

## Special Interview with Author/Artist Lita Judge

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/special-interview-lita-judge/>

This entry is part 3 of 9 in the series [GSB Interview](#)

[GSB Interview](#)

- [Author Rob Skead: on collaborating](#)
- [Interview with YA Novelist Patti Buff](#)
- Special Interview with Author/Artist Lita Judge
- [Author Rob Skead: Submarines & Secrets](#)
- [Interview with MG Novelist Shelley Tougas](#)
- [An Interview with Sheryl Hershey](#)
- [An Interview with Jo Marshall: Bringing nature to story and story to nature](#)
- [Interview with Non-fiction Illustrator Konrad Algermissen](#)
- [Special Interview with Artist/Author Roxie Munro](#)

*This interview with Lita Judge was unquestionably one of the most enjoyable ones I ever conducted. I've no doubt it will inspire you!*

**When you see a Lita Judge book, you're immediately struck by the particular style and beauty.**

Even though she's written and illustrated non-fiction and fiction of all sorts, her work has a definitive look - all her own. Lita's on the page. In this very special interview with her and her husband Dave, their chemistry and heartfelt approach to creativity was made all the more clear.

[Lita Judge](#) and her husband Dave Judge travel extensively together - for touring her books, but also to be inspired and study new places for her *next* books. [Hoot and Peep](#) is a lovely illustrated storybook, and it's one of my [top picks of 2016](#). I'll be reading it next month at the library to a room packed with kids.

**Hoot and Peep is a story set in France. The idea of travel-to-storybook is fascinating to me, so it was the first thing I asked this interesting couple.**

**Chazda:** What was your inspiration for writing stories that involve travel? How did you first come up with that (fantastic) idea and decide to actually do it?

**Lita:** Traveling always opens up my mind to new possibilities and new ways of looking at things. We started traveling to Europe long before I wrote my first children's book. On these trips I pored through museums, soaking up art and I painted on location under bridges and busy street corners, out of windows, in gardens, and in museum halls.

Our plan was that if I could create a series of painting from each trip and sell them back home at art galleries then we would go back again. The plan worked! We ended up doing about 25 trips in 10 years. We went to France, England, Sweden, Spain, Austria, Italy, Russia, Finland, Estonia and many other places.

## **Falling in love with a special place.**

I often fall in love with story ideas that I know will take me to interesting places. I travelled extensively by foot, car and horseback through Yellowstone National Park for my book, *Yellowstone Moran*. [Thomas Moran](#) was a painter and explorer who played a key role in preserving many of our National parks. I carried his journals and followed in his footsteps, often painting in the exact spot he must have stood while painting his own paintings to create the illustrations for the book.

On a recent trip, I decided to sketch and draw aspects of Paris that excited my imagination. Instead of painting street scenes, I let my mind soar above the rooftops and churches. Instead of recording whatever light was available, I imagined Paris by moonlight or lamppost. The paintings that came from that trip were much more personal. I knew then it was time to acknowledge the gifts Paris has given me by setting a book there. The story of [Hoot and Peep](#) is a love song to a place that has taught and inspired me.

I am currently working on a picture book that is again set in France, this time in the countryside. It will be out next year, and it captures many of the paintings I did on a more recent trip to France. I'm also creating work inspired by painting trips to England and Italy for an illustrated novel I'm working on now.

I just want to keep doing books that excite and interest me! To never have the feeling that I want to slow down. And to travel to more wonderful places that allow me to soak up their beauty and capture their essence in a story.

**Chazda:** How many books have you created as a duo, with one illustrating and the other managing? Dave – do you also help Lita with plot and character ideas at the brainstorming phase, or perhaps more at the editorial stage?

**Dave:** Lita would probably take exception to me being called her manager. We've actually had fun thinking of what my title should be. Global Outreach when I answer emails. Fortification Specialist when I make us sandwiches for lunch. When Lita wrote [Hoot and Peep](#) she based the character of Hoot on me — older and wiser with a definite idea of how things are *supposed* to be done. Peep is much more like Lita.

