

• Meet the Author •

Lynne Rickards

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



Photo from www.lynnrickards.co.uk

Lynne Rickards was born in Canada and moved to Scotland in 1992. She has been a writer of sorts all her life, working as a translator in Toronto, a proofreader in Montreal and an editor in Glasgow. Her early career included a brief stint as a children's illustrator for Crabtree Publishing Company, and this has proved invaluable in her picture book writing. Now she can imagine how a story should look, and then let the illustrator do all the hard work! Lynne began writing for children when her own children were learning to read. Several of her books feature penguins in starring roles because her son loves penguins. She also writes about identity and friendship, perhaps because as a Canadian living in Scotland she feels just that little bit different. Like Patrick the pink penguin, Lynne has found that being different can sometimes be a good thing.

Did a real-life event inspire you to create the story of Patrick and his pinkness?

LR: As a matter of fact, it all started with my daughter, Anna, who made a tiny picture book for her dolls' miniature school. On the cover she drew a rosy-colored penguin and a one-word title, *Pink*. At that point there was no story, but I was so taken with the idea that I was inspired to write one!

How did you decide to focus the theme of tolerance in *Pink!* on color? And once you had decided on color, how did you come to choose a penguin as your main character?

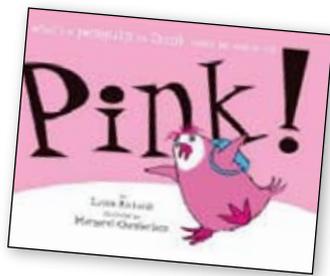
LR: Because the idea of a pink penguin began with Anna's little book, I had no conscious intention of writing a story about tolerance or color at the outset! The story just evolved as I sat and thought about how a penguin might feel about being pink. My favorite line from the book reflects poor Patrick's reaction: "This is terrible!" cried Patrick. "What will all my friends say? Whoever heard of a pink penguin?" As I wrote about Patrick's feelings, I imagined how his parents might try to comfort him, and how his friends might react. The fact that flamingos are also

pink gave me a perfect contrast to all the physical attributes of a penguin. What could be more different? This was a great way to show that although he was pink, Patrick really belonged with his penguin friends and family who loved him no matter what. I think because I was writing about real feelings we all experience—that insecurity about "fitting in"—the theme of tolerance emerged almost subconsciously. It was simply the happy ending that felt right.

How do you hope that teachers will use *Pink!* in the classroom?

LR: I recently received an inspirational email from the mother of a little girl with special needs. She said the book had meant a great deal to her daughter, and told me she had developed a teaching tool with *Pink!* for parents and teachers of children who are "different." The 45-minute interactive session is geared for children between the ages of six and ten, and begins with a reading of *Pink!* Next is an informal discussion about the things that make us different from each other and the things we have in common. If there is a child with special needs in the class, the teacher explores what is different about that child, but then emphasizes what common interests or strengths that child

shares with the rest of the class. I hope that teachers will be able to use *Pink!* to spark classroom discussions about all sorts of “differences” that can divide us. Drawing attention to this issue using a fun and accessible story might help to encourage greater tolerance and understanding among children. The sooner this lesson is learned, the better our chances of making a more harmonious society.



Please reflect on Margaret Chamberlain’s illustrations of Patrick’s story. If you and she had any communications, directly or through your editor, tell us about that experience.

LR: I had no say in the choice of illustrator for *Pink!* and had never heard of Margaret Chamberlain (a terrible oversight on my part, as she is an accomplished and very talented illustrator). You can imagine my delight when I saw the finished book! I just love the bold and colorful illustrations, and my favorite images are of Patrick swimming for seven days and seven nights, and of all the penguins slipping and sliding on their tummies. When I first set up my Web site and wanted to use Margaret’s illustrations, I contacted her for permission. She was warm and encouraging, and we were

soon chatting by email quite often. It was a great pleasure to finally meet her in September 2008 when we did a joint appearance at the Bath Festival of Children’s Literature. We are now good friends and she will be illustrating another of my books to be published in 2010.

What manuscripts are you working on now?

LR: I have two new books coming out with Hodder Children’s Books in 2010. One is called *Jacob O’Reilly Wants a Pet* (illustrated by Lee Wildish) and the other is *I Do Not Eat the Color Green* (illustrated by Margaret Chamberlain). Both are funny rhyming stories that were lots of fun to write. As a result, I’m busy writing sequels to both of them (as well as a new *Pink!* story) but I’m not sure yet whether any of the sequels will be published.

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

LR: The best way to find out more about me is to visit my Web site at www.lynnerrickards.co.uk. It’s bright and colorful (for my target audience of four- to eight-year-olds) and has a different page for each of my books. There’s also a big About Me page full of strange and interesting information, as well as photos of me as a baby, my grandfather the fisherman, my first illustrated book, and my very untidy desk. I had a great time helping to design the Web site and was delighted with the result. My brilliant designer, the earlybird, has recently added

a message board with lots of lovely comments that people send me. It looks just like a cork bulletin board, pins and all!

My books to date are as follows:

- *Look Out! The Teachers are Coming* (Macmillan, 2005)
This is an anthology of school poetry in which I have two poems: “Mrs. Blake and Miss Sharp” and “Sports Day.”
- *Pip Likes Snow* (Evans Brothers Ltd, 2005)
- *Jack’s Bed* (Egmont Banana Books, 2006)
- *I Win!* (Egmont Banana Books, 2007)
- *Pink!* (Chicken House, 2008)
- *WOW! 366* (Scholastic Ltd, 2008) This is an anthology in which I have two rhyming stories: “Buster the Fly” and “A House for a Mouse.”

To be published in 2010:

- *Jacob O’Reilly Wants a Pet* (Hodder Children’s Books, 2010)
- *I Do Not Eat the Color Green* (Hodder Children’s Books, 2010)

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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.