



## **An Interview with Cynthia Lord, conducted by Dr. DeAmicis' Class**

*In Fall 2005, I held a dual interview with a wonderful fifth-grade class in California. First, the students interviewed me, and then I interviewed them.*

Here are the questions the students asked me:

### **What is the first step to getting your book or a story published? ~Katie A.**

Katie, I think the very first step goes all the way back to reading. Most published authors began as avid readers. Reading other people's books gives you an inner sense of story that is a great help when you write your own books.

The second step is being willing to write (and write and rewrite) until you develop your skills and your own voice in your writing. Writers who get all the way to publishing have usually spent years at it.

When you've done those two steps and have created a piece of writing you'd like to have published, it's a good idea to get feedback on it from other writers and readers you trust. Every writer I know needs other people to help point out places where his/her work could be stronger.

Then you have to decide on an appropriate place to send your writing. There are magazines and websites that specifically publish young writers, and I have a list of resources on my website, if you're interested.

[http://www.cynthialord.com/young\\_authors.html](http://www.cynthialord.com/young_authors.html). There are also writers' market guides that list publishers and their guidelines for submissions.

### **Where do you get such good ideas? ~Samantha**

Samantha, thank you so much for the word "good!" For me, ideas come from questions, usually. I start wondering why or how or what if, and that sparks something to write about. Writing for me is a lot like acting, it allows me to be another person and have things happen that may never happen to me in real life. Sometimes being other people in my books teaches me more about myself, too.

### **What is your favorite part about writing? ~Aaron**

Aaron, there are lots of good parts, but I think my favorite part is when something surprises me. I'm typing along and suddenly, something happens that I didn't expect or plan for. It keeps the story fresh and exciting for me when that happens.

**What is the name of your dog and what kind is it? ~Kayleigh**

My dog's name is Flurry and he's a Bichon Frise (pronounced "bee-shawn frees-ay"). When we got him, he was a tiny three-pound white ball of fur (and teeth! He chewed everything, including some of my favorite picture books!).

He's the color of snow and full of energy, so "flurry" works for both meanings of his name. Flurry is very friendly and likes people—except the mailman whom Flurry seems to think is Voldemort in a postal uniform. ☺



*Here's a picture of Flurry, Kaleigh. He looks a little sad here but really, he's just sleepy.*

**Why did you choose to write about challenged people? ~Austin**

Austin, the short answer is that I have a son with autism. The longer answer is that all people have challenges whether those challenges have a name or not. Life is long and challenges come into every family, even if you don't start life with them. RULES is about accepting there is value in everything, even in imperfection. Sometimes things can't be changed, but you can change your feelings about them.

**Are you going to make more of these stories? Perhaps a sequel? ~Kyle and Ryan H.**

First thank you, Kyle and Ryan, I always take a sequel question as a compliment. I don't have any plans to write a sequel, but I am writing more books with different characters and settings and questions.

**Is Rules based upon your own life? ~Daniel and Rachel**

Parts of the story are based on real things and people, Daniel and Rachel. But most are from my imagination.

**Why did you call the story Rules? ~Paul**

Paul, one challenge of many people with autism is understanding social “rules,” like if you say “Oh, great!” while you roll your eyes, it doesn’t mean the same thing as “Oh, great!” said happily and plainly. When you try to teach all these little “rules” to someone who doesn’t understand them, you see how complicated people really are. That’s something the main character in my book struggles with—our world doesn’t fit into neat, “always” answers.

**Can we reserve a copy now? ~Danielle**

It’s available online to be pre-ordered. It will be in bookstores after April 2006 and eventually, in the Scholastic Book Club fliers, Danielle.

**Could you give us some tips on how to be a good writer? ~Edwin**

Read, write, learn, and dream. Those are things that a good writer does every week, if not every day, Edwin.

Reading stretches you. It wraps you in words and stories. The more you read, the more you will be able to judge your own writing.

Writing teaches you. Writing is a skill, and to learn any skill, you must practice it regularly. Dare to write something really, really bad and try again and again, until you write something that makes you amazed you wrote it.

Learning gives you those tools you need—grammar, spelling (I’m still learning about commas, myself!), but also things like dialogue and description. Take yourself seriously about all these things because they allow your writing to shine.

And finally, dream because it gives you things worth writing about.

**We would like to know what is going to happen with both Jason and with David.**

*~Callie*

Well, Callie, in stories, life always becomes more complicated, right? That’s all I’ll tell you ☺

**Why are you willing to share the first two chapters before the book is published?**

~Galen

Galen, I was “author of the week” for a group of teachers, including Dr. DeAmicis (You are very lucky to have her!). The other authors who had been “author of the week” already have books published so teachers could check their books out of the library to read them. I don’t have a book in the library yet, so I asked my editor if it would be okay to share a couple chapters.

**How long did it take you to write the story Rules? ~Angela**

To write the first draft took about 4 months, Angela. Then I sent it to my writing friends who critiqued it and gave me feedback and I rewrote it. I worked on it for about a year before I started sending it to publishers. After Scholastic bought it, I did more rewrites on it with an editor. Here’s something I learned: when an author writes a book to be published, she’d better write about characters she really likes, because she will spend a long, long time with them! ☺

**Do you only write for children? Is the audience for Rules children? ~Cassidy and Mrs. Reilly**

That’s a good question, Cassidy and Mrs. Reilly. Authors often write in more than one genre. I write articles (and occasionally short stories) for adults, too. I also have had units for teachers published.

**How many times and in what ways did you change this story before we had the chance to read it? ~Rachael**

Oh, it’s changed a lot, Rachael. The new friend used to be an old friend. Where the story begins has changed—it used to begin in the kitchen with a big milk mess. Part of being a writer is learning how to let go of something to reach higher. Sometimes you even need to let go of things you like.

There are many things to consider in a story: the characters, the plot, the setting, the language, etc. It’s a bit like one of those puzzles where you can match up many sides, but if the last side doesn’t match, you have to take it apart and try again—even though some sides work. This book felt like that for me sometimes. I needed to accept that the “plot” part of the book wasn’t working and that meant taking apart those other elements and trying again to make it *all* work together.

Many people are involved in creating a book, not just the author. There is an editor and an art director and a book designer, a copyeditor, a typesetter, and this list goes on. An author doesn’t choose the font or the cover or the design, so it’s an amazing experience to

open an envelope or click on an attachment and see someone else's vision of your book. It's very exciting.

**What inspired you to be an author?** ~*Olivia*

Lots of things have inspired me, Olivia. I've always loved to read and loved books, even as objects—those sharp corners and the swoosh of the pages when you flutter them fast. I also like to tell stories, and a fiction writer is really a storyteller. I had wonderful teachers who encouraged me and now, I'm very lucky to be surrounded by creative people who also love books. They keep me inspired.