

The Making of *A Perfect Night for a Pillow Fight*

And interview with Nisha J.

November 2024



Nisha

Hi, Catriona.

It's really nice to have you here.



White, Cat

Thank you for having me.



Nisha

And I'm so excited to know more about your book.

So let's go deeper into it.



White, Cat

Great. Sounds good.



Nisha

What inspired you to write a perfect night for a pillow fight?

Was there a specific experience or a memory that sparked the idea?



White, Cat

I am a big fan of pillow fights. I have two kids of my own. They're now five and eight, and pillow fights are their favorite thing in the world. And at first I had this sort of like immediate response of, like, oh, don't hurt yourself, don't break anything.

But then when I got into it with them like, it's just the most fun that we have together and it can go on for hours of just like, outrageous laughter and things flying all over the place.

And so one particular fight we had kind of helped me imagine the pictures that would come along with a book like this, you know, things crashing through the air and whatever else.

So that was the main inspiration, but when I was a kid, I used to have pillow fights with my brothers all the time. Although, our pillow fights changed over time to a game we called Bean cruncher. And Spoiler Alert, I was the bean.

We had these massive, bean bag things. Two big brown ones and a big red one. And so my brothers would layer a brown pillow, Me, the red pillow for ketchup and then a second brown one on the top and then they would sit on top of me. It was always so much fun and so I've got great memories of pillow fights with my brothers when we were kids and now with my own kids. So I thought it was a great topic to write a book about.



Nisha

That's interesting. And it also is, I think it's fascinating when children start to get into that mode of, like, you know, a pleasurable fight. It's not like you know, you're fighting for something.



White, Cat

Yeah! And there's no winner or loser necessarily, right? 'cause everybody's getting clobbered with a pillow.



Nisha

Oh yes, absolutely. That was fun. Thank you.

Writing a rhyming book can be quite challenge, especially for the first time. Could you walk us through your writing and editing process? Were there any unexpected challenges or funny moments?



White, Cat

Yes, 100%. So yeah, this was my first book that I wrote in rhyme and meter, and I had no idea what I was doing.

I do most of my writing immediately when an idea pops into my head, and if I don't sort of stop everything I'm doing and start writing it down in the notes app on my phone, I lose it. For this story, I just started writing how I heard it in my head. You

know, what I thought sounded good. But it turned out I had no idea what I was doing.

I hired an editor who specializes in meter and rhyme. She used to work for a traditional publishing house in Boston. And her first comments were. Oh, this is all over the place. Ha! She confirmed very quickly that I had written in about 5 different meters.

And so looking back, I know now it's a lot easier to write to a meter that you select at the beginning than doing what I did, which was write a story out and then have to edit it back into a perfect meter. The editing process was long and grueling. We ended up doing iambic heptometer, which is actually the meter Shakespeare typically wrote in, also known as the Fourteener. Literary nerds will be excited to know that it's written in Shakespearean meter. It's hilarious to me that I wrote a book about a pillow fight in Shakespeare's meter.



Nisha

Oh!



White, Cat

He'd be so proud of me, I think. Or rolling in his grave.



Nisha

Absolutely, absolutely.



White, Cat

Anyway, you know, the editing process was hard. I learned so much from this editor and it came down to replacing a word with a different word that had the stressed syllable at the beginning instead of the end and just tiny little tweaks to one or two words to make the meter fit.

Now I know what I know, I will never just randomly write a story thinking that it's in a correct meter without like, mapping out the meter and plugging in the right words from the beginning because it was it was very challenging to edit it back down to a correct meter. But we got it there eventually.



Nisha

Thank you. And it's interesting too, right? Unless we do it by ourselves, we don't know what exactly happens behind the process or behind the works that we see and read. And now, since you went into the process now you know how poems are written or how a story is being written.



White, Cat

Yeah, exactly. Rhyming is easy. I mean, anybody can rhyme. They teach kiddos to rhyme at the age of three or four, but writing in meter is like a whole other whole other thing.



Nisha

Yes.



White, Cat

I'm not sure I'm jumping to do it again any time soon, but I am keeping an open mind.

Nisha

Thank you for sharing that. The illustrations have such a unique style. Could you share a bit about your inspiration for the illustration and how you approached creating those visuals that complement the story's theme?