But we do work together every day and we've been getting better over the years at discovering a language to communicate critical ideas about art, books, stories and visual elements. I try to achieve the right balance of positive feedback, to realize what is working well, along with constructive critiques to

help fix the things that are not working as well.

I try to articulate my experience as a reader of words or pictures. And I try to adjust to the phase of the project. We don't want to push for an optimization of things too early. Lita is quite good at brainstorming so I largely stay out of that process.

**Chazda:** Lita, you have several stand-alone storybooks on the market, published by a variety of publishers ([Disney-Hyperion](#), [Roaring Brook](#), [Viking](#), [Atheneum Books for Young Readers](#) and most recently, [Dial](#)). Any plans for a book series?

**Lita:** I have some companion books but no plans for a series.

**Chazda:** How did you decide on fiction and nonfiction storybooks?

**Lita:** I started writing only nonfiction but have grown to love creating both fiction and nonfiction stories. My grandparents were biologists, and they taught me to respect animals and to study how they live and interact in the wild. So my work reflects my upbringing, and the fact that I've always felt compelled to bring a better understanding of animals to young readers.

My own background as a geologist, and having grown up helping my grandparents with their research projects in the field, made me very comfortable with the research involved with creating nonfiction.

But the more I drew and wrote, the more I began to want to push myself into creating fictional characters with expressions full of exuberance and whimsy. I think my background with wildlife made my fictional drawings of animals better because they were rooted in an understanding for anatomy and how animals move. And I think my work with fictional characters made my nonfiction better because it really helped me focus on building connections between my readers and my subject through studying the subtlety of expressions.

**Chazda:** How was the contract arranged with your publisher?

**Lita:** I work with a literary agent who I adore, [Linda Pratt](#) at the [Wernick and Pratt Agency](#), because she keeps life sane for me, juggling all the contracts and turn-in dates. But more importantly, she is my sounding board for stories. She always gives me a safe creative place to bounce around ideas.

## **The Best Events with Lita**

**Chazda:** What book events do you attend? Can you talk about your favorite (and why it's your favorite)?

**Lita:** I enjoy going into schools and doing book festivals. This year I'm presenting at about 15 schools in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire. I had a great time last fall at the Sheboygan Children's book festival in Wisconsin.

I'm also giving keynotes at the Keene Children's Book Festival in New Hampshire, and at the Mazza Summer Conference in Findlay, Ohio.

I have a show of my artwork for Flight School at the Danforth Museum in Framingham, Massachusetts (<http://www.danforthart.org/LitaJudge-FlightSchool.html>) and I'll be there for a family day event next month.

I just want to continue connecting with kids, teachers, librarians and parents over stories and feel in some small way that my work is a part of their imagination and life. That's all I want.

**Chazda:** What kind of relationship do you have with your editors (have you met in person, perhaps Skype – or just via email)?

**Lita:** I try to get down to New York City a few times every year to meet with my editors. I've been working with [Namrata Tripathi](#), [Editorial Director](#) at Dial Books, the longest.

## What Lita Loves

**Chazda:** You've done so many different types of books. Do you have one or two that are your personal favorite?

**Lita:** All of my books are very special in some way, but [Flight School](#) is particularly close to my heart. In it, a little penguin has an oversized dream of learning how to fly and leaves his home and family to find a way to make that dream happen. It's kind of autobiographical really.

I was born on a tiny island in Alaska, and for much of my childhood, my family lived in remote places far out in the wilderness. Becoming an artist seemed like a pretty farfetched dream because I was never exposed to art in school nor had I met an artist who was making a living by painting. Somehow though this big dream came true and my family's livelihood comes from me drawing characters and writing stories.

