



Meet Author Viji K. Chary



Viji K. Chary was born in India and immigrated to the United States at the age of two. Her passion for writing stories began in elementary school and has evolved from coaching children in various activities; including gymnastics, classroom activities and creative competitions. Her stories

have been published in Highlights for Children, Ladybug Magazine, Hopscotch for Girls and many more.

It's rare today to find an author who does nothing but write for a living. Do you have a day job other than writing, and if so, what is it?

When my son was born, I decided to stay home to care for him. So my day job changed as he grew. I volunteered in his school and coached his activities. Actually now that my children are teenagers, I am considering applying for a day job.

What are some other jobs you've had in your life? Have they influenced/inspired your writing?

I have been a gymnastics instructor for young children, a dental assistant, volunteered at the hospital, and a laboratory technician. I have also coached Odyssey of the Mind teams for several years. Instructing children always keeps me in touch with how children think. And other jobs always expose me to different aspects of life.

Can you share some writing experiences with us?

Sometimes, people want to become 'authors' and decide to write. What they do not realize is that writing is a lot of work, especially if you do not have a writing background or innate talent. In the beginning, I did not put enough time into my writing. One year, I gave myself an ultimatum. I would give writing my 100% or stop writing all together. Getting rejection

after rejection was too discouraging. So I read a lot, wrote a lot, went to conferences. Now, I get rejection after rejection, but not because the quality of my writing is inferior. In fact, I get comments from the editor that the write is wonderful, "but". It makes me feel good that the editor enjoyed the story.

Tell us briefly about your book and what you feel is the most important topic/sub-message you share.

My latest book is *Porcupine's Seeds*. In this book, Porcupine longs to grow beautiful sunflowers in his garden, just like Raccoon. When Raccoon gives Porcupine seeds, she says that all they need is soil, sun, and water. But growing sunflowers is not easy for Porcupine.

Porcupine's Seeds connects to the early elementary science curriculum. Beginning science classes teach that seeds need soil, sun and water to sprout and grow. This fictitious story will cement these science concepts in the reader's mind.

Like all authors, you have had your fair share of rejection letters. You obviously did not let the letters deter you. How did you keep your determination without getting discouraged?

After a serious illness, I needed to streamline my life. I decided to give writing an honest effort. With that effort, I feel my writing is not lacking and editors have other variables to juggle like marketing a book, or they have other similar pieces in line. When you send a story that is your best, the rejection doesn't sting as much. Also, I have written for an educational publisher, a 'for hire' writing job, as well. That also cushions the rejection blow.

It has been my experience, some things come quite easily (like creating the setting) and other things aren't so easy (like deciding on a title). What comes easily to you and what do you find

more difficult?

The only reason story ideas come easier is because I observe and take note of children and their activities. But what is difficult is refining the initial story idea. For that I have a great critique group that helps when I hit a dead end.

Please describe to us your relationship between you and your editor. What makes an author/editor relationship a success?

In my experience, I have given my editor revisions or anything she wanted in as soon as possible. Editors are very busy and have to deal with authors that do not pull their weight after acceptance. So, I make sure I communicate with my editor whenever she needs anything.

What inspired you to write?

I've always enjoyed young children's books. With the text and illustrations, the story seems to take the readers to another world. I wanted to be able to do that as well.

Do you consider yourself a born writer?

Definitely not. It took work and still does to get to a story to where I want it to be.

Who is your favorite author and what is your favorite genre to read?

My favorite author is Wilson Rawls, the author of *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

This story touched me deeply as a teen and I cried at the end. Twenty year later when my son read this book and I thumbed through it, it again brought me to tears. Wilson Rawls connects the reader with the character so intimately that the character's fears, triumphs and sorrows become the reader's as well.

I tend to read non-fiction, but I do like to read historical fiction as well.

When they write your obituary, what do you hope they will say about your books and writing? What do you hope they will say about you?

I hope they will say that my writing rings true with children. I hope the obituary says that I took every opportunity that was given to me.

Where you have lived and what you have experienced can influence your writing in many ways. Are there any specific locations or experiences that have popped up in your books?

I have lived in California nearly all my life. I have visited India quite a few times and stayed with relatives. Visiting another culture expands your understanding of the human experience.

During college, I studied science. Many of my articles and some of my stories are science based.

My picture book manuscript, "Thatha and I" trace the differences and similarities of a grandfather's world and a young boy. I used my travels to India as a basis for this story.

Is there any particular book that, when you read it, you thought, "I wish I had written that!"?

I love Mem Fox's *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*, Sandra Boynton's *Doggies* and Anna Dewdney's *Llama Llama Red Pajama*.

Have you ever suffered from writer's block? If yes, how did you 'cure' it?

I have never suffered from long term writer's block. If I don't have anything to write about I look at themed magazine to get ideas.

Have you had any training to become a writer?

I have taken three different courses from the Institute of Children Literature – Writing for Children and Teenagers, Beyond the Basics, and Writing Children's Book. I have also attended the Writer's Bootcamp. I enroll in as many conferences that I can.

What type of books do you mostly write?

Porcupine's Seeds is my first published picture book. I mostly write picture book for 4-8 year olds.

But I have articles and stories published in magazines and anthologies. These can range from 4 year olds through adults.

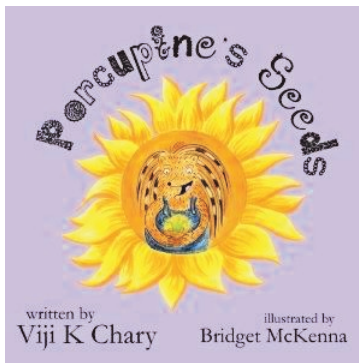
Does your family and friends inspire any of your books, characters, or plots?

