



Media talking points

What prompted you to write a children's book?

I love children's books. That's probably because if I think of all the places I'd like to go in my spare time, reality isn't one of them. I like to escape, and I like to look at great illustrations. For five years, I was a Girl Scout leader, and it was something of a personal mission of mine to help the girls in my troop to feel good and strong about being young women. Our culture puts a lot of pressure on girls, and I was probably a little unrelenting in my message to the girls in my troop that being a girl is great and being themselves is fabulous. I had wanted to get that message out in a book, but didn't want to do anything preachy.

How have issues of self-esteem affected your life?

Self-esteem is something I developed late in life with a lot of help from a good friend and therapist. I wanted to do something with my life that might make it just a little bit easier for children to believe in themselves. That's why I think when I set out to write something just for the joy of it that I wrote *Too Tall Alice*. The notion of believing in myself and seeing me really seeing me is something that gives me tremendous joy.

What was the process that you went through to develop the character of Alice?

Alice just popped into my head fully formed. I've named every female fictional character I've created since 1986 Alice. I was pregnant that year with a baby girl. My husband and I were going to name the baby Alice Elizabeth. Unfortunately, I had a miscarriage and was never able to get pregnant again.

How did you and Dom, the illustrator, work together to design the look of the characters and the visual elements of the book?

We talked about who Alice was and what I thought she looked like. Then we talked about the style of the writing of the story. It was very visual, so it wasn't like we needed illustrations to drive the narrative. We wanted illustration to just take the story further, and we wanted the type to be part of the illustrations. The nature of the story, I believe, called for this kind of treatment. That also gave us the opportunity to play with the type—make it

bigger, smaller, italics, etc.—to underscore the action and emotions of the story.

Do you feel that children today have more issues with self-esteem than you did as a child? If so, what are the differences?

I'm not sure that children today suffer lower self-esteem than generations before, but I think they are under far more pressure than generations before to conform to unattainable standards of perfection and beauty. Also, there is so much pressure to consume, to have the hottest shoes, clothes, etc. That is really out of control, I believe, and as a result, children, particularly girls, don't have an opportunity to just be children. Ten-year-old girls are dressing like they just stepped off the set of a television show or out of the pages of a fashion magazine.

In our celebrity-centered world, what can role models today do to positively change young girls attitudes about themselves?

I think it would be great if we knew the realities of celebrities' lives. We only see them after the make-up artists have transformed them into something perfect. Girls need to understand that the images they see in magazines have been retouched and that a lot of hair and make-up talent goes into making a person a movie/television star. I'm happy to see people like Jamie Leigh Curtis and Jessica Simpson out there—just themselves—and the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. I think we need more of this.

What five things can each of us do to foster self-esteem in our family and in our communities? Be considerate of and kind to each other. Thank people who do something well or something nice. Praise someone who does a good job. Provide constructive—never destructive—feedback when it's needed. Remember, we all have our issues and life is tough for all of us at times. When someone is sharing their feelings, listen carefully and let them own their emotions. Trivializing someone's emotions is one of the best ways to tell them they don't matter or their perception of the world is inaccurate, and that is terribly undermining behavior. Also, be patient with and stop judging others harshly.

How do you hope that Alice's story can make a difference?

Several years ago, I was reading at a high school assembly in New Jersey. After the show, a young woman came up to me and told me that she had been going through a tough time and that listening to my stories helped her to see that things would get better for her. It would be great if Alice's words to readers could help them to see that they're okay and can be all they want to be. Tall order, I know, but every message that supports that theory helps. I'm putting together some curriculum materials for teachers and after school programs focused on self-esteem and positive imaging. These can help too. Of

course, the place we all want to hear that we're loved is at home. Maybe children who hear it's okay to expect that in a book will start asking for it at home. That would be great. Another tall order, but children's minds are open.