

• Meet the Author •

Jane Manning

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

Grades
K-2



Jane Manning is the illustrator of dozens of children's books, including *Little Goblins Ten* by Pamela Jane, *Cindy Ellen* by Susan Lowell, and the New York Times bestseller *The Witch Who Was Afraid of Witches* by Alice Low. She wrote and illustrated 2008's *Cat Nights*. Many of Jane's books have appeared in Scholastic Book Clubs and ALA "Pick of the Lists." She's won several awards for her work, including *Parenting Magazine's* Reading Magic Award for *Drip Drop* by Sarah Weeks, and The Western Writers of America Storyteller Award for *Cindy Ellen*. The second book in her *Millie Fierce* series is due out next

year. She and her husband Tim live in Deep River, CT, with two ancient dogs and one semi-fierce cat.

Millie Fierce is a book about bullying in a day when public concern over bullying is finally getting the attention it deserves. What made you decide to write a book on the topic?

JM: I did not plan to write a book on bullying. My intent was to write a book based on feelings. I believe navigating your emotions can be tough, especially for kids. I've noticed that people (including kids) often act badly after they've been treated badly. That can dovetail right into the cycle of bullying. My goal was to write about how not to do that—how not to pass on the pain. I am thrilled for it to be noted as a story about bullying because I feel strongly about working to end this destructive behavior.

Your book has such an interesting layer. You show us how Millie came to be a bully. Can you talk more about why you decided to give the reader insight into

how bullying may start in a child who is meek, ignored, and the object of bullying herself?

JM: Thanks. Well, I suppose it's the old story. I wrote about my own experience. I was bullied as a kid. I know how frustrating it can be to keep that fierce part inside! Sometimes you just want to scream! It's hard to keep following your inner compass and do the right thing, because being quietly good often gets you no attention at all. I wanted to tell kids that even though no one may notice, being a good kid is always the best way to be.



You are primarily known as the illustrator of many children's books. Occasionally, however, as with *Millie Fierce* and *Cat Nights*, you both wrote and illustrated a book. What moves you to write a story of your own to illustrate?

JM: I love writing. It seems like a natural continuation of my creative process. I often see the pictures I want to illustrate attached to my own stories. I come up with an idea while walking in the woods and think: *that would look so cool!* Plus, writing is less physically demanding on my aging self! I can sit any way I want when I write. I hope to write for a long, long time to come.

Will you talk about the experience of illustrating a book written by another author? What are the challenges and what things are the most fun?

JM: Illustrating another author's work is very similar to working on my own books. I try my very best to relay the story onto the page. I guess the biggest challenge is to make the characters consistent, especially when they express a lot of emotion (and they usually do). The most fun I have is when I "get" the right look for someone else's character after a lot of work. That's fun and satisfying. I feel very fortunate to work on some great books. Whenever I get tired, I tell myself: *Think of all those talented people out there who would love to have the chance to do this* and it keeps me going.

Were you always interested in illustrating children's books? How did you come to pursue it? Do you do other types of art besides book illustration?

JM: I always wanted to be a children's book artist. From the time I could grasp one, I had a pencil in my hand. I won my first art show at age three for my inspired "Raggedy Ann" and drew bunny illustrations for my local newspaper. When I was eleven, I received a nice letter from Diana Vreeland at VOGUE after I sent her some of my fashion designs. That was the beginning and end of my career in fashion. Paier College of Art trained me well as an illustrator—a great school. I was a graphic designer at first, and I put in some long hours pounding the pavement to land my first illustration job. It was full steam ahead from there on.

I love the smell of oil paint, and when I find a scrap of free time, I tackle the occasional oil painting. I make jewelry and various other things, like painted rocks. My biggest creative outlet at present is my garden.

Millie Fierce is illustrated with watercolors. Is this your exclusive medium or do you use others as well? Please talk about your preferences.

JM: No, not exclusive, but I would say it is my primary medium. I definitely like to mix it up. *Cindy Ellen, Cobweb*

Christmas, and some others were done in acrylics on watercolor paper. I've used oils, pastels, pencils. I have a great idea for a book done only in pen & ink; I hope to do that someday. All my mediums are traditional—I don't see myself going digital. I love paintbrushes and paint. I'm a hardcore leadite.

How can readers learn more about you and your other books?

JM: Guilty—I'm not the biggest networker in the world (I said I was a leadite)! But I'm out there. Check out www.milliefierce.com or find me at [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com). When I'm not working or walking in the woods, I'm occasionally found at book signings and talks at stores and libraries in the New England area.

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Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is both an author and a career library media specialist. Her credits include the 2013 Caldecott Honor Book One Cool Friend among nineteen picture books, which include But I Read It on the Internet! (Upstart, 2013) and Just Like My Papa (Hyperion, 2013). She has also authored many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.