

• Meet the Author •

Kelly DiPucchio

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit www.tonibuzzeo.com).



Photo from www.kellydipucchio.com

Kelly DiPucchio was born when President Lyndon B. Johnson was in the White House. When she was a little girl she did not want to grow up to be president. She thought she might like to be an artist or a famous singer. When Kelly got older, she discovered that she couldn't draw or sing, but she could write stories. She is the author of several acclaimed books for young readers, including *Mrs. McBloom*, *Clean Up Your Classroom!* and *Sipping Spiders Through A Straw*. She lives with her family in The Great Lakes State of Michigan, which has 17 electoral votes.

How did you first decide to write the story of a young girl incensed by the lack of a woman president in United States history?

KD: The idea for the story was actually inspired by a real little girl, named Grace, who, when faced with a poster of all of the American presidents' pictures,

asked the question, "Where are the girls?" This was back in 2004 and little girl was my editor's daughter.

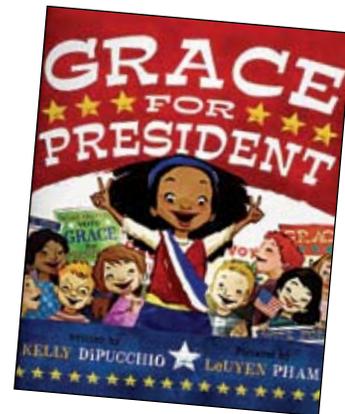
Did you ever run for elected office in your elementary (or secondary) school?

KD: No, I never had any political aspirations as a child; however, I have vivid memories of a big classroom project that involved making election campaign slogans and posters for the presidential race between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter when I was in the 4th grade. I remember being assigned to Jimmy Carter's campaign and I think just about everything we made or wrote had more to do with peanuts than politics.

How was the decision made that Grace would be portrayed as an African American girl candidate? Was there discussion with you, as the author?

KD: The decision to portray Grace as an African American girl was initially made by the very talented illustrator for the book, LeUyen Pham. Her original character studies of Grace were adorable and there was no doubt in anyone's mind that Grace was absolutely who she was meant to be. Back in 2004, when the idea for the book was

conceived, nobody was even speculating that Barack Obama might run for president. As it turned out, when the book was finally published in early 2008, we not only had a woman running for president in Hillary Clinton, but we had an African American candidate, as well. LeUyen had unknowingly represented both Democratic candidates in Grace Campbell. I like to think it was fate.

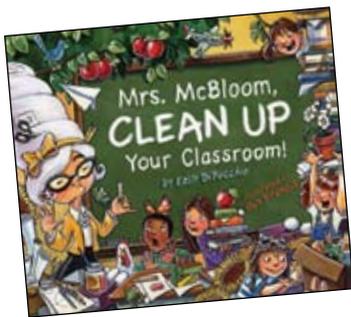


Have you heard from librarians and teachers who have used *Grace for President* as a model to hold their own school elections using an Electoral College model? Tell us more about those programs.

KD: Yes, as a matter of fact, I heard from librarians and teachers across the country who were using *Grace for President* in their classrooms and schools. I even received

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a letter from a high school teacher thanking me for helping her to explain the Electoral College system to her government students! A few teachers wrote to me to tell me they had held mock elections similar to the one in the book, while others used the story to initiate politically inspired writing prompts. One writing activity asked the students to describe the new rules they would enforce if they became president of their school. Some of the responses were hilarious, including one campaign hopeful who promised “ten recesses every day and an ice cream sundae bar in the cafeteria.”



What does Grace for President have to say to readers now that we have entered an era of diversity in the presidency?

KD: I think we can finally say (and believe!) that anything is possible. I am confident that we are getting closer and closer to a time when children in this country won't have to look at a poster of American presidents and ask the question, “Where are the girls?”

How did you decide which state Sam's tie-breaking vote would represent? Tell us about your research process to decide that.

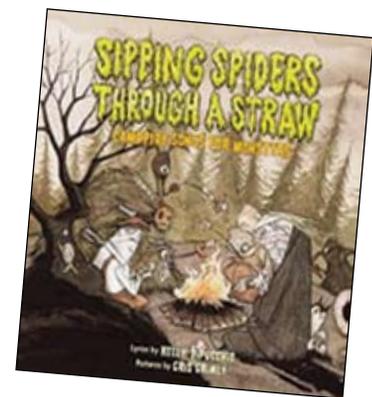
KD: Sam's tie-breaking vote came about in a very serendipitous way. When I started to write the voting scenes, I introduced the students and the states they were representing alphabetically, starting with the Yellowhammer State of Alabama, the Last Frontier State of Alaska, and the Grand Canyon State of Arizona. Obviously, in the interest of time and length, I had to fast forward the voting process to the end. I wanted to build the tension in the story by making the deciding vote, the last vote.

Alphabetically, Wyoming is the last state. When I began to research information on Wyoming I was stunned to find out that its state nickname was the “Equality State.” As it turns out, Wyoming was the first state to give women the right to vote in 1869, and it was the first state to elect a female governor in back in 1924. So, it made perfect sense that Sam's tie-breaking vote came from a state with a rich history of granting rights to women.

Can you tell us about some of the interesting conversations you have had with students in schools and libraries as you have shared Grace for President with them?

KD: I was really impressed by how informed and how passionate so many young students were about our most recent presidential election. I thought it was interesting see how they were able to make connections between the campaign and candidates in the book with the presidential race that was

going on in the real world. A lot of kids told me that they admired Grace's spunk and determination. Several kids were impressed by the courage and independent thinking Sam displayed in the story. And I had more than a few students approach me after an assembly to tell me that when they grew up they were going to be president of the United States. That was extremely rewarding to hear.



How can readers learn more about you and your books?

KD: Visit my website at www.kellydipucchio.com!



Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of ten picture books, most recently The Great Dewey Hunt (UpstartBooks, 2009) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.