



A Q&A WITH AUTHOR KATE KLISE

Grounded

By Kate Klise

Grades 3-6

Ages 9-13

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Why did you choose a small-town setting for *Grounded*? I noticed that you live in a small town—how is the dynamic there different from a larger city? Did you grow up in a small town? If not, what drew you to one? Have you ever lived in a larger city?

I grew up in Peoria, Illinois, which is a medium-size city. But I've always been drawn to small-town stories. I'm not sure why because I've lived in some pretty big cities. (My first apartment was in Madrid, Spain.) When I bought my house 21 years ago, I chose an old farmhouse in the country seven miles north of a town of three hundred. I love the quiet here and the stillness. I like to wake up in the morning and see wild turkeys chasing one another outside my window. I've also grown to love the stories and characters in small towns. So just as I can't imagine living anywhere else, it's hard for me to imagine setting my books anywhere other than in small towns.

Was *Grounded* inspired by any real-life stories?

I would never have written *Grounded* had I not wandered into Deb Baird's hair salon almost 21 years ago. I didn't begin writing *Grounded* until several years later, but I'm sure the book was born during that first appointment when Deb started telling me about her remarkable life. How when she was a child, her father and brother died within months of each other. How friends and neighbors brought her hundreds of dolls in an attempt to comfort her. How soon after that, her mother got a job at the family funeral home as a hairstylist. How Deb learned to do hair in the funeral home. For years I told Deb she should write a book about her life. But she always waved away the idea. "You're the writer," she said. "You write it." So I began to write her story. But as often happens, the facts started slipping away quickly and the book took off on a direction all its own.

What do you want readers to remember about *Grounded*?

I hope readers will come away from this book thinking about what it means to be grounded or connected to the people around them. I also hope they'll remember the characters and their individual struggles and triumphs.

How similar are you to Daralynn?

Well, I love a good mystery, like Daralynn. My father died when I was young, like Daralynn's dad in the book. And I live in a small Missouri town not unlike Digginsville. But I wouldn't want readers to think that Daralynn is me. Part of the fun of writing fiction is that you get to live other lives through your characters. It's the same reason people like to read to fiction. The weird thing is that I'm often able to uncover truths about myself and others in these made-up stories. Not facts, but truths.

When starting a book, what do you think of first? Characters, plot, themes, or something else?

I usually start with an image, almost like if I'm a movie director envisioning the first scene. With *Grounded*, I started with the image of Daralynn receiving hundreds of dolls after the deaths of her father, brother, and sister. I have to see the first scene in my head before I can start writing.

How has your work in journalism affected your fiction writing?

The nice thing about journalism is that there's no time for writer's block. Deadlines are never more than a few days, sometimes a few hours, away. So you learn to write quickly and revise carefully. I spent fifteen years reporting stories for *People* magazine. Before that, I wrote a weekly column for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. I don't do much journalism work anymore, but I still find a lot of story ideas in newspapers and magazines.

What advice do you have for young writers?

Resist the urge to tell people about your masterpiece before you write it. It's a mistake we've all made. You have this great idea for a book, so you tell a friend about it. But as you're telling the story, you see his or her eyes drooping. Or maybe the friend is stifling a yawn. Even if they're not doing this, you feel like they are. The upshot is that *you* lose interest in the story—and you haven't even written the darn thing yet. Don't do this. Instead, find your magic time to write (mine is 6:15 to 8:00 A.M.), and just write the first draft as fast as you can. You'll probably discover the story changes a lot in the writing process. That's good. If you can tell a story easily, it probably wouldn't make a very good

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book, anyway. Plus, it's important to keep in mind the difference between an idea for a book and a book. It's like the difference between an idea for dinner and dinner. No one wants an idea for dinner. So forget about the idea for your book and just write it.

Where do you find inspiration for your writing, in general?

Everywhere. Friends, family, books, movies. But newspapers are always my best source. I bet more than half of my book ideas came from stories I read in the newspaper.

Do you ever get writer's block? What do you do to get back on track? What other challenges do you face in the writing process, and how do you overcome them?

I don't get writer's block. Sometimes I get writer's laziness, where I don't want to rewrite a book that I know needs revising. The trick I play on myself is to divide big jobs into little jobs. I never try to write more than one chapter a day or revise more than three or four chapters a day. Also, I always make myself read my final drafts out loud. And I turn off e-mail when I'm writing. That one took me a long time to learn, but it makes all the difference.

What's the best advice you have ever received about writing?

I often think of that quip by Colette: "Who said you should be happy? Do your work." But of course what we often find is that it's our work that makes us happy. Or at least it makes me happy. It's hard for me to be happy if I'm not working on a book. I start getting restless and cranky when I don't have a cast of characters to move around on the stage in my head.

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A zookeeper, an ambassador, an ice skating champion, and/or a stewardess. (This was obviously a long time ago.)

What were your hobbies as a kid? What are your hobbies now?

As a kid, I loved to ice skate, especially outside. These days I like to bike, hike, explore unfamiliar cities, go out to dinner and a movie. Or just plop down in a comfy chair with a good book.

What was your favorite book when you were a kid? What is your favorite book now?

I loved *Charlotte's Web* and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, both by E.B. White. I can remember falling out of bed laughing at one of Betty MacDonald's *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle* books. My favorite book now is a tie between *Cold Sassy Tree* by Olive Burns and *Miss Buncle's Book* by D.E. Stevenson.

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and what would you do?

Depends on the day and mood. Right now I'd love to be at an outdoor café in Siena, Italy, eating seafood pizza. Or, wandering through a museum in London sounds wonderful. Or, reading a good book under an umbrella on a beach anywhere is always heaven. All that said, if I want to get my next book written, I have to stay right here at my desk, which is also fine with me. That's another fun thing about writing. It can make you feel like you're somewhere very far away and exciting even when you're just sitting at home in a small town on a rainy day.



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