

WHAT'S YOUR STORY, CRYSTAL HUBBARD?



I was born in St. Louis, Missouri. My mother was a teacher, and she raised me and my five sisters with help from my Grandma Hazel, who lived in one of the two apartments above ours. My Grandma was the best cook and she was very strong. When I was little, she used to hold me upside-down by my ankles and swing me, and I LOVED that!

My mother loved to read, and every week in the summer, she would send me to the library to get books for her. I loved to go because I loved to read, too, and the head librarian, Isabel Duncan, introduced me to so many authors—Mark Twain, Harper Lee, Ambrose Bierce, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Alexandre Dumas—I was never bored in the

summer because my days were filled with stories.

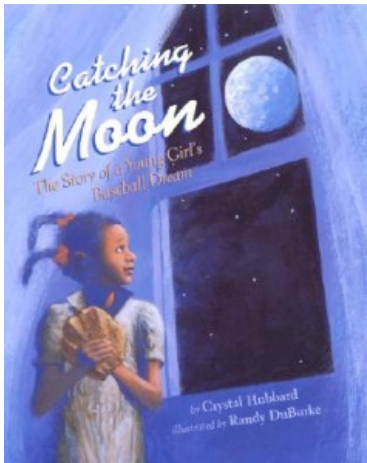
When I was ten, I decided I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to tell stories just like the authors I adored. So I wrote a play. It was called “Disco Cleopatra,” and it was about a 17-year-old Cleopatra and her adventures trying to get a pair of Nike Disco Roller Skates, the kind with the white swoosh and the neon-orange urethane wheels. She needed those skates to catch the eye of Marc Antony. Cleopatra and Marc Antony were real historical figures, but I put them in a completely fictional setting in my play.



When I was in seventh grade, I wrote a long, sprawling soap opera that I’d charge kids 10 cents a page to read at recess. The story only had three characters, but I had them falling off cliffs in canoes, wrestling pythons in jungles, being tied to fire ant hills and all kinds of horrible adventures. The story ended only because the school year did!

In high school, I used to write stories in spiral notebooks, but one day, my notebooks disappeared from a bookrack for three days. I was in a panic because I didn’t want anyone reading my stories! My notebooks magically reappeared, but after that, I never let anyone read anything I wrote. I was too self-conscious.

I was working as a sports copy editor at the Boston Herald when I met a woman named Jen Safrey. She worked at the newspaper too, but she was also a romance novelist. I worked up the courage to show her a book I’d written, and she encouraged me to send it to a publisher. That’s when I decided to pursue publication, and in 2005, my first adult novel and my first picture book debuted within three months of one another.



My first picture book is called [CATCHING THE MOON: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dream](#), and it's about a little girl who wanted to play professional baseball

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

I had so many weird habits as a child, most of which remain with me now. When I eat plums, I have to eat all the skin first, and then eat the flesh. I can only eat scrambled eggs if they're covered in syrup. I have to sleep in an oversized T-shirt, and I never, ever walk around barefoot. When I write, I always have to use a black, fine-point pen, and I always write my first drafts longhand in spiral notebooks. And I never sleep barefoot. I always wear socks.

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

I grew up without a father. My mother was a girly girl, so she never mowed the lawn or fixed the car. My Grandma Hazel was a beautiful woman, but she was also wicked tough. She's the one who taught me how to change the filter in a furnace, start a charcoal fire that could burn for days, and how to use a pencil to choke a carburetor. She's also the person who taught me about baseball, and instilled a love of the sport in me. I can't say that growing up without a father was bad, but it wasn't good either. I think I'd be a far different person than who I am if my father had helped raise me.

One of the best moments of my childhood was spending my sixth-grade year in the class of a teacher named Gloria Griffiero. Mrs. Griffiero encouraged creative writing and she really encouraged me to write whatever I wanted.

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

My sister Joelle was drowning in a public pool, and I pulled her out, but I don't think of that as a brave thing to do. It was instinctive. The bravest thing I ever did as a child was to face the kids who used to tease me, spit on me and throw rocks at me when I walked from my house to the library. My family was the only family of color in our neighborhood, and some of our neighbors didn't like us. My love of reading outweighed my fear of mean kids, so I would make that walk just about every day even though I knew it was scary.

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

Yes! I was always in trouble in high school—for slipping grades and for skipping classes. My behavior improved when my drama teacher, John Faust, and the school headmaster, Edward Cissel, showed an interest in my future. They genuinely cared about me, and that made all the difference.

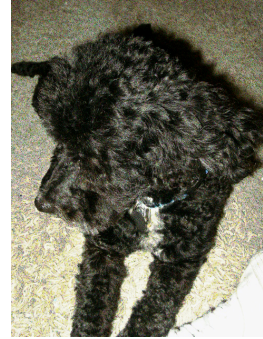
- **What advice do you have for aspiring young readers and writers?**

My advice to aspiring young writers is to write. Simply write whatever you want, and don't ever throw something away just because you don't like it. You never know when you might want to revisit that story, and chances are good that it's not as bad as you think it is. Just write. That's the best advice for any writer.

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



I have four children. A son, who's fourteen, and three daughters. They're nine, six and four. I also have a dog, a miniature poodle mix named Maggie; two cornsnakes named Candy Beaverhausen and Snakey; three bearded dragons named Peyton, Alex and Chris; and two African dwarf frogs named Legs and Rocket.



Quick Picks:

- **Soup or salad?**

I'm a salad fanatic! My favorite is romaine lettuce with artichoke hearts, olives and a sweet Italian dressing.



- **Dog, Cat, Bird, or Fish?**

My snake, Candy Beaverhausen, is my favorite animal.

- **Favorite or least favorite vegetable?**

Brussels sprouts are my favorite vegetable. Carrots are my least favorite.

- **Longhand or computer?**

Longhand. I like the feel of the words coming out of my pen.

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

I'm an early bird writer and a night owl. I usually write late at night into the early morning hours.