

Interview Questions

Where do you live?

I have lived all over the country. I was born and raised in Indiana but have lived in Arkansas, California, New York, Minnesota and most recently Michigan. My family and I relocated here this summer and are excited to plant roots.

When did you know you wanted to become a writer and/or illustrator?

Since I could write. It has always been easier to express myself with a pencil and paper even when I was a child. It wasn't until I was an adult that I realized this was something I was meant to do.

How did you become a writer?

I have always wanted to leave my mark on the world as a writer but never found the right time or outlet to do so. I studied Business and Apparel Merchandising in college and jumped right into the corporate world after I graduated. But after almost 20 years in a corporate setting, I was burnt out. In 2020 I was presented with an offer that would change my life forever. In that moment it was one of the hardest decisions I ever made. To leave my comfy corporate job and everything I knew to start something completely new and unknown. It was a pivotal moment in my life and I'm so happy I took a chance on myself.

What do you write?

I write children's picture books.

Where do your ideas come from?

My ideas are all inspired by daughters and their real life experiences. As a mother to three daughters, I have a nice collection of ideas that I can't wait to translate into picture books.

Tell us about your book(s):

Finding Bunny, is my debut book which came out in March of this year, 2022. It is a heartwarming story about friendship and emotions. It is based on my youngest daughter, Elle, and her best friend, Bunny. It is an emotional journey about Elle losing and finding her best friend, Bunny, something so many can relate to. It is perfect for children 6 and under.

My second book, **Imagine That**, was just released in September of this year, 2022. This is a story that will spark imagination and empower children to creatively conquer their fear of the dark. It is based on my first born, Emma, who is adventurous and fearless during all aspects of life but bedtime evokes very different feelings. It is perfect for all children who battle a fear of the dark, ages 4-7.

How was your publishing experience?

I chose to self publish which was a journey in itself. My decision to self publish was driven by a few things. First off, I wanted full creative control over my stories because they are keepsakes for my children. Therefore, I wanted the illustrations to reflect my daughters and I wanted the storyline to stay true to their experiences. Second, I wanted my book out in the world as soon as possible. What author doesn't want that? Overall, I am happy I went the self publishing route. I

love everything about the journey from writing, to marketing, to building community, to selling and doing events. It was the right decision for me.

What is next for Renee?

I have two more picture books in works that I plan to release in 2023. The next one will be dedicated to my oldest daughter who I like to refer to as my bonus kiddo. She is my step daughter and her story will be about the relationship between a step mother and step daughter. I haven't seen many picture books out there that highlight this relationship and I think it's important to showcase the beauty of a blended family.

Renee is an avid user of social media. You may have seen her videos. In the next portion of the interview, Renee will discuss social media.

What types of social media do you use to market yourself?

There is so much out there but I like to focus on specific platforms and have an impact over quantity. The point of social media is to socialize and build communities so I want to ensure I am doing just that, authentically. I spend most of my time on Instagram (@reneebollaauthor) but I do have a presence on Facebook (@reneebolla) and Twitter (@RBollaAuthor). I am just starting to expand my TikTok (@reneebolla) account which has been fun.

You seem very comfortable using social media. How did you learn how to use it?

It's funny how I seem comfortable on these platforms now because I didn't start out that way. I have to thank the writing community for welcoming me and allowing me to be my authentic self. They have been one of the most welcoming communities I have ever worked with. Also, I am a very strategic person so before diving in I spent a lot of time educating myself on all things social and connecting with my mentors or other accounts that inspire me to help guide my journey. This is a social community and it is about building a network. If you think of it that way and less transactional it makes it easier to navigate.

How hard is it for you to put yourself out in the world? What drives you?

I am a pretty private person so it took a minute before I was comfortable putting myself out there and letting myself be vulnerable with the world. I am a highly sensitive person too so the thought of me sharing my authentic self with the world and opening myself up for feedback was terrifying. But I am constantly driven by personal growth and paving a path for my daughters so I had to take the next step. I already did the hardest part of leaving my corporate job and starting a new career so why would I let fear hold me back at this point?

What's your experience been like using social media to market your books?

It is a long game. If you think you will jump on these platforms and have a million authentic followers over night you have missed the mark. The idea behind social is to build authentic communities that will support you, your journey and your product. You are building a brand around yourself not your product. If you only think about promoting and selling your product you will fail. This is a hard concept for many because it requires a lot of engagement and work up

front. If you don't invest the time and energy it will be challenging to grow. And remember, there is enough room for all of us in the sandbox to use the platforms to uplift one another.

Which media platform do you find the best for promoting yourself? Why?

I have prioritized Instagram at this point. I find the social engagement on there to be honest and authentic and I, personally, feel most natural on this platform. I also find that my target audience uses this platform the most which is key. As you are building your brand you have to have a clear understanding of your target audience and where they spend their time. I use IG for community and the selling of my books so I spend time connecting with authors, entrepreneurs, mothers and teachers.

How much of your day is focused on social media versus your writing?

In the beginning of my social media journey, it was too much. I created my social presence after the writing and completion of my first book, Finding Bunny. Which is not an ideal timeline but I was on a learning journey. Therefore, social media was all consuming for a while before I got a good handle on my strategy. My advice is to create your strategy first, don't jump in blind. You will waste your time and energy. You need a process, goals and a timeline to work off of. Now that I have regulated all of that I can spend more time writing again.

Renee, one last question, tell us something that no one knows—something about you that isn't posted anywhere on your website or social media.

You are really getting me to open up in this interview. :)

I was going to share a fun fact but I changed it up last minute and decided to share something personal in hopes to encourage and inspire others on their journey. I struggle with ADHD and was not diagnosed until I became an adult. This was frustrating to hear as an adult because I spent a lot of time wondering if certain aspects of my life could have been easier if I knew earlier. Many girls go misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all because of their ability to work through it. It can be a very internalized thing where the hyperactivity happens in the brain vs outward looking hyperactivity. That was me. I had and still have so much activity going on in my brain ALL the time that basic daily tasks can be challenging to accomplish. This was definitely something that contributed to my burn out in the corporate world. But now I know and I have spent the last few years educating myself on all things ADHD specifically for adult women and how I can manage it. Having ADHD as an entrepreneur is not easy because I am the only one responsible for my day to day structure and because I'm an emotionally driven artist staying on task requires work. I share this because I am all about building a supportive community when it comes to this topic. I am open to connecting and sharing tips that I have learned along my journey with others out there dealing with the same thing.

Renee, thank you so much for stopping by. Readers will have a great insight into your personality. If you would like to follow Renee, below are links to her website and social media.

Website:

<https://www.reneebollaauthor.com/>

Instagram:

Handle @reneebollaauthor

<https://www.instagram.com/reneebollaauthor/>

Tik Tok

<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTdTU8Ex8/>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/reneebollaauthor>

Twitter: @RBollaAuthor