



Patricia Polacco

TeachingBooks Original Movie Transcript

Patricia Polacco, interviewed in her home in Union City, Michigan, July 29, 2008.

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People will ask me, how is it that you came to be a children's book writer, and I have to say it's because of the incredible storytellers that I came from. When you are raised by people who can, at the drop of anything, manufacture an incredible story, you're doomed. You're going to be a storyteller yourself.

My mother's mother was the penultimate storyteller. She'd pick a violet and she'd put it up in front of my face. She would pull two petals out of it and say, now Tricia, look, and I'd look, and she'd say, do you see the little yellow man? And there is. There's a little yellow man that sits in the middle of it. He has a hat on. His little knees go over the edge, a little yellow man.

On Writing Family Stories

One of my favorite things to write about is my family. What I love about writing about these family members is I get to bring them back to life. *Pink and Say*, this is a story handed down to me from Say, who was Sheldon Russell Curtis, who was my great-great grandfather. He actually did fight in the civil war. He was left wounded on a field and found by a young black kid, Pinkus Aylee. This was probably the first reaching of multiculturalism within my family.

The Keeping Quilt is made up of pieces of clothing of my mother's family. I actually have the quilt. When I was little, I always slept with the yellow horse here, by my face.

I started thinking I want to do a series of drawings of everything within my family that I know has been done with that quilt. We used it to hold our babies in for their naming. We've used it as *chuppahs* for our weddings. It's been used as tablecloths. It's been used as babushkas. We use it to cover the coffin of the dead when our families die. I mean it literally follows us from the time we are born until our last moments on earth.

I named this house Meteor Ridge because one of the very first books I wrote is about a meteor that landed in the front yard of my grandparent's home. The meteorite is now our family headstone.

On Illustrating Picture Books

This is what a dummy looks like, the template, or blueprint, for the story. This is what determines the pacing of the story. This determines what the subjects are going to look like. How the story is literally laid out. The artwork in my book will vary depending on the story. There are some stories that I do that are very funny stories, so there, it's a rather cartoon style. *Pink and Say*, a lot of sepia tones and grays because we're talking about a time that is dark. *The Keeping Quilt* is all black and white drawings except for the quilt, and except for the clothes that originally went into that quilt. *Rechenka's Eggs*, these glorious Pysanky eggs and their majestic colors.

And there's also a pattern that appears in almost all of my books. And if you look closely you'll find it. I'm not going to tell you what it is. The other thing that appears in many of my books is a goat. Somewhere there's going to be a goat, because I love goats.

On Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism to me means more than just the blood that runs in your veins. It's food. It's how you dress. I lived in a wonderful inner-city neighborhood where my neighbors came in as many colors, ideas, and religions as there are people on earth. To me multiculturalism certainly is a sharing of different ideas, but it's also sharing your soul.

Being a Storyteller

I just love the richness of tell you a story and watching it unfold in front of your eyes and watching your face as I'm telling you. And if your eyes get bigger and you lean in, I'm going to add stuff to that story because I've got you, got you.

Books by Patricia Polacco (bibliography created November 2008):

- IN OUR MOTHER'S HOUSE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2009
- FOR THE LOVE OF AUTUMN, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2008
- SOMEONE FOR MR. SUSSMAN, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2008
- GINGER AND PETUNIA, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2007
- LEMONADE CLUB, THE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2007
- ROTTEN RICHIE AND THE ULTIMATE DARE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2006
- SOMETHING ABOUT HENSLEY'S, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2006
- EMMA KATE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2005
- GRAVES FAMILY GOES CAMPING, THE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2005

- MOMMIES SAY SHHH!, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2005
- JOHN PHILIP DUCK, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2004
- OH LOOK!, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2004
- ORANGE FOR FRANKIE, AN, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2004
- "G" IS FOR GOAT, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2003
- GRAVES FAMILY, THE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2003
- CHRISTMAS TAPESTRY, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2002
- WHEN LIGHTNING COMES IN A JAR, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2002
- BETTY DOLL, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2001
- MR. LINCOLN'S WAY, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2001
- BUTTERFLY, THE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2000
- LUBA AND THE WREN, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1999
- WELCOME COMFORT, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1999
- MRS. MACK, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1998
- THANK YOU, MR. FALKER, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1998
- IN ENZO'S SPLENDID GARDENS, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1997
- AUNT CHIP AND THE GREAT TRIPLE CREEK DAM AFFAIR, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1996
- I CAN HEAR THE SUN: A MODERN MYTH, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1996
- TREES OF THE DANCING GOATS, THE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1996
- BABUSHKA'S MOTHER GOOSE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1995
- MY OL' MAN, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1995
- JUST PLAIN FANCY, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1994
- MRS. KATZ AND TUSH, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1994
- MY ROTTEN REDHEADED OLDER BROTHER, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1994
- PINK AND SAY, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1994

- TIKVAH MEANS HOPE, Doubleday Books for Young Readers / a division of Random House, 1994
- BABUSHKA BABA YAGA, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1993
- BEE TREE, THE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1993
- CHICKEN SUNDAY, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1992
- PICNIC AT MUDSOCK MEADOW, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1992
- APPELEMANDO'S DREAMS, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1991
- SOME BIRTHDAY!, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1991
- BABUSHKA'S DOLL, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1990
- THUNDER CAKE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1990
- UNCLE VOVA'S TREE, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1989
- BOAT RIDE WITH LILLIAN TWO BLOSSOM, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1988
- CASEY AT THE BAT (written by Ernest L. Thayer), Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1988
- KEEPING QUILT, THE, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1988
- RECHENKA'S EGGS, Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1988
- METEOR! Philomel Books / a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 1987

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