

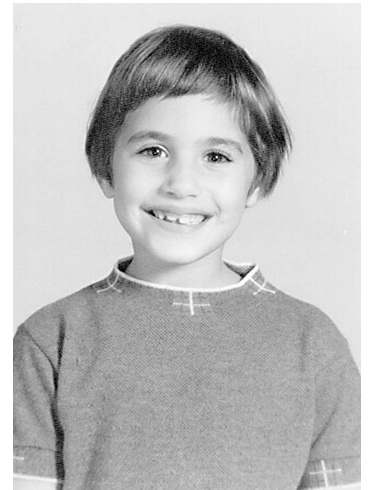
What's Your Story, Jacqueline Jules?

I spent my entire childhood in Petersburg, the small southern Virginia town I was born in. My mother was a dietician from New York who loved the color pink. Most of the rooms in our house, except my sister's and mine, painted pink. My father was an immigrant from Switzerland, who loved to garden. Every summer, he plowed up the entire backyard to plant corn, squash, tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables. I spent long hours in the dirt, helping my Dad harvest and weed his humongous garden. Another favorite summer activity was playing with caterpillars. Hordes of them would nest in a crevice of one of our old trees. I spent hours watching those furry little guys crawl around in containers. Caterpillars walk with a fascinating wiggle.



This may sound like I was a tomboy, but I really wasn't. I also liked to sing, swim, and dress up in pretty dresses. I didn't see any reason why someone who played with caterpillars in the morning shouldn't like wearing white lace socks in the afternoon. My sister says we were "tomboys in skirts."

Some people love nature or animals. Others love sports or music. I've never been a "one passion" kind of person, except when it comes to writing. That has been my one overriding dream. In third grade, I declared my intention to become a writer, but it took me years to publish my first poem and many more years to publish my first book. Now I spend most of my free time playing with words instead of caterpillars. But while I write this, I wonder if those days of playing with caterpillars didn't help prepare me to be a writer. While I enjoy being around people, I don't mind being alone with my own thoughts. I like watching an idea wiggle across the page until it becomes a sequence of words important to my story. Caterpillars become cocoons before they burst out into the sky as beautiful insects with powerful wings. To write, you have to be comfortable being by yourself sometimes, to let your ideas grow until they are ready to fly on their own.



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

I was a hard worker in school. My parents always made sure I did my homework and helped me study for tests. My mom, especially, helped me correct the grammar in my written assignments and taught me a lot about proofreading.

- **What were your favorite things to do when you were young?**

I enjoyed reading and doing jigsaw puzzles. I also liked taking long walks along

the pretty tree-lined streets in my neighborhood.

- **What were you afraid of?**

I didn't like big dogs who barked too loud or chased after me on the sidewalk. In those days, there were no leash laws and most dogs roamed freely in the neighborhoods. Not all of them were friendly when you walked by their houses. Sometimes, I would avoid certain streets, to avoid loud, territorial dogs.

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

I bit my nails and chewed on pencils. I shredded napkins at restaurants. My hands were never good at staying still. They still aren't!

- **Any defining moments (good or bad) that shaped you as a child?**



Since my father was from Europe, he spoke with a foreign accent and wasn't always familiar with American customs or figures of speech. Sometimes, I watched my dad struggle to be accepted in a small southern town with people who had lived there for generations. The experience made me sensitive to the feelings of my students, years later, when I worked in a school with kids who had been born in other countries. It inspired me to write my picture books [No English](#), which is about two girls who find a creative way to overcome a language barrier, and [Duck for Turkey Day](#), which is about a little girl who feels uncomfortable celebrating Thanksgiving with a traditional

Vietnamese dish instead of turkey.

- **Did you ever do something brave when you were young?**

I wish I had, but I can't recall anything special. That's been one of the best things about writing the [Zapato Power](#) series. I get the chance to imagine being a hero as I create adventures for Freddie Ramos and his magic purple sneakers.

- **Did you ever get into trouble at home or school?**

I wasn't always as nice to my sister as I should have been. In kindergarten, I went through an unexplained phase of knocking lunch boxes off of desks.

- **What books were favorites as a child?**

*I loved *The Jungle Book*, *The Secret Garden*, and *The Borrowers*. I also enjoyed mysteries.*

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

I took piano lessons as a child but never really learned to play. The instrument I used the most came from my own vocal chords. I loved to sing and still do. In high school and college, I took professional voice lessons. When I worked as a school librarian, I would always begin and end story time with songs. I enjoy making up songs and in author visits, I usually sing a song that goes along with one of my books. On my website, I have audio files with some of my songs, including “The Ballad of Freddie Ramos,” the song I wrote about my hero from Zapato Power. <http://www.jacquelinejules.com/sneakerswithpower.htm>

- **If you weren't a writer, what would you like to be?**

Luckily, I am also a teacher and a former school librarian. I love working in an elementary school. My students are always giving me ideas for stories and characters.

- **What advice do you have for aspiring young readers and writers?**

Take the time to examine your stories. Did you make everything clear for the reader? Did you put in enough details so the reader can see what you see in your mind? Did you put your sentences in the best order—grouping thoughts and ideas— or did you mention something in paragraph one and wait until paragraph three to explain it?

I teach writing in an elementary school and hold individual conferences with students about their stories. We often talk about the importance of remembering the reader. A writer’s responsibility is to give the reader the best story he or she can.

- **Where do you get your ideas?**

I get ideas when I read, when I listen to my students talk at school, when I remember my past, and when I hear teachers ask for books on certain topics. Ideas are never the problem. It’s sitting down and turning those ideas into a story with a compelling beginning, middle, and end.

- **Do you write everyday? If so, for how long?**

On the days I don’t teach or do a speaking engagement, I usually start around 8:30 a.m. and write until the afternoon, when I take an exercise break. After dinner, I usually work again until bedtime.

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

I prefer silence. I like to hear the melodies of the words I am writing in my head.

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

The first draft is the hardest for me. I love revising my stories once I know the plot. I revise my stories so many times I usually lose count. And sometimes, I work on stories for years before I get them right.

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

I've had to put many manuscripts aside that weren't working. Last summer, I picked up an idea I started almost twenty years ago and finally turned it into the story I always thought it could be. It will be my 23rd book!

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

My youngest son and I had guinea pigs for several years. That's why Freddie in the Zapato Power books has a guinea pig. His name, Claude, the Second, comes from a childhood friend who named her dog, Mickey The Second, after the first Mickey died.



Art by Miguel Benitez

Quick Picks:



- **Favorite stationary item?** *My stationary exercise bike.*
- **Soup or salad?** *Salad*
- **P & J or Mac and Cheese?** *Don't really like either. I'm always on a diet.*
- **Dog, Cat, Bird, or Fish?** *I'm a bird person.*
- **Favorite or least favorite vegetable?** *I'm not a strict vegetarian, but I usually choose vegetarian options when I eat out. Years of eating my father's homegrown vegetables, turned me into a vegetable lover.*
- **Favorite or most hated subject?** *I don't really like math.*

- **Sourdough, whole wheat, white or rye?** *Whole wheat*
- **Love revision or hate it?** *Love it.*
- **Longhand or computer?** *Poems, longhand. Computer for longer pieces.*
- **Early Bird Writer or Night Owl?** *I write in the mornings and the evenings. Whenever I can find the time.*