

The Littlest Bigfoot

Interview with a Librarian

Librarian:

Many of my students love the idea of having a "do-over". Is there any scene from the book that might be your chance to relive something from your own life, making it turn out differently?

Jennifer Weiner:

I think that any kid who's been bullied has a fantasy of turning the tables and giving her tormentors a taste of their own medicine. Of course, this rarely happens...you have to wait until you grow up and have a wonderful, rich, full adult life, and then realize that that life is the best revenge. But, if I'm being honest, the way Millie exposes Jessica, knowing what Jessica has done to her friend, felt a little bit like that kind of fantasy do-over. I mean, who wouldn't want to know that the girl who's been making your life miserable has a deeply shameful secret of her own?

Librarian:

I'm really drawn to the characters of Alice and Millie, particularly because they struggle as being outsiders. What drew you to these characters? Why do you think this taps into experiences that so many of us feel?

Jennifer Weiner:

When I began writing this story, I drew on the children's books I loved the best – "Matilda" and "The BFG," "A Wrinkle in Time" and the Harry Potter series. All of those books – plus everything from Disney to Dickens – deals with children who are outsiders. Either they're orphans (and Alice started her life as an orphan, many, many drafts ago), or they have parents who Just Don't Understand. Part of creating Alice and Millie was just honoring tradition...but, also, I don't think there's a kid alive who, at 12 or 13 or 14, doesn't feel like an outsider, like he or she is lonely and alone and misunderstood, like they'd give anything to find a friend.

Librarian:

The forest & lake setting of the story is wonderful -- can you share any pictures of places that inspired this as you wrote?

Jennifer Weiner:

A lot of it was just my imagination...but I spend my summers in Cape Cod, where there are freshwater ponds that you can swim across. One of them, in Wellfleet, is called Gull Pond, and that was the place I pictured when I imagined the lake between Alice and Millie.



Librarian:

Can you recommend any books for Alice to read at night? What about Millie? What would they enjoy? What might help them escape or find solace? (I'm thinking that Millie would particularly enjoy Tim Federle's *Better Nate than Ever*)

Jennifer Weiner:

That's exactly what I'd pick for Millie, too – something great but grounded about a kid who wants to be a star (my older daughter loves Broadway, so she's a big fan of Nate). And I'd give Alice Anne of Green Gables – another girl with crazy hair, just looking for a friend, along with the “Spy School” series, and “A Wrinkle in Time,” because I think she feels a lot like Meg Murry – like she's a misfit, at war with the world, misunderstood and constantly fighting (I'd also buy her a copy of GEEK LOVE, and tell her that she can read it when she's sixteen)

Librarian:

I really appreciate how you encourage adults to embrace reading many different genres. Do you have any advice for parents who worry that their child is stuck in a rut, only reading one thing over and over?

Jennifer Weiner:

I have a wonderful pediatrician, who told me once that, in order to get a kid to try a new food, you have to put it in front of them, sometimes up to ten times, before they'll take a bite. You just keep putting it on their plate, and putting it on their plate, and then, eventually, they'll taste it. I think it's like that with books, too. First, kids have to see their parents reading. It's not enough to just have books in the house, studies show that kids need to actually see you engaging with the text. Then, I'd just make sure kids had all kinds of books available. Just like you keep putting different foods on a kid's plate, keep putting different books in front of them, and maybe starting a new genre as a read-aloud. Finally, I'd be patient. I know it sounds trite to say “at least he or she is reading something,” but I do think that getting kids to reading anything is more than half the battle...and I think that things like comic books can lead to graphic novels, which can lead to chapter books. I know I keep bringing up A WRINKLE IN TIME, but it's one of my all-time favorites and I could not get my daughter to read it. I must have bought her four different editions...until finally I found a graphic novel. Lucy gulped that down, then asked for the real thing, and now it's one of her favorite books, too.