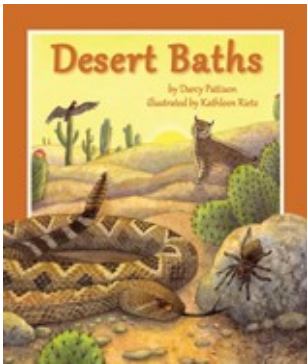




A Conversation with Darcy Pattison, author of *Desert Baths* and *Prairie Storms*

What drew you to writing, children's books especially?

I write because I read children's books to my own children. With four kids, it meant years and years of reading books, during which time I developed a love of the picture book form and a passion for chapter books for kids. I started writing when they were young and have never grown up.



What was your favorite book as a child? Any authors or illustrators that you still especially enjoy?

As a child, I read widely. There were seven kids in my family and my Mom read to us every night before bed. I grew up on the best of the best of children's literature, from Winnie-the-Pooh to Dr. Seuss. One book really stands out though. In early elementary school, the school library was clearing out old books and each student was given a book to take home. Mine was Dr. Doolittle--maybe the beginning of my interest in animals.

What do you hope children get out of your stories?

My goal is to help kids enjoy playing with language. Of course, that means a story and I hope they enjoy the story, too. And since *Prairie Storms* is a non-fiction book, it also means facts. I want kids to have fun learning about the animals and the storms and how living creatures interact with the weather and climate of their area. But mostly, this is meant to be a great read aloud that an adult can share with a kid, and enjoy a moment of shared pleasure in the words, the art, the sound of literature, the joy of knowing something.

What tips do you have to encourage young readers?

Read, read, read. The more you practice, the better reader you will be. And why should you want to be a great reader? So you can travel to places you've never seen, can feel emotions you'll never feel any other way. In *Prairie Storms*, for example, you'll stand stare into the face of a blizzard and stand, "prairie strong and defiant."



What is the most rewarding thing about having your books published?

Because I'm published, it means I get to visit many places and talk to many people. In that sense, writing and publishing has enlarged my world, made me friends with widely scattered folks. I love the book, as something you can hold and open together. But mostly, I love that creative work can connect people in special ways.



What is your favorite *Desert Baths* or *Prairie Storms* animal? What surprising facts did you learn about the animals in these books?

Buffaloes. They are just the symbol of the Wild West for me. EVERY animal had fascinating facts. For me, there's great joy in researching the details of an animal's habitats, food, behaviors, etc.

Which ecosystem did you enjoy writing about more—prairies or deserts? Is there another ecosystem you are interested in researching?

I enjoyed the prairies, because I went to college in Kansas. It was great to revisit the places I lived through fiction. And I'd love to research a swamp; it's a bit scary and therefore interesting.

Any advice for those interested in writing?

Read, read, read. Write, write, write. Practice is the most important thing you can do. If you want to be in a rock band, you don't just pick up a guitar and wind up rich. Instead, you learn how to play chords, how to write music, how to sing. In other words, you practice. Don't expect to sell the first thing you write. You may need to write ten novels before you write well enough to sell well. Consider those books and those years as an apprenticeship and you'll be fine.



Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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