Many, many times. The idea for *Porcupine's Seeds* was sparked when my son and I planted

seeds in a small pot. He tripped over the threshold, and the soil and seeds scattered. I have other picture books that my daughter and nephews inspired.

In fact, one story was inspired by a neighbor boy whom I took bowling with my daughter. He pretended to tap dance at the bowling alley. I wondered how I could incorporate world dances in one story and illustrate the dance beats through words. I worked on it and wrote “Brianna’s Beats” for Hopscotch for Girls.

I cannot write eight hours a day. I need to meet people, engage in conversation and go on vacations in order to have something to write about.



Can you share with us a little about your current book?

My latest book is *Porcupine’s Seeds*. In this book, Porcupine longs to grow beautiful sunflowers in his garden, just like Raccoon. When Raccoon gives Porcupine seeds, she

says that all they need is soil, sun, and water. But growing sunflowers is not easy for Porcupine.

Porcupine’s Seeds also connects to early elementary science curriculum.

What do you like most about writing?

I like coming up with ideas and once I have the story idea, I enjoy the actual writing processes. I especially enjoy getting into the ‘flow’ of writing when the words just come.

Do you find it hard to balance your personal writing time with your other job(s)?

Now that the family is a bit more independent and I have more time for myself. I have read many time management books. I have learned that making lists is very effective. As long as I organize my time, I can get most tasks done without becoming overwhelmed.

Tell us about your writing space.

When we remodeled our home, we built a study with two desks, plenty of file spaces and bookshelves. This area worked very well until my teenaged son’s work

area became the study.

I’ve moved out of the study and to the dining table with my lap top. When writing non-fiction pieces, this provides a lot of space for opened books for quick reference.

Is there anything you'd go back and do differently now that you have been published, in regards to your writing career?

Conferences and critique groups are a must. I would have attended more conferences if I had to do it again. The very first critique group I was a part of was very good but it was not exclusively for children’s writers. If I had to do it again, I would join an exclusively children’s group.

Do you do first drafts on a computer or by hand?

Computer, definitely. I find it easier to cut and paste. Sometimes, I write two different opening paragraphs to help decide which slant to use. I outline plots, write up character sketches and list story ideas by hand.

How do you see the future of book publishing, both traditional, electronic, and print on demand?

I don’t know much about publishing books. But I do think many businesses run on public demand. Electronic publishing seems to be in public demand right now. It is accessible and convenient. But reading a picture book to a child is difficult to replicate with an electronic device. The touch between readers, the large colorful illustrations and the conversations about the pictures and plot, I think, only a traditional book can offer.

What is your creative process like? What happens before sitting down to write?

I think a lot before writing. I formulate the story line, the characters, the climax, and the resolution. For non-fiction, I outline in my mind or on paper the topics I want to cover. If I am targeting a magazine or publisher, I read at least ten magazines or books from them to get their writing flavor. Then when I sit at the computer, I write as fast as I can. It is in the editing that I pay attention to word choice, sentence structure and overall flow.

Do you do a lot of research for your books?

Definitely for non-fiction. For fictional stories, I do need to do some research. I wrote a fictional story on dance beats. I used tap dancing and flamenco dance. To incorporate the sound of the dance, I repeatedly watched tap and flamenco dance videos.

It is important to make sure that fictional stories are anchored in reality. It makes the story believable to the readers.

What voice do you find most to your liking: first person or third person?

It depends on the story. If the story is a personal one where I am the main character as a child, I use the first person. But, I usually write in the third person.

Do you participate in competitions? Have you received any awards?

Occasionally I write for contests. It helps me focus on a topic. And it is always good to have written and polished another story.

What advice would you give to a new writer?

Read, read, read in the genre you want to write. Then write, write, write. Attending conferences is a must. A local conference will be fine.

Do you have any book signings, tours or special events planned to promote your book that readers might be interested in attending? If so, when and where?

Not at the moment. But I will do so, soon.

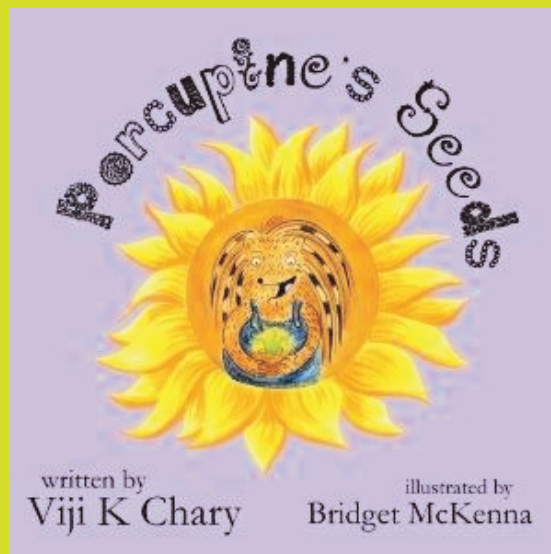
Use this space to tell us more about who you are. Anything you want your readers to know. Include information on where to find your books, any blogs you may have, or how a reader can learn more about you and writing.

My website is www.vijikchary.com.

To order your copy of *Porcupine's Seeds*, please visit <http://4rvpublishingcatalog.yolasite.com/chary.php>.

The World of Ink Network toured mychildren's picture book, *Porcupine's Seeds* published by 4RV Publishing in June 2012. You can find out more at <http://tinyurl.com/6wewb3c>

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