sparks your creativity?)**

I'm most creative when I think about one person who I think would like to learn about a certain subject, and I write the book for that person. For instance, I thought my husband's mother and his sister, who love to watch herons, would like to learn about herons, so I wrote this book for them - like a letter. Then it's not hard. It's fun. And, it keeps me focused.

**Do you have any advice for parents (or other group) about...?**

After reading my book to your child, take your child on an "outdoor adventure." Let them figure out if they have any wetlands near their home. A great blue heron can hunt in either fresh water or salt water, so even areas near the seashore, such as an estuary, are great heron habitats.

If you have any streams in your area, go on a field trip and drive from one end of drainage, where the stream is small to the other end, where another river enters it, or it empties into a larger river. Talk about how the river rushes downhill. Some areas aren't as steep, and that's when the water runs slower. This is where herons like to hunt and fish.

To show your children what it's like to stand still for a long time, have your children sit or stand in a comfortable position for as long as they can before they feel their nose itch. It makes them concentrate and think about their body, and think about how hard it would be for a heron to stand still for a long time.

Talk to your children about the importance of wetlands. Great blue herons are the symbols of wetland conservation, and this book includes information about the habitat needed to keep the great blue heron population healthy. Our wetlands are so important to the world, not just for herons, but for all species including humans. A wetland provides flood control in spring, neutralizes toxic substances, provides food for many animals, and mixes nutrients and oxygen into water. All this provides clean, fresh water for all the inhabitants on earth. Wetlands aren't more important than lakes, rivers, and oceans, but they are just as important, and wetlands are often the forgotten part of the water cycle.

Also, my book is humorous. Read my book and other humorous books like it to children to lighten their load. Children often feel the same pressures you do – worry for loved ones,

concern over doing well at school or in an activity, hurt by a friend, or let down by a broken promise. Let a fun book relax their brains for a little while. A light bedtime story can ease a burden. When it's accompanied with a smile and a relaxed attitude, a child can be helped to rest easy and be able face a new day.

**What is most rewarding and/or challenging about writing children's books?**

I read to my children almost every night. It was such a special time. The youngest was put to bed first, so I read to him and got him settled in. He liked funny, silly stories. Then I read to our middle child. One winter, she and I enjoyed the whole *Little House on the Prairie* series a few pages at a time. That is one of my most treasured memories with her. Then I'd settle my oldest child in. He liked sports stories and super hero books. Reading to the children meant turning off the TV and getting up and doing it (really hard to do after a long day at work), but it was worth the sacrifice. Now when I write, I like to imagine a young mother or father snuggled up next to their child holding one of my books in their hands, turning the pages, learning about a new subject, oohing and awing over the pictures, and sending love to their child with every word read.

**Your choice. Please think of an interesting question to ask yourself!**

What would you write about and share with the world if you could write about anything, and no matter what, it would be published?

Grief. I know that sounds sad, but I would. I lost my father when I was seventeen, my mother recently when she was 73, and we lost a daughter when she was four to Hib before there was a vaccination for the illness. However, I would write about hope and courage and how to be kind to someone who has lost a loved one. And I would write about how it's OK to go on. Grief is a universal theme. Everyone faces it sometime in their lives, and it's one of the hardest things in life to face and is so little understood by everyone. There needs to be a really great book out there about grief.

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

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