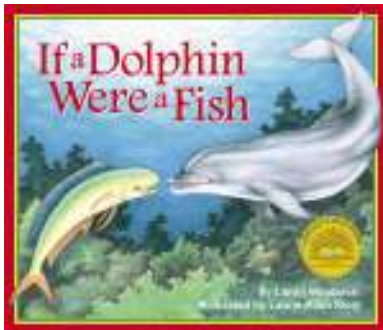


*A Conversation with Loran Wlodarski, author of *If a Dolphin Were a Fish* and *Questions about Felina's New Home: A Florida Panther Story**



What inspired you to write *If a Dolphin Were a Fish*?



I have the great pleasure to teach programs on dolphins, write about them and work next to them—what a fascinating animal! The more I talked to people about dolphins, the more I noticed that we know very little about them. I wanted a way to teach children scientific facts about dolphins in a way that wasn't boring or like it came right out of a science book. That's how the book was born! The idea hit me all at once when I was walking on a pathway many years ago. Suddenly I had to write the story down quickly in

case I forgot about it. I still have the scrap of paper I found on the ground that I used to write the first version of the book.

What inspired you to write *Question about Felina's New Home: A Florida Panther Story*?

For the last 20 years, I've had the privilege of living in the state of Florida. The natural beauty and diversity of the wildlife here is amazing. Sadly though, many of the wonderful animals in the state—from manatees to sea turtles to wood storks—are very endangered and face extinction. *Felina's New Home* is my attempt to teach people about what is likely our state's most endangered animal—the Florida panther. They so desperately need our help or they simply won't make it.



What do you hope children will learn from your story?

Dolphins and people live in vastly different worlds, yet there are many things we have in common with one another. Since we are so similar, our needs are very much the same as well. For example, kids need clean, safe places to play in. Dolphins need this too.

That's why we should be careful about our environment and take steps to protect it. It helps to save dolphins and countless other animals at the same time (and people too!).

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

What's the most common question I get when I'm doing something like a book signing? Probably, "Excuse me, but where's your bathroom?"

Ha! Just kidding! Really, the most frequently asked question I get is, "Will you read your story to me?" I'm always glad to do it.

What sparks your creativity?

I know this might come across as corny, but just looking around at the wonders in the world greatly excites me! When I spot something amazing, like a species of frog I've never seen before or the interaction between birds in my backyard, I want to tell people about it. Writing books, stories and newsletters helps me to communicate to people things that I find highly interesting.



What has writing taught you about yourself?

That writing is fun, and it's important. I recently wrote a large newspaper supplement that was distributed to schools in three big counties in Central Florida—the message was that our everyday actions can make a difference in the world. Even young children can help save animals by recycling, participating in river or beach clean ups and reading books on nature.

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

One of my ultimate goals is to help preserve our environment so that future generations can enjoy the diverse, complex and incredible life found on our planet. The most challenging part is getting the message out there, especially in a written format since people seem to be reading books less and less. The most rewarding times are doing book readings at a school or library, and showing kids how their everyday, ordinary actions can make a great impact on our fragile environment.

Do you have any advice for parents?

Seeing a live Florida panther is a rare and incredible treat that everyone should experience, especially children. If you live in Florida or plan to vacation here, I hope you'll visit a zoo that has Florida panthers. There aren't many, but it's worth the effort and time.

Any interesting questions you could ask/answer about yourself?

One of the most common questions I get, from friends, family, coworkers and people I meet at book signings is "how do I get a book published?" This may sound odd, but the most basic and overlooked part of the process is to do the actual writing. Many people have a good idea for a story, but often they never take the time to sit down and simply write it out. Another tip that worked for me—ask people to review your work. Invite criticism and ask for honest feedback. Really, it's the rarest thing to write down an original story, make no changes and then have it published. I trust my friends to tell me when I wrote something that's special, and when I wrote something that's especially bad and needs corrections. Lastly, be persistent. If you believe you have a story that deserves to be published, then push away self-doubt and rejection and never quit. I still have a story that I wrote when I was nine years old that I think will make an exceptional movie and book. No matter how many dead ends I've encountered all these years later, I will never give up on this story because I know it's good. Don't give up on your dreams.

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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