



Friends of the Sea Otter
Presents:
Interview with Janet Halfmann

Janet Halfmann is an award-winning children's author who strives to make her books come alive for young readers and listeners. She has written thirty-five fiction and nonfiction children's books.

Besides "Good Night, Little Sea Otter," other recent books are: "Home in the Cave;" Eggs 1, 2, 3: Who Will the Babies Be?"; "Star of the Sea: A Day in the Life of a Starfish," "Fur and Feathers;" "Little Skink's Tail;" and "Seven Miles to Freedom: The Robert Smalls Story."

Before becoming a children's author, Janet was a daily newspaper reporter, children's magazine editor, and a creator of coloring and activity books for Golden Books. She is the mother of four and the grandmother of four. When Janet isn't writing, she enjoys gardening, exploring nature, visiting living-history museums, and spending time with her family. She grew up on a farm in Michigan and now lives with her husband in South Milwaukee, WI.

FSO: How long have you been writing children's books?

JH: I've been writing children's books for about 15 years. I've also worked as a daily newspaper reporter, as an editor/writer for a national children's magazine, and as a creator of coloring and activity books.

Writing children's books has always been my dream, so I feel extremely lucky to now be living that dream.

FSO: What is the most enjoyable part of writing children's books?

JH: I enjoy playing with words. I love finding just the right word that shows the action or feeling I'm trying to share. I also love being able to tell a story.

FSO: What is the overall message that your young audience can take away from "Good Night, Little Sea Otter"?

JH: Most of all, I think "Good Night, Little Sea Otter" is a fun, soothing bedtime story. I hope that young listeners can feel the wonderful, loving bond between Little Sea Otter and his mom. I also hope the book shows kids how amazing and varied life is in the ocean, and what a kelp forest is like. When I do story times, I have the children hold onto kelp strands made of green flannel, so the kids feel like they're part of the otters' ocean home.

FSO: What made you decide that sea otters would serve as the main characters for "Good Night, Little Sea Otter"?

JH: I got the idea for the book when I was writing a magazine article about two young girls scuba diving in the kelp forest off the California coast. In researching the animals the girls met, I fell in love with sea otters. I especially was fascinated by how the mother wraps herself and her baby in a kelp cradle for the night so the two won't drift away. As I read about the kelp cradle, I knew then that Little Sea Otter and his mom were perfect to star in a bedtime story.

Since writing the story, I've been able to visit the sea otters at Monterey Bay Aquarium in California. What a fun time watching the otters swim and play!

FSO: What are some of your personal favorite characteristics about the sea otter?

JH: I love how otters are so playful, and how the mom and pup have such a close bond. It also fascinates me how otters use stones as tools to break open shellfish.

FSO: This book helps promote a lot of attention for this beloved animal. Were you aware that sea otters are endangered when you chose to write about them?

JH: No, I didn't know, but I soon found out in doing research for the book.

FSO: Do you have any ideas about what you might write about next? Do you think otters may become reoccurring stars in your literature?

JH: I have two new books coming out in the next year or so. The first is by the same publisher as "Good Night, Little Sea Otter." Titled "Grandma Is a Slowpoke," it features a grandma and her grandson taking a walk in their neighborhood, and all the animals they see. The second, "Rainbow of Birds," is an original legend about how the rainbow came to be.

Otters could very well return in a future book. I have always loved river otters, so i think a river otter may star in a future story.