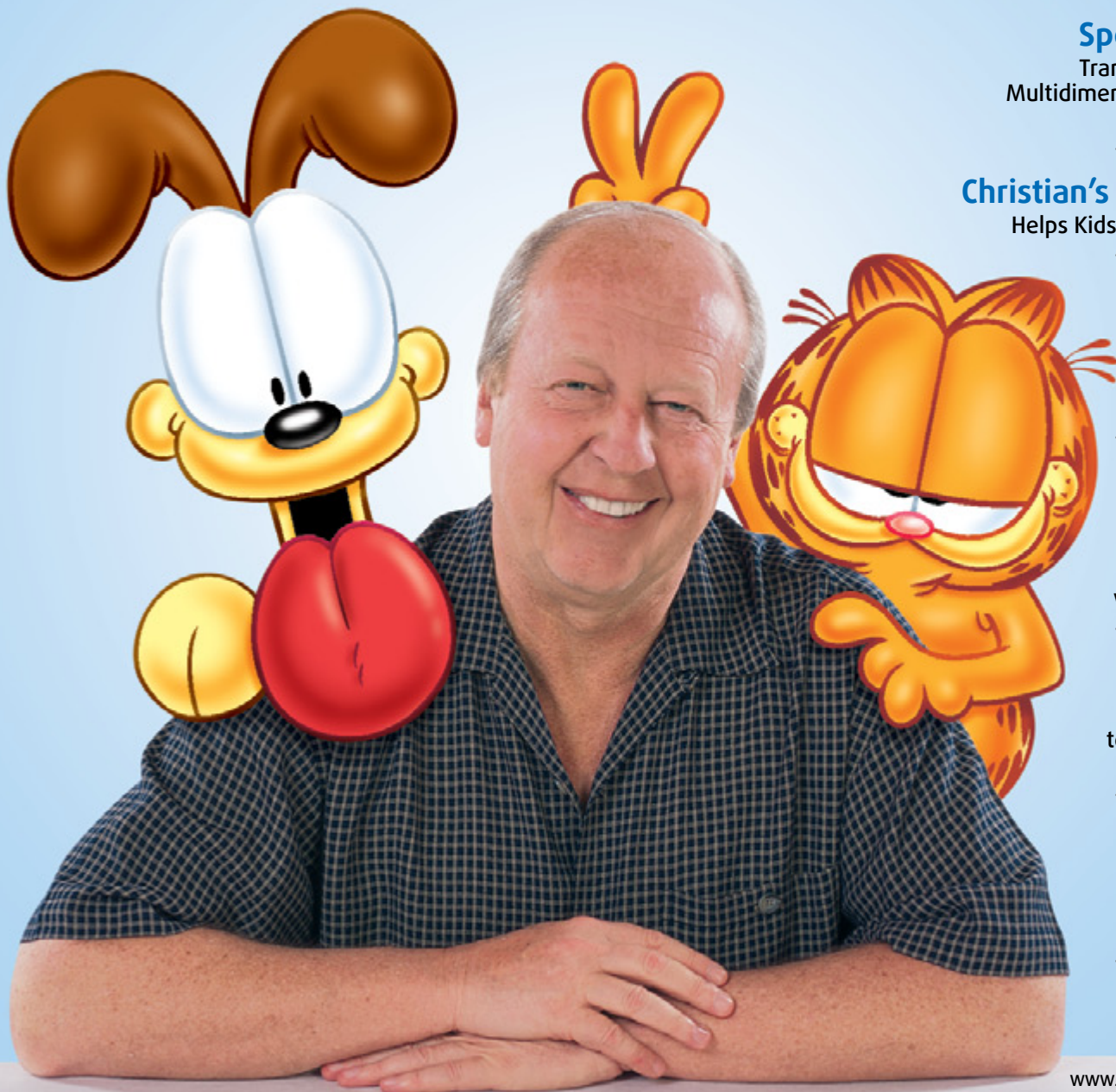




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# Katie Mullaly

Invites Readers of All Ages to Her Land of Children's Books

by Melissa Fales

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Katie Mullaly's children's book series leads young readers on captivating adventures with delightful rhymes, unforgettable characters, and bold illustrations, teaching them valuable life skills they'll use now and continue to employ throughout adulthood. "I wanted to create tools for young readers to live better lives," says Mullaly. "My books are about the life lessons most of us learn in our thirties and forties. Why should we have to wait until we're that old to have these skills? Why not start teaching these tools at a younger age?"

