



Q & A WITH ERICA S. PERL, THE AUTHOR OF WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU O.J.

Q: *When Life Gives You O.J.* is a book with a pretty unusual premise: girl wants dog, girl ends up with orange juice jug instead. How did this story come to you?

A: My grandpa Alan was a real character - opinionated and obstreperous and larger-than-life - a lot like Ace, the grandfather in the book. And, like so many kids, I desperately wanted a dog. So while Grandpa Alan never made me take an orange juice jug for a walk, I wouldn't have put it past him.

Q: What else in the book is based on your experiences?

A: Well, the book is set in Burlington, Vermont, where I grew up. I was one of very few Jewish kids, and I was the new kid when I moved there, like Zelly. So the book speaks to my experience feeling simultaneously interesting and special and feeling out-of-place and weird. I also volunteered at the Chittenden County Humane Society (which is in the book), and I certainly enjoyed my fair share of creemees.

Q: Creemees?

A: That's the Vermont word for soft-serve ice cream. Yes, it is spelled C-R-E-E-M-E-E.

Q: Let's talk about O.J. Ace's idea is that by walking an orange juice jug (who gets named "O.J.") around like a dog, Zelly will demonstrate responsibility. How, exactly?

A: Well, Ace tells Zelly that if she "feeds" and walks and cleans up after O.J., day in and day out, her parents will see how responsible she can be. But at the same time he's trying to make a point by showing her that caring for a dog will, in fact, require a big commitment on her part. Meanwhile, Zelly goes back and forth between believing in Ace's plan and believing that Ace is nuts.

Q: Many of your other books – like *Chicken Butt!* - have a lot of humor in them. To what extent does humor play a role in *When Life Gives You O.J.*?

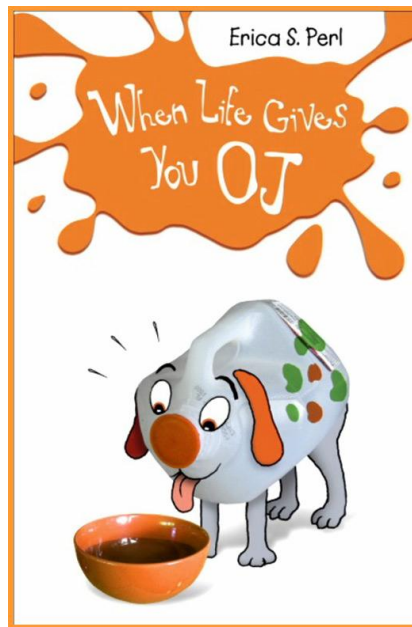
A: There are a lot of funny moments in this book, from the slapstick humor of Zelly tripping over O.J. while trying to clean up after him, to the unselfconscious way Ace behaves in public. But as silly as the premise is, there are serious issues that should be relatable for many readers. Zelly is teased – gently, by her friends, and not-so-gently by Nicky, the class bully – and has a real crisis of confidence. She’s pulled in a lot of directions as she tries to figure out how to stand up for her choices and discover the implications of her actions.

Q: What do you hope readers will take away from the book?

A: I hope that readers – boys as well as girls - of all backgrounds will identify with Zelly’s struggles: to fit in and feel secure with her friends without losing her identity, to take pride in her cultural heritage, and to value what makes her family special while developing her independence.

Q: Did you end up convincing your parents to let you get a dog? And does Zelly?

A: I finally convinced my parents when I turned 13 and celebrated my Bat Mitzvah. As for Zelly... well, let’s just say that when Ace is involved, nothing is ever simple!



For additional information about *When Life Gives You OJ* or to schedule an interview with Erica S. Perl please contact Tracey Daniels, 828-859-9456, Tracey@mmpublicity.com.