White, Cat

Sure. So I publish my books through a Canadian company called Freisen Press and they have a bunch of very, very talented illustrators on contract. When I was thinking about what illustrations would work the best for this book, I had this picture of almost comic book feeling imagery. So when I asked Freisen Press for a couple of illustrators to look at, that's the guidelines I gave them and I got David Anderson's portfolio back.

His work feels a lot like the old comic strip that we used to get in newspapers called For Better or For Worse. You know, that same kind of movement, but also has a kind

of a Robert Munchy feel to it. So when I saw his portfolio, I knew that he was the guy that I wanted to illustrate this.

The process of illustrating through Freisen Press is interesting because for every illustration I write exactly what I want that illustration to look like or what my ideas are for that illustration. So the creative process was, you know, very much guided by what I had envisioned this book to look like.

Then after that I get a rough pencil sketch concept from the illustrator to confirm the look, feel and the movement. I have a chance to make adjustments from that. He came back with a bit more of a structured, cleaner pencil sketch. I approve that, then he goes away and adds color for the first time. I then get to make modifications to color and then we get into the final illustration. So there's a lot of back and forth, but the illustrations are 100% guided by my vision for them.

There were also a lot of little like nitpicky things in these illustrations, like, the pillow starts here, and then this kid is gonna throw it, and it's going to end up over here. And so from continuity perspective, we needed to make sure, you know, the pillows and the vase and other things were all in the right spot in every picture. So, yeah, it was a bit of a process, but a fun one.



Nisha

That's interesting.

So how long did it take for you to complete like just the illustrations alone?

Like the editing is different, but the illustrations alone.



White, Cat

I mean, I do my book publishing work on the side of a full-time job and having two kiddos. So for me it takes quite a while because it's very much side of desk. But I would say the illustrations took about six months, maybe.

We go back and forth, you know, it takes me a couple weeks to really sit with them and make sure that all my comments have been captured and I like to leave them for a bit then come and look again with fresh eyes. And then the illustrator takes another three or four weeks to make those edits, so you know it's kind of, it's pretty long

process. It could be shorter if it was the only thing I was doing, but that is unfortunately not the case.



Nisha

I understand you were intentional about the characters, facial expressions, and body language to avoid any unintended interpretations. Could you explain how you approach this sensitive aspect in your illustrations?



White, Cat

That's a good question. I mean, it's a very interesting world we are living in today and it's very unfortunate that we need to sometimes put these lenses on our work, but it became very clear in the first pencil sketches that the dad looked a little angry. Or he looked a little intense and his body position was higher or towering over the kid. There were some sensitivities there that I became aware of, and I wanted to make sure that illustrations that are intended to be very fun and silly were not going to be triggering for anybody about domestic abuse.

And again, it's sad that, you know, this is a reality that we need to shine these lenses on our work but it's really important. And so we did do some edits to the original pencil sketches to change face expressions. I said to the illustrator that everyone needs to look happy and I did not want any sort of big power dynamics showing between parent and child. Or between husband and wife or mom and dad. I said I want you to draw these illustrations through that lens of sensitivity. And I think he did a really great job of that.

You know, in my very first book, I did a cultural sensitivity review of the illustrations and learned so much through that process. We made some pretty significant changes to my illustrations of my first book based on that learning. I'm committed to continuing to shine these lenses on the illustrations. It is a kid's book. It should be fun. But we still need to think about these pretty important situations and topics that could potentially be quite triggering for the reader.



Nisha

And it happens so subtly, like everywhere, right? And if we don't see deeper into it, probably there might be a hurt or something that goes with that person who was

seeing that and you being open enough to see, OK, let me see through this lens and make sure that everybody is seeing in a way where.

 **White, Cat**

Yeah.



Nisha

It's just a fun, very silly book, but it's also a book which conveys a message. What do you want to share?



White, Cat

And actually that that lens was also applied to the words that we chose in the in the actual manuscript that you will not see the word hit once in the book, we chose impact words that are funny, like bopped or wallop. Words that are, like, more fun. And like you know. How many ways can you say hit without saying it is really the challenge that we that we looked at right and and so. I love the variety of language in the book, without it being violent language.



Nisha

And it's very important like as as I hear you, I can also see that there are many books that comes with whatever violence or and how are they want to show it off right. And if your intention is to reach to this child or reach to this mom. And you know, show them that there is something like this. I think that's more important.



White, Cat

Yeah, agreed.



Nisha

If and, you've got it very well. Thank you. So your business white Cat books has a personal touch with the white cat that appears in each book. Could you share who the **** is and how it became a part of your work?



