

• Meet the Author •

Meet Anastasia Suen

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



Anastasia Suen, author of ninety-eight books, wrote her first picture book when she was eleven years old. She wrote in junior high, high school, college, and as an elementary school teacher. After writing for kids for twenty-nine years, Anastasia sold her first book on her fortieth birthday. Six weeks later, she sold her second book, and six weeks after that she sold her third book: *Man on the Moon*. Today, Anastasia works as an editorial consultant for several publishers and teaches adults how to write for kids in her online workshops, at Southern Methodist University and Staff Development for Educators.

It must have been quite challenging to decide which events, which conversations, which scenes to include in a book of just a little more than 300 words! Please share

a bit of the creative and decision-making process involved.

AS: When I wrote *Man on the Moon* it was my longest book. My editor called it my Iliad! (Most of my picture books are under 100 words.) As I planned the book I made up a list of events to include and then began writing. I am a rewriter so I wrote eighty versions before I sent it to my editor. After my editor read it, I rewrote it again a dozen times. I wanted to share how dangerous it was to go to the moon that first time, but I didn't want the book to be too scary. After all, it did have a happy ending!

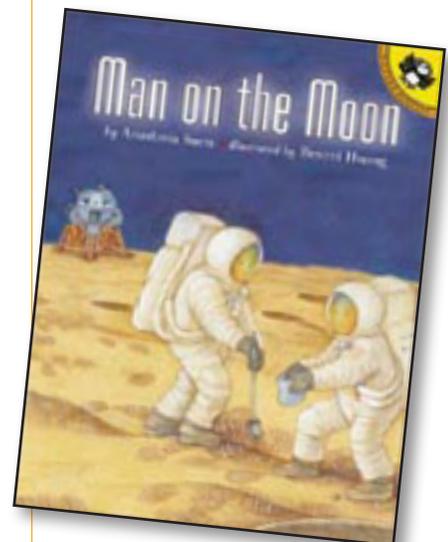
Your author's note tells us a little bit about the influences of NASA in your childhood. That makes this book all the more interesting. Please talk a bit more about what it was like to grow up in Florida at the time of the space race.

AS: We moved to Florida the year NASA selected the first astronauts. So many people moved there at once that they built a new church and a new school. Our school was between a major highway and a railroad track, so all day long someone

was going by at a rapid pace. We were also under the flight path for the astronaut's trainers, the planes they flew as they prepared to go into space. As I learned to read with Dick and Jane the world was changing all around me.

At the same time, I grew up in the old world. We lived by the Indian River, so when I went out to play, there were alligators in the water just two blocks away. Once I rode my bike around the corner and went out into the water by myself. A gator came out of the river after me. I have never moved so fast in my life!

As your author note tells us, you have a strong personal memory of the day the Eagle landed. Are there other launches,



other stories, you remember in detail that you can share with your readers?

AS: President Kennedy said we were going to go to the moon, and the people at NASA were the ones who were going to make that happen. My father worked with NASA as a missile tracker. Satellites still fell out of the sky in those days, so they placed radar on ships and sent them all over the world. Before a launch, my father sailed off to the waters near Africa. He didn't come home until after the astronauts had landed.

I remember one time he set sail on a weekend so my mother took us to the harbor to see him off. We saw him board with the rest of the crew and then they pulled in the ropes and the walkways and set sail. We watched his ship until it reached the horizon and then it disappeared. It looked like they had sailed off the edge of the world!

So many of your picture books have a strong science bent, even when you are writing fiction. *Man on the Moon*, of course, is purely nonfiction for the youngest readers. What draws you to nonfiction?

AS: Machines fascinate me. I've written picture books about all of those machines that traveled by my school as a child: *Red Light*, *Green Light* and *Delivery* have cars and trucks on the road, *Window Music* and *Subway* are about trains and *Air Show* is about planes.

"Why?" was my favorite question as a child. I've always been interested in how things work—so I've always read nonfiction (and I still do!)

Your picture books are written for very young children in a way that makes your subjects accessible to them—sometimes in rhyme, sometimes in lyrical prose. What attracts you to writing for these youngest readers and what are the challenges?

AS: I enjoy working with very young children, they're so much fun! The world is still fresh and new, a place to explore. The challenge for adults writing for kids (of any age) is to think like your reader. To write a picture book you need to think like a three- or five-year-old.

You have written many kinds of books over the years. Tell us about some of the other types of books you've written in addition to fiction and nonfiction picture books.

AS: I've written many books for the classroom, from simple kindergarten readers to science books for seventh graders. It's a way for me to keep exploring and to share my "finds" with my readers. For example, did you know that in the Netherlands they found a skeleton from 10,000 BC with sharp animal bone "blades" tied to its feet? When I discovered that I had to put it in my book, *The Story of*

Figure Skating.

In addition to my nonfiction books, I also write fiction. I wrote six hi-lo sports books with the pen name Jake Maddox. (My name is in small print on the inside.) I'm also working on a space fiction series, so hopefully you'll see that in print soon!

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

AS: I have info about my books as well as book activities at www.asuen.com.

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Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist and member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. She is the author of seven picture books, most recently The Library Doors (UpstartBooks, 2008) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.