

WHAT'S YOUR STORY, TAMEKA?



I was an only child...with a really big family! The way I grew up, relatives who lived outside your house were just as much “family” as the ones who lived inside it. My family included many aunts and uncles, and lots of cousins to play with.

People always ask if I was spoiled as an only child. My answer is, “Yes.” Except I wasn’t spoiled with things; I was spoiled with lots of love and attention—the good kind of spoiling everyone can use.

The first book I remember owning as a very young child was a book of Mother Goose’s Nursery Rhymes. It had a black and white checkerboard pattern around the edge, and I knew every single word in it. I wish I still had it today.

I also remember going to my cousins’ house and reading their beat-up copies of Dr. Seuss books. Every time I went over there, I would read those books. I didn’t even mind that some of the pages were missing; the stories were still enjoyable without them.

While we didn’t travel much when I was a kid, I do remember the few times we took the Greyhound bus to Alabama. My grandmother packed food for us to eat, like ham sandwiches with mustard, chicken, sweet potato pie, and cheese and saltine cracker stacks.

I remember a whole lot of things about my early years because I loved my childhood. That doesn’t mean things were always perfect—they weren’t—but I loved it just the same.



- **What kind of student were you?**

I was a very good student. I mostly made A’s. Doing well in school was important to me, partly because my mother expected me to do my very best, and partly because I was very competitive and liked to be number one. I was no good at sports, so getting A’s was my thing.

- **Did you have any bad or funny habits as a child?**

I had a habit of sitting around with my mouth open. Adults were always telling me to close it. I don’t know why I did that. Hmmm...maybe I had a

problem breathing through my nose. Mom did say I always kept a cold...

- **Did you play an instrument? Which one(s)?**

I never learned to play an instrument as a child—but I've always wished I had. So next year, I'm signing up for piano lessons.

- **What one thing can you tell readers that nobody knows?**

I used to think I could fly. Well, more like float through the air about 15 feet. I clearly remember doing it when I was about 5 years old. I flew from one end of the living room to the other. I was twenty-something years old before I realized that it had all (probably) just been a dream.

Shhhh...let's keep that a secret.



- **Favorite pastime as a child?**

My favorite thing to do was to sit quietly and listen to grownups talk. The more quiet I was, the more interesting the things I heard.

- **Do you listen to music while you write, or do you like silence?**

I work best when it is silent.

- **Is it hard to write a book?**

Some books are harder to write than others. Some books take a lot of figuring out, while other books just seem to flow out of your brain and on to the page. The longer the book is I'm trying to write, the more figuring out I have to do.

- **What's the hardest part about writing a book?**

The hardest part about writing a book is finding the words to express what you want to say, in an interesting way that makes kids want to read it.

- **Have you ever thrown a manuscript away?**

Nope. They're all on my computer somewhere. But there are some I'll probably never go back and try to fix, because I'm not excited about them anymore.

- **Do you have any children or pets and have you ever used them in a book?**

I do not have any pets, but I do have children. Sometimes I use things they have said or done in my stories, but I mostly use my own childhood memories. I try hard to remember how I felt about certain things, and then I try to find the perfect words to describe those feelings. Kids from the past and the present share the same kinds of feelings, and we always will.

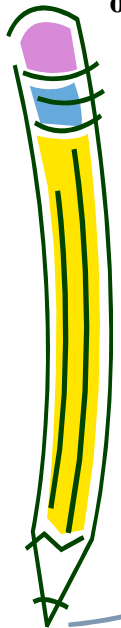
- **Are you famous?**

No, and I do not want to be. I do hope my books become famous, though.

Quick Picks:

- **Soup or salad?**

Salad, especially if it has strawberries, raisins, cranberries and mandarin oranges. (I am speaking of a green salad, although it sounds like I'm describing a fruit salad.)



- **P & J or Mac and Cheese?**

Very tough call. I'll say mac and cheese...but only if it's homemade and VERY cheesy.

- **Favorite or least favorite vegetable?**

Least favorite: Beets. Blech.

- **Favorite or most hated subject?**

*Favorite: English and Spelling.
Least Favorite: Geography.*

- **Longhand or computer?**

Computer.

- **Early Bird Writer or Night Owl?**

Neither. I'm too sleepy at those times. I'm a Mid-morning/Early Afternoon Writer.