White, Cat

Yeah, absolutely. So I started writing for the first time at the very beginning of the pandemic in 2020, and at the time I had just put down my cat of 18 years. His name was Oreo and I was feeling really raw and sad about that.

So in the illustrations for the first two books, it just made sense to include my cat in the book. And then I thought, you know, this is just going to have to be part of my brand because, you know, my name Cat White to White Cat Books plays out nicely. But to have a cat that is part of every story that I write and in the illustrations was a nice little personal touch to sort of make sure that my cat lives on forever.

But it's also really fun for kids and parents to know that the cat is in there and to look for him in each book. You know, the cat looks a little different with each illustrator, but the cat still lives on.



Nisha

That's a lovely story. I'm really sorry about your cat.

You know in life, things happen. And you create ways to bring it to life as well.

That's beautiful.

As the book launch is approaching on November 24, what are you most looking forward to about the event? Is there anything special planned for the launch?



White, Cat

Yeah. So you know what I think I look forward to the most with these events?

Seeing familiar faces. For my very first book launch, I think it was in 2021, I did a massive event and invited the community and we had such a riot. I started to build up, I'm gonna say a fan base, but that sounds silly. But moms and dads who wanted to hear about next book and kids that were excited for the next book. And then I saw so many of those people come back for book launch #2.

And it's been a while since that launch. You know, life goes on and things get busy. But I'm really excited to see a lot of those faces again. They're kind of growing up with my books, which is so fun. So I get to see them again, like three years later, four years later, but they're still coming back to these book launches, which is really great.

For this book launch, I can't get insurance for a big pillow fight, even though that's what I would love to do for this event, but. No insurance company will insure me for a massive pillow fight. I can't think why.

So we're going to be decorating pillowcases instead and kiddos can take a fun pillowcase home. That's that will remind them of the book launch event.

There might some surprises like pillow stuffing flying through the air in the middle of the story, you know, things like that. It'll be fun. I'm excited to see those faces back and to have a fun little event with them again.



Nisha

That's really wonderful.

Best wishes for November 24th.



White, Cat

Yeah. Thank you. I'm so excited.



Nisha

Yes, so what message or experience do you hope readers will take away from a perfect night for a pillow fight?



White, Cat

You know what, I think parents and I know I'm speaking for myself, moms especially, we spend so much time worrying about the mess and the, you know, the risk of our kids getting hurt. And I just feel like pillow fights are such a beautiful opportunity just to let loose, have some fun with your kids, you know?

You can clean up later because the pillow fight and the memories of that are the things that are going to matter and are going to last forever. While the mess afterwards is annoying, it's so worth it.

And I hope that's the message that comes through with the book, that sometimes we just need to like let loose, let out our inner child, play with our kids, get silly and just have fun.



Nisha

That's really nice. I just have a last question to ask. What would you say to a budding writer or person who was interested in doing children's books? Is there any tips or you know things that you would like to share after your experiences with the books with illustrations with printing presses and everybody everywhere?



White, Cat

You know, it's one of the things that I've actually sell as a print when I'm at art markets but it, move faster than your fear. This has become my mantra when it comes to writing books and getting them out there. If I stopped long enough to let my doubt, my fear and my imposter syndrome catch up, I wouldn't do anything. And so moving faster than your fear, for me, says just do it and trust in it.

And the other thing that I've really had to come to grips with this year, is that I have to be OK with things not being perfect and I have to be OK with things not being in the timeline or the level of effort or what I had originally envisioned for something. We're all busy and a lot of the time writers are doing this stuff in the pockets of time they have between the rest of their life.

I had intended to launch this book in June, and it's now November and we're renovating our house and we had a busy summer with the kids. And work has gotten super busy, and like, life happens, right. And I've just had to be able to say to myself it's OK. To release these expectations that I had for myself and just get it done when I can and that's OK too. That's going to be good enough and giving yourself some grace. And not forgetting that you do it because you love it, not because it's a chore or a task, right?



Nisha

That's true, very true.

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and your experience with the book writing as well as all about your you know what's happening with the new to share this to the outside world.

So thank you.



White, Cat

Thank you for interviewing me!



Nisha

Thank you, Catriona, and wishing you all the very best with your book launch and with everything that goes after that as well.



White, Cat

Thank you so much, Nisha.
I really appreciate it.