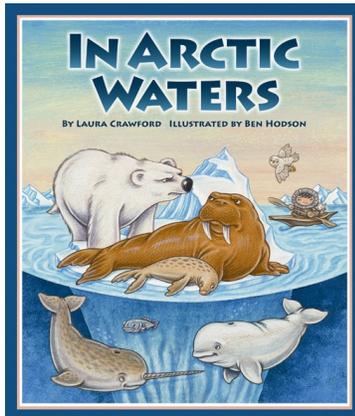


*A Conversation with Laura Crawford, author of *In Arctic Waters!**



What made you want to be a writer?

When I was getting my Masters Degree in Reading at Northern Illinois University, my instructor showed us the book he had written and published. I decided that some day I would like to do the same. It was about 4 years later (in 2001) when I saw a local community college was offering a course in how to get your work published. I wrote my first book in that class...and it just came out this spring!



What inspired you to write *In Arctic Waters*?

On a trip to the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago with my Dad, I had my first encounter with the beluga whales. It was right after my Mom had passed away, and we were extremely sad. We were watching the belugas, and they swam right up to us. Their cute little faces looked like they were smiling...and then they splashed us! We were soaked, but it was the first time we had laughed in a long time! Now, belugas hold a special place in my heart! Around that same time, I was teaching second grade, and we were doing a unit on the Arctic Circle. I was fascinated with all of the animals...and I was shocked to learn that penguins did not live there! When I first wrote (or tried to write) *In Arctic Waters*, I had envisioned it as a story of the food chain. I soon found that the animals did not all fall into a

nice little plan since some are plant eaters, so I made it a story about the animals chasing each other and playing.

What are the most frequently asked questions you encounter?

Children ask me: Did you go to the Arctic? I wish, but no.

Do you get rich from writing books? Again I wish, but no.

Did you draw the pictures? No, I am a terrible illustrator! Luckily the editors are very good at choosing talented people to draw the pictures.

Adults ask me: How do you find the time to write? I do most of my writing on the weekends and evenings. I try to write for about a half hour each day. Sometimes I end up writing for much longer than that, and sometimes it's shorter. It takes me a while to get a book finished!

How long did it take you to write *In Arctic Waters*?

A LONG TIME! It took me a several weeks to research and learn all about the animals. I did several rough drafts, most of which were terrible! I finally got the story to a point that I liked it, but then I changed it several times because it still did not sound quite right. After a few weeks of

working on it, I took it to my writing group, where they had lots of wonderful suggestions to make my book better. I went home to improve it again. I revised *In Arctic Waters* about 19 times before I sold it. I am so glad that I finally got it right!

Do you ever get sick of writing?

Yes I do! That is when I go to the library and read. Or, I take a little break and watch a movie.

Are you going to write a chapter book?

Maybe some day, but right now I am focusing on picture books because that is what I read all day with my students!

Where can I go to learn how to get published?

I always suggest joining SCBWI (the Society of Childrens' Book Writers and Illustrators). I also think it is extremely important to join a writing/critique group. I am in a group that meets at the local bookstore and also an online group. Doing this has made my writing so much stronger. Just a few minor suggestions from other writers can make a huge difference in a book. Plus, the people in my writing groups have quickly become some of my best friends. I learn from them every single time we meet. I credit them with my success.



What sparks your creativity?

Working each day with young children sparks my creativity. They are constantly asking questions and looking at things in a unique way. Since I began writing, I find that I look at things differently. When I see something on the news or in a book about an unusual animal, I think 'that would be a good book!' I have always liked science and social studies, but unfortunately some elementary students do not. I try to find fun and entertaining ways to teach them factual information.

What has writing taught you about yourself?

Oh.... I have learned a lot from this new hobby! I have become much more patient. Writing is a long process that goes through several stages. In the beginning, I sent books out way before they were ready. As time went on, I found that I needed to take my time and perfect the books....no need to rush! Persistence is another quality I have needed in this journey. *In Arctic Waters* was rejected 29 times before Sylvan Dell published it. As I said earlier, I sent it out way before it was ready, so many of those rejections were on versions that did not rhyme very well. I often start a book and then stop, but I always go back to it. When I get an idea, I often just start writing and writing. But there have also been several times when I have given up...for only for a few days, that is!

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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