

Interview with Mo Willems: **Author of *Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale***

“I am continually amazed by the quality of cartoon films that are produced by a bunch of guys who live in the woods. It’s remarkable that they haven’t been attacked by a bear yet.”

-Mo Willems

Q: We love the style of your books - the melding of photographs with your illustrations. How did you come up with the idea to do that?

A: Well, the look of *Knuffle Bunny* is the result of two factors. One, I wanted the story to *feel* as real as possible and realistic backgrounds helped achieve that. Two, I hate drawing backgrounds...

Q: When did you decide to become a writer?

A: Probably a Tuesday. It’s hard to say because I was very young at the time and too busy making up funny stories for my friends.

Q: You live in NYC - what is like to raise a child in the city?

A: Besides expensive? Exhilarating. All we have to do is open up our front door, pull out a bucket of chalk, and almost instantaneously the block is filled with kids drawing and doodling on the street. Plus, the bagels are better here.

Q: You co- produced with Weston Woods Studios to create the **film** version of *Knuffle Bunny*. Can you tell us about the process of adapting your story and illustrations to the small screen?

A: I’ve either written, directed, or animated over 200 short films and TV episodes, so you’d think I’d be blasé about one more.

But this production was special: it was a thrill to record voices with my daughter and wife, the animator and I go back 15 years, the guys at Weston Woods were a joy to work with, and the production schedule

allowed us the time to finesse the film (a luxury that television does not afford).

I think the whole crew had a great time, and I think it shows on the screen.

Q: Are you working now on the video adaptation of Knuffle Bunny Too?

Yup. Recording is completed and the animator is busily drawing away. It promises to be one of the top two Knuffle Bunny movies ever!

Q: How often do you read with your daughter? Do you have any special story time routines?

A: My daughter caught the reading bug from her mother, so she reads frequently throughout the day. But the last 10 minutes of the bedtime routine always involve reading a book, either on her own or with a parent. Whenever she reads alone, we make sure to ask about the content of the books; we want to hear about all the cool parts.

Q: Does your daughter watch TV? How do you monitor her television watching?

A: Having spent 15 years making television, I'm keenly aware of it's strengths and weaknesses. TV isn't a demon, but nor is it a babysitter.

Trixie's life is too busy with school and play to spend a lot of time with the set, so she averages about one episode of a show every day or so. As she gets older and comfortable viewing options become more limited, I join her on shows with borderline content (which is cool with me, I *like* cartoons). But, just like we do each book after reading, I make sure that my daughter and I discuss each show after we watch it.

Q: Do you have any advice for parents about how to encourage reading and a love of books?

A: Read cool books. Reading isn't broccoli; it should be fun. It couldn't hurt if your kids see the grown-ups in their lives reading and enjoying it. If it's cool for you, it'll be cool for them.

Q: What are you working on now?

A: I've got a pretty full slate, filled with fun projects like my Elephant and Piggie series of Easy Readers, a new Pigeon book and a funny story about a Naked Mole Rat.