When the book was [adapted into an off-Broadway musical](#), it just confirmed that dream even more because I got to watch the character born from my imagination suddenly singing and dancing on stage. I feel like that little penguin everyday I walk into my studio and sit down to create another story.

**Chazda:** What is the thing you are most proud of with **Hoot and Peep**?

**Lita:** I'm proud of the emotion that I captured in this story. Every story comes to me differently, but my fiction often comes to me as an emotion first, and then I build characters to pen a story and explore that emotion. This story was very much about gratitude - for all the beauty I see around me, for a life where I get to spend my time creating art which I love, for Dave who shares that life with me and has helped make it possible, for the place that has inspired and taught me.

A lifetime of painting unlocks an endless sense of wonder in me about the world. I wanted to write a story that expresses that wonder and the gratitude I feel at living this life. After I decided on that, I worked out from there with characters and setting. Usually images come before words. Images speak of an emotion that sometimes words can't describe. Once I have some of these images to anchor a story on, I build words and more images around them, writing and drawing together throughout the process.

**Chazda:** Are you touring the book? Where – and what has your experience been like?

**Lita:** For picture books my preference is visiting schools and appearing at Book Festivals and Conferences. I'm appearing at a few local New England book stores.

**Chazda:** What are your favorite shoes (or footwear)? Is it the same regardless of where you are?

**Lita:** Hoka One One – I'm wearing them in this painting I did of myself riding a bicycle in France.

## **Location, location, location**

**Chazda:** What is your favorite place in the world?

**Lita:** Paris has always been a wellspring of my art. But I love traveling to the Lake District in England and to Tuscany and Venice. And we love New Hampshire and Vermont.

**Chazda:** What location have you not as yet been to that you're planning on seeing next?

**Dave:** We'd like to go to Prague some time. This year we're going to the Dordogne region of France which we've been to before. We'd love to be able to go on two big trips each year but with three books in the works Lita is quite busy with deadlines. We love to ride our bicycles so I've been looking into good places to bike in Europe.

## **The Ideal Workspace**

**Chazda:** Describe your workspace, where you illustrate, write and edit your stories.

**Lita:** We found a beautiful piece of land in New Hampshire and I designed my house and studio. We had been saving and dreaming for a very long time, so the studio grew out of that energy. I found a salvaged church window and lugged some niches home from France that were made out of 15th century oak and were in a church that was sadly destroyed in WWI, but they have a home with me now.

And I carved ravens for the roofline outside to reflect my background. I was born on the Tlingit Indian reservation in Alaska and the ravens are my homage to their beautiful art and culture that inspires me. I'm grateful for every day I get to create in this space!

## **What's Next**

**Chazda:** What are you working on now?

**Lita:** I'm very excited about the projects coming up. First I have another story for my characters, Hoot and Peep. And I'm creating another nonfiction book about animals that will be a companion to my book, *Born in the Wild*. And then I have my first YA novel coming out! I'm so very excited about this one, it is an illustrated novel in verse and I am currently working on the final art pieces for that.

It is such an exciting departure for me and I'm thrilled to be working on a novel during a time in publishing when there is so much exciting innovation going on in this genre. It has been a very long adventure for me to bring this big scale project to life, and it is nearly done. Stay tuned, I'll be giving sneak peaks soon.

**Chazda:** If you could read your latest story to any particular person in the world, who would it be?

**Lita:** When I was younger I was lucky enough to spend many summers in the mountains of Montana studying art with Jack Hines and Jessica Zemsky. Jack just passed away last year at the age of 92. He was always so positive about my career and I wish I could share my latest story with him.

**Is there something I forgot to ask Lita Judge and Dave Judge?**

**I feel very inspired and hope you do as well.**

**Keep creating, no matter what.**

// //

**This entry is part of the series**

[GSB Interview](#)

**Be sure to check out the other posts:**

[<< Interview with YA Novelist Patti BuffAuthor Rob Skead: Submarines & Secrets >>](#)