



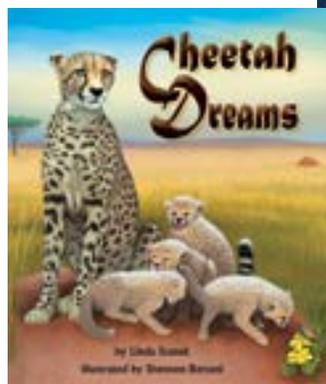
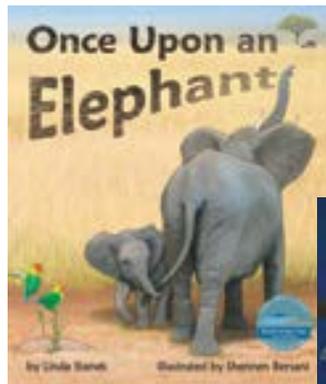
A Conversation with **Linda Stanek** author of *Once Upon an Elephant,* *Night Creepers* & *Cheetah Dreams*

What was your inspiration for writing Cheetah Dreams?

I was inspired to write this story after working with the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium on a chapter of a book for famed cheetah conservationist, Dr. Laurie Marker. Working on that book taught me so much, and so of course, I wanted to share what I learned with kids.

How have you been inspired by these animals?

I have had the opportunity to hold a tiny baby cheetah, and to pet a full-grown cheetah, look into her huge amber eyes, and hear her purr. Being up close with these beauties has been a huge inspiration. In fact, studies have borne out the power of these types of personal experiences.



What do you hope kids learn from the story?

I hope kids will learn about this amazing species--which happens to be the African cat most rapidly moving toward extinction. I also hope they learn something they can do to help.

What was your incentive to write Once Upon an Elephant?



I only learned about the concept of keystone animals in 2010, while working on my Beco book. At the time, elephant expert, Harry Peachey, explained to me how truly vital elephants are to our world, and how without them, other

species would die. This is such an important concept, and I felt a little embarrassed that I didn't already know about this. As I talked to other people, I learned that it was a new concept to most of the people I knew. At that point, I knew this was something I wanted to share with the world—especially children, my favorite people of all!

When did you become interested in writing?

When I was raising my kids, I needed a pick-up-and-go hobby. I was always taking them somewhere and then waiting for them. I wanted to have something fun to do while I waited. One day I decided to write a story for them. So I picked up a notebook and a pencil and started taking it with me. I wrote what we call a Middle Grade novel, and it took me two and a half years to write it. By the time I finished with it, I knew I wanted to continue writing for children, so I began attending conferences and writing events to learn about the business.

What sparks your creativity?

The world is a fascinating place. My creativity is sparked whenever I learn something new and think, “Wow! That’s interesting!” At that moment, I start thinking about whether this is something that kids would like to know about, or should know about (like the keystone animals). If the answer to either of those questions is “yes,” I begin thinking about how I would like to tell that story.

What is the most frequently asked question you encounter as an author and what is your answer?

The question I often get from children is, “Is it hard to write books?” My answer is, “Yes, writing is hard work, but anything you try your best at is hard work. You might work hard at soccer, or singing, or at learning to ride a bike. And like learning to ride a bike, writing gets easier and more fun the more you practice it. So I like kids to know that if they think writing is hard for them, stick with it— it gets easier and more fun as you go!

Did you always love to read?

Believe it or not, the answer is no. I didn’t catch the reading “fire” until I was in the third grade and found the right books for me. My older sister loved reading, but I was bored with it until I found the *Little House* books. I loved those books because I was fascinated with how people lived a long time ago. Now I tell children that if they don’t think they like reading, it’s because they haven’t found the right books yet, but those books are out there! Ask your friends what books they are enjoying. Ask your teacher. Ask a librarian. Every reader is different, and I promise you, when you do find the right books, reading will be awesome!

Do you have any advice for parents?

As an educator, my advice for parents is to read to your children every day and let them see you reading for your own pleasure, too. Studies have shown that this simple act is one of the most impactful things you can do to help your children succeed in school.

What is most rewarding about writing children’s books?

For me, the most rewarding thing about writing for children is feeling that I can make the difference in a child’s life. I strive to educate them about their world, but in an interesting way—a way that will engage them and help them enjoy the process of reading. So really, my mission is two-fold—to teach them about their amazing world, and to build a love of literacy.

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