

# • Meet the Author •

## Michael B. Kaplan

Grades  
K–2, 3–5



Photo courtesy of [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

A native of Wayland, Massachusetts, Michael Kaplan wrote plays and musicals throughout high school and at Princeton University, where he attended college. Upon graduation he moved to New York where a number of his plays received productions and staged readings, primarily at The Ensemble Studio Theatre, where he is a member.

For the past twenty-three years, he has lived in Los Angeles, working as a television writer and producer on a total of twelve different prime time shows for ABC, NBC, FOX, and UPN. His career as a comedy writer has included stints

as a writer and Supervising Producer on two of television's most respected comedies, "Roseanne," and "Frasier." For his work on the latter, he received an Emmy award, as a member of the producing staff, for best comedy series.

He co-created and Executive Produced "I'm In the Band" for Disney XD, and is currently working on a new show for Disney Channel.

He is the author of **Betty Bunny Loves Chocolate Cake** and **Betty Bunny Wants Everything**, with more books to come in the Betty Bunny series.

Michael currently resides in Los Angeles with his wife and three children.

**How did you come to write this pitch-perfect book about an obstinate, single-minded, yet fully loveable character who adores chocolate cake?**

**MK:** When my daughter was a toddler, she had a doll we called Betty Bunny, and for a reason I no longer remember, I started telling all my kids stories about this doll. At first

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).

she was a baby who understood nothing and perpetually got into trouble, but over time, she evolved into a preschooler. My kids loved the stories and insisted I tell one at every possible opportunity—in the car on the way to school every morning, every night before bed, and any other chance they could clamor for a Betty Bunny story. As I told story after story (often two or three a day), the character evolved, including her love of chocolate cake, which became a defining obsession that cropped up in many of the stories. So when it came time to write the first book about Betty Bunny, it only seemed natural that I write about the first time she tried chocolate cake.

**Some of the most charming scenes in *Betty Bunny Loves Chocolate Cake* are family interaction scenes. They are funny and so true-to-life. Are we getting a peek at your family, the family you grew up in, or merely a glimpse into your genius imagination?**

**MK:** I just had a conversation with someone the other day about whether Betty Bunny is based on me and my childhood or on my kids. The answer, I think, is both. I certainly feel that I am, to some degree, chan-

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neling Betty Bunny as much as observing her, as I write the stories. But watching my kids go through the preschool years gave me a lot of insight into how preschoolers think, speak and interact. And Betty Bunny's three siblings are consciously based on my three kids. When I used to tell my kids the Betty Bunny stories, it evolved to the point where they began participating, each playing the role of him or herself, conversing with me, as Betty Bunny, in what became more like a four-person improv. I will also add, and I know this is anticipating your next question, that Stéphane clearly has a fantastic understanding of family dynamics, and so the illustrations also contribute a lot to that true-to-life feel to which you allude.

**Betty is as appealing in pictures as she is in text. How accurately did Stéphane Jorisch capture your vision? Did you include any illustration notes to guide his illustrations?**

**MK:** I love Stéphane's illustrations, and think he did, and continues to do, a fantastic job illustrating the Betty Bunny books. He not only captures my vision, he exceeds it, adding detail and humor beyond what I had in my mind while writing the text. I also appreciate his ability to draw character and performance, almost the way an actor takes a TV script I might write when I am working in that medium and creates a performance based upon the words. When we were looking



for an illustrator for the Betty Bunny books, I saw a lot of beautifully drawn illustrations by a lot of artists, but Stéphane was the only one whose characters had the degree of expressiveness on their faces that I knew we would need for Betty Bunny.

As to your second question, I do not give illustration notes prior to Stéphane taking his first pass at the sketches. Again, it is sort of like writing for an actor in TV. If the actor is talented, I prefer not to give a lot of direction in the script as to how a line should be read ("angrily," "wryly," etc.) because I've found that if I don't limit the actor in this way, he or she may come up with a reading that is not what I had in mind but may be even better. So in the same way, I would not want to limit Stéphane, and prefer to see what he comes up with first.

**You've written for prime time television as well as for children. How is both the writing experience and the product of the writing different when the intended audience is children and the intended outcome is a picture book?**

**MK:** I don't really write for children, in terms of ever thinking, "Oh, a child might like this or find this funny." I can only write from a place of what I think is funny or entertaining, and then hope that others, whether children or adults, will as well. I think a lot of bad and lazy writing comes from a mindset of: "Well, that's kind of stupid, but kids will probably like it." So for me, the difference between writing for children and writing for adults is one of subject matter and tone. Obviously, a children's book has to be G-rated, and has to be about a subject that is relevant to a child's experiences. But when writing the books I don't think of my audience as being children so much as including children. It is my hope that adults will find the books just as funny and entertaining as will their kids.

As for the differences between writing a picture book versus a TV show, the obvious answer is that the book is much more personal, and much more representative of my vision (and the illustrator's), while the TV show is a collaboration among many dozens of people. And if it's not a TV show that I have created (such as "I'm in the Band," or the new show I am working on

for Disney Channel) then it is not even my vision that is being served, but rather I am working to serve the vision of the writer who created the show. The two experiences are very different, though there is great satisfaction to be derived from producing a good result in either medium.

**I know that your new book, *Betty Bunny Wants Everything*, was recently published. Tell us more about that book. Will there be other books in the series? Are you working on any other picture book ideas right now?**

**MK:** *Betty Bunny Wants Everything* is about Betty Bunny going to a toy store and not understanding that she can't have everything she wants. Currently, Stéphane is working on illustrating a third Betty Bunny book, and I am working on the manuscript for book number four.

I am working on an idea for my first non-Betty Bunny picture book as well as a chapter book for older children.

**How can readers learn more about you as a children's author?**

**MK:** The short answer to that question is, they can't. I don't tweet, blog or maintain a website. I don't even have

a Facebook page, as I wish to maintain my privacy and also fear that it will consume too much time. I suppose readers can keep an eye on my author's page on Amazon.com for news of future projects and can continue to read Betty Bunny books.

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of seventeen picture books, most recently Inside the Books (UpstartBooks, 2012) and Stay Close to Mama (Hyperion, 2012) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*