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Mullaly lives in Park City, Utah, and has held a variety of jobs, including ski instructor, mountain bike coach, and Karate teacher. She most recently served in a public health position where she created a guide for adults about how to live consciously and mindfully. Now, Mullaly is applying those themes to books for children. “The past few years I’ve been working mainly with adults,” she says. “I’ve missed the kids. This gets me back with them again.”

According to Mullaly, the idea to write *The Land of...Children’s Books* came to her in bits and pieces. First to form in her mind were the memorable titles. “I had the names *Land of OR* and *Land of AND* in my head, but I didn’t know what to do with them,” she says. On an entirely separate plane, says Mullaly, she was contemplating writing a guide on mindful living for young people. “In one half of my brain I had the titles, and in the other side I had the concept,” she explains. “Eventually they collided.”



Mullaly’s first book, *The Land of OR*, walks children through the steps of a thoughtful decision-making process. The book also introduces the mischievous Yabbut, created by Mullaly and her editor Michael Rago as a symbol of the human tendency to make excuses for not doing the right thing. “You’ve got to watch out for the Yabbut,” Mullaly warns. “He’ll be a consistent character throughout all the books.”

Her second book, *The Land of AND*, instills the concepts of inclusion and accepting differences. For each book in the series, readers can access online “travel guides” and activities designed to reinforce and practice the lessons each book demonstrates.

Making the verses of her books rhyme was particularly challenging for Mullaly. “I have a lot of writing experience, but not writing poetry,” she says. “It’s very different. It’s a lot more complex than just the last word of each line. You have to consider structure, rhythm, and timing.”



While Mullaly’s books are instructional in nature, they are anything but dull. “People think if you’re teaching a lesson, your books have to be very serious,” she says. “They think you can’t be too rhyming or colorful when you share a message with substance, but I wanted to be light and fun and rhyming and colorful with mine.”

Mullaly credits her robust collaboration with illustrator Toby Allen with bringing her books to life. “He lives in England,” she says. “We’ve never met, never spoken, yet we had an immediate mental connection. He gets exactly what I think.” Mullaly says Allen makes significant creative contributions to the books. “He’s been such an inventive force in this effort,” she says. “It’s never been me writing the stories and him doing the illustrations. From the very beginning, the story and the illustrations have been evolving together.”

In writing *The Land of...Children’s Books*, Mullaly says she’s broken



# “Basically, I read everything I could find about the children’s book industry ... and ignored it.”

all of the established “rules” of writing for kids. “They say don’t self-publish,” she says. “I did. Rhyming is another big don’t, but I did that, too. Basically, I read everything I could find about the children’s book industry ... and ignored it.”

Mullaly says she feels she was meant to create these books, and she’s doing it on her own terms. “It all feels very purposeful,” she says. “I needed to do this. I had to disregard what everyone was saying. It was important to me to follow my vision, despite the risks.”

For Mullaly, writing each book in the series has been a distinct



Toby Allen, illustrator

experience. “I assumed that I would repeat the same process for each book, but that hasn’t worked,” she says. “Each time the birthing process is very different. It’s scary and thrilling at the same time.”

Mullaly is currently working on her third *Land of...* book and has many more in the works, with future topics to include self-worth, worrying, problem-solving, dealing with change, patience, and how to be present and live in the moment. Mullaly envisions them as a cohesive set. “I’d like to create an atlas for living with these books,” she explains. “I see the whole series as an overarching resource.”

The themes for Mullaly’s books are inspired from her own life experiences. “Most of what I write about comes from facing my own challenges and blocks,” says Mullaly. “I find that when I’m writing about issues I’ve been grappling with myself, the words come out easier. I’ve tried to write about other things, but I find that it’s a struggle for me to voice them if they’re not something I’ve been dealing with personally.”

Mullaly has been heartened by the positive response to her *Land of... Children’s Books*, which she describes as “Dr. Seuss meets Dr.

Phil.” A school in Salt Lake City turned one into a play, which Mullaly narrated. Another school teacher in Portland is using Mullaly’s books to teach Internet safety and playground manners. People are even buying them as gifts for graduating high school seniors. “It’s amazing to see people being affected and touched by my books,” Mullaly says. “I think they’re appealing because these topics aren’t easy. These are things we have to learn from experience. These aren’t skills we’re born with.”

For more information about Mullaly and her *Land Of... Children’s Books*, visit [www.landofchildrensbooks.com](http://www.landofchildrensbooks.com). ●

