



A Conversation with Scotti Cohn

Author of
Animal Partners, *On the Move*,
One Wolf Howls
and *Big Cat, Little Kitty*

Having written quite a few children's books, what is most rewarding or challenging about writing books for kids?

To me, the most rewarding thing about writing children's books is that I get to share the feelings and interests I had as a child. I write for the child I was, from the heart of the child that is still within me. The most challenging thing about writing for children is getting my work into the hands of editors who appreciate it and want to send it forth into the world so that others can enjoy it.

*In *Animal Partners* you mix poetry and nonfiction facts in a whimsical way. Was this more challenging than some of your previous writing?*

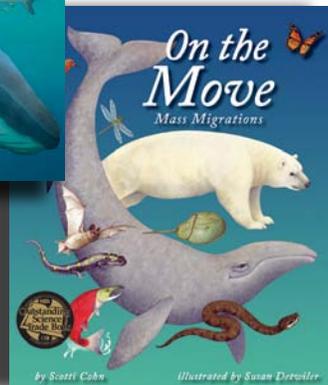
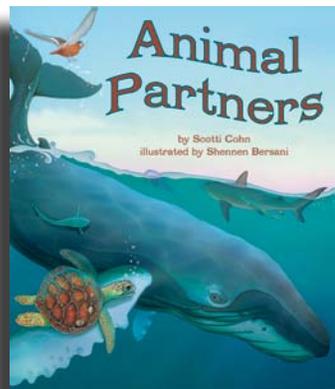
It can be quite challenging to write rhyming poetry, but the challenge level rises significantly when you also have to base your verse on facts. My goal in *Animal Partners* was to take information about symbiotic relationships between animals and let my imagination go wild, creating silly scenarios to illustrate those relationships. I read about how mongooses

“clean” warthogs by feeding on ticks and other parasites on the warthog's body. That made me picture someone being pampered at a spa, so I read about various spa treatments and then wrote a poem about mongooses giving a warthog a “fig and aloe body rub” and a “banana facial.” I have always enjoyed (and had no trouble) making extraordinary leaps of imagination. I think most children can relate to that. The beautiful thing about Arbordale books is that the For Creative Minds section gives children the facts they need to know after reading the whimsical text.

Science has always intrigued me, but I struggled a bit with it in school. As a sophomore in high school I wrote my biology teacher a story in which the characters were cells in the human body. The story was humorous and off the wall.

I figure she would just throw it away. Instead, she invited me to be her assistant the following year! Maybe that's why I thought I'd take a shot at exploring the science of symbiosis in whimsical poems!

How did you first become interested in writing poetry? Was there someone or something that



sparked your interest in creating “Animal Partners”?

I became interested in writing poetry as a child. One of my first poems, written around age 9, was about two birds having an argument. I enjoy writing children’s books in rhyme. *Animal Partners* was inspired by other animal poems I have read, particularly those that are short, humorous, and clever. The names of poets Ogden Nash, Jack Prelutsky, Shel Silverstein, and Deborah Ruddell come to mind.

As a children’s author of science related stories how important is research in your writing process? Have ideas from previous books inspired you to write new stories?

I love doing research. Sometimes I get so involved in following “trails of information” in libraries or on line that I have to make myself stop and actually write the book. I’m almost embarrassed by the huge amount of research I did for each *Animal Partners* poem. I would think of a possible line and then have to do more research to make sure that line was in keeping with the basic facts. For example, in *Sea Turtle’s Lament*, we all know that the sea turtle isn’t really talking like a human – that’s the “whimsical” part -- but I needed to be accurate about what sort of creature he was talking to. Barnacles really do attach themselves to sea turtles, so using a barnacle made sense.

When I wrote *On the Move: Mass Migrations* (Arbordale / 2013), I really enjoyed learning about a lot of different animals. That experience probably planted the seed for *Animal Partners*,

which also includes a variety of animals.

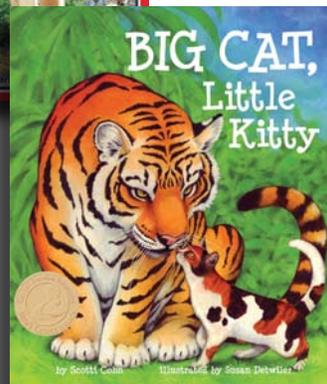
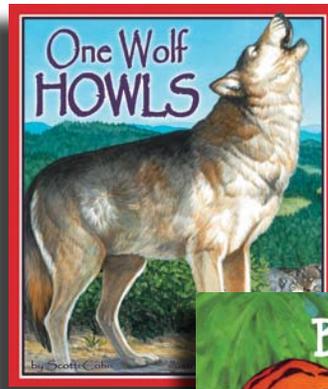
Animal behavior is fascinating to me, whether we’re talking about pet cats and dogs or wild animals around the globe. I think my interest in animal behavior comes across in all of my Arbordale picture books. Why do wolves howl? How does a domestic cat’s behavior mimic that of a lion or tiger? What prompts animals to migrate? Why do animals form “partnerships”? I like being able to respond to those questions in a way that makes children eager to learn more.

Was that curiosity your incentive to write One Wolf Howls?

I have long had a special place in my heart and mind for wolves. I even had a vivid dream in which I was a wolf. Years of reading, watching television and film specials about wolves, listening to recordings of wolves, and visits to wolf sanctuaries all provided incentive for me to write *One Wolf Howls*. My purpose is to share my fascination with these magnificent creatures and to encourage children to develop understanding and concern for the plight of wolves in the wild.

...And Big Cat, Little Kitty?

I have always loved cats in all shapes and sizes, and have shared my home with “little kitties” for most of my life. I have always been fascinated by the similarities and differences between the big cats (tigers, lions, etc.) and domestic cats. I wanted to write a book for children to help them compare and contrast the characteristics and behavior of these amazing creatures. I also wanted to call attention to the plight of big cats all over the world. We are in danger of losing some of the most beautiful animals on the planet.



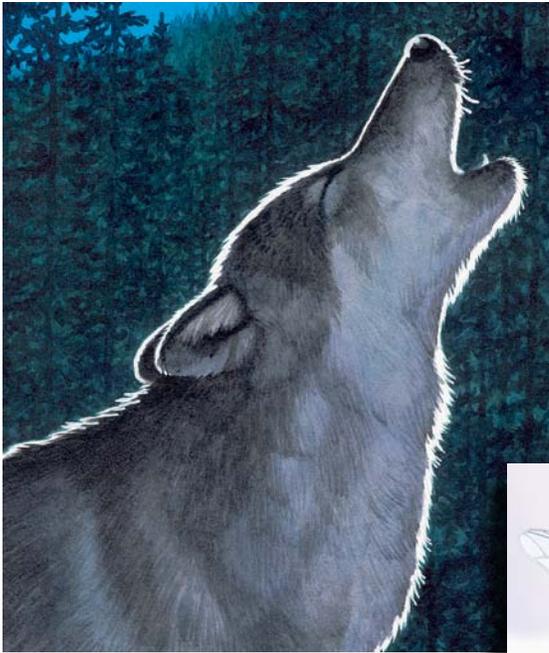
As a writer that has presented at many schools and events what are some of the common questions that children and parents ask?

Questions I have encountered usually pertain to the specific book I am presenting on. For example, people will often ask how I chose the individuals or events I included in my nonfiction books. Other questions I have been asked have been answered

in this questionnaire (e.g., When did you become interested in writing?).

Do you have advice for children or parents of children that aspire to be a writer someday?

First of all, I advise anyone who is interested in writing to do two things: (1) read and (2) write. Read all kinds of books, including some that you don't think would interest you. You might be surprised. As a child, I wanted to read only fairy tales and fantasy. A school librarian encouraged me to read a biography for a change. Reluctantly, I complied -- and discovered that such books could be quite fascinating. My published books include several nonfiction titles that contain mini-biographies of remarkable people. I think it's important to not only read different types of books but to try your hand at writing in different ways about a variety of topics. You'll soon discover where your strongest interests and talents lie.

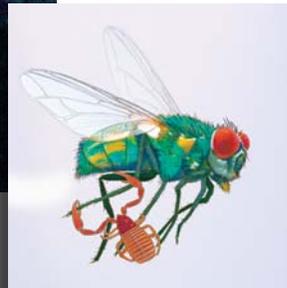


You have published several picture books, chapter books, and poems. Have you always been a writer or have you had other jobs?

I have always been a writer, but have held many other jobs as well in order to pay the bills. I have worked as a billing clerk, a technical editor for a bank holding company, a legal secretary, an educational software purchasing agent, and a public relations and marketing specialist for a health care system. Currently I do freelance copy editing for a company that publishes nursing textbooks.

Finally, having written about felines and canines which do you prefer?

I love canines and felines equally. However, I prefer to share my home with cats. Although I adore dogs (and love to visit with them when they are with their owners), I find cats are better suited to my lifestyle and personality on a daily basis.



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