

February 2012

InSpire

Magazine

Every Woman
Has A Story

Once Upon
A Rhyme

*Instant
Classics*

Author

Julie Woik

**builds strong
self-esteem
in children's
book series**

Lilly the Lash



Author, Julie Woik
InSpires
the world,
one
child,
one eyelash,
at a time.

By Renee Wahlen Tillema



Photo by Gary D. Haas Photography

Life can be full of many surprises, and opportunities can come out of nowhere. Julie Woik had her life turned upside down by

an eyelash fairy named Lilly. Lilly the Lash jumped off one of Julie's eyes and these two have set off on an adventure to share life lessons with

children and adults everywhere. They have a message of hope to share with the world, and have begun spreading the word one child, one book at a time.

Originally from Kekoskee, Wisconsin, Julie moved to Sarasota, Florida when she was 21 years old. Julie had worked at a group home in Horicon and after her move, started at a psychiatric hospital and worked in the field of psychiatry for about 12 years. Although Julie found she was really good at connecting with people, this particular job was not to be a long-term situation. Unexpectedly, while looking for another job in her field, she received an offer to help at an office part-time.

"It wasn't exactly what I thought I'd be doing, but I spent the next 15 years working as an office manager," Julie said. "For the last seven of those years, I was an office manager at an antiques warehouse. I loved it – loved the customers, loved my bosses, loved my pay, loved my vacations – I just never would have quit this job in a million years."

Apparently, Lilly the Lash had other plans for Julie. Late one night, Julie was walking down the hallway, heading to her bathroom, when she wiped her cheek and noticed an eyelash on her finger.

"As soon as I looked at that eyelash it was Lilly the Lash," Julie said, "and a poem began to fill my head. I had never planned to be an author; it wasn't like a lifelong dream or anything. It was only after someone in the publishing business overheard the poem, and encouraged me to create a children's story with Lilly the Lash in mind, that I decided to give it a whirl. So I sat down, and to my amazement, a couple books came forth."

The first book in *The Life and Times of Lilly the Lash* series is called *The Garden Gathering*. This book focuses on the importance of self-esteem and being comfortable and confident as an individual. Julie explained that the books are meant to stand alone; each book contains an adventure and a life lesson for

Lilly the Lash to be part of and to be proactive in the solution.

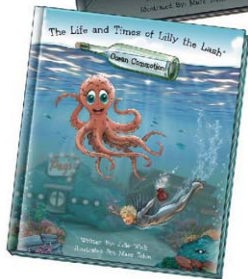
"This works for several reasons," Julie explained. "The series is destined to have fifteen books in its entirety. Going back in time in every episode to review how Lilly came to be, allows people to buy any book in any order. Should someone experience a problem with a child, taking things for example, they could just skip right to the third book, *Ocean Commotion*, which has Lilly in an undersea adventure with a focus on honesty. The second book, *The Toy Store*, is based in New York City, and covers the importance of sharing. Many children share without being prompted, but may choose this story to read simply because of its electrifying location."

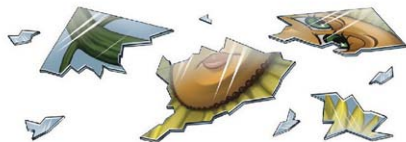
Once Julie had her ideas set to a captivating rhyme, she set out on a search for an illustrator. Julie selected Marc Tobin to bring the images of Lilly the Lash to life.

"We needed an illustrator that would absolutely blow the children away," Julie said. "I'm trying to teach a lesson and I need those children to want to turn the page. I need them to be excited about what comes next. I looked at about 100 websites of illustrators and interviewed about 20. Instead of Marc e-mailing me back, he called me, and once we spoke, that was it. It was like we had known each other all of our lives."

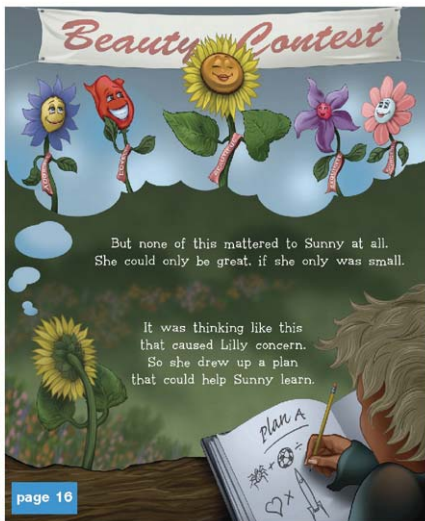
Julie created an array of lesson plans for teachers and therapists, crafting activities, Girl Scout achievements, and games to correspond with each book. These are available free of charge on Lilly's website at www.lillythelash.com, are designed for various age ranges and learning levels, and can be utilized by educators in a classroom, as well as the family at home. Each book

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A bit of a stickler, she liked things "just so."
This image, for Sunny, would be hard to let go.
The thought of her having a big double chin.
Compared to the flowers that grew nice and thin.



Once Julie had her ideas set to a captivating rhyme, she hired illustrator, Marc Tobin to bring the images of Lilly the Lash to life. These non consecutive pages from *The Garden Gathering* illustrates the issues of self-esteem suffered by Sunny the sunflower, and how Lilly draws up a plan to help Sunny.

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also financially supports a different cause. Breast Cancer research at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center, the National Lung Cancer Partnership, and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation are the first three organizations.

"These books are made with true love," Julie said. "We even offer the activities for free on the website because we don't want to limit this message to only the people who can afford to buy the book. We're trying to save the world from the mess that it's in, and we need these available to everyone at the click of a button. With a play in the works, and recent discussions regarding animated films, the series is 'going big'. We're very pleased about that, but want to make sure we don't lose the home-town handshake we've built it on."

Thanks to an eyelash fairy, these books are inspiring children to read, expand their vocabulary, write, illustrate, think outside of the box, use their imagination, and learn a lesson. Julie said she couldn't ask for more.

"There are children who are sending thank you letters, sending illustrations, and story ideas of where Lilly should go next, that are beyond what I could have imagined," Julie said. "Lilly's influence is so powerful; children are raising their hands and admittedly associating themselves with the characters in the books. Lilly has something really special, and I assure you, it has nothing to do with me."

Lilly has a universal appeal to all ages and genders. She has a tomboy characteristic, different from most

fairies. Each book has a different set of characters for Lilly to observe and guide. Ultimately, in the end, the lessons learned are genuine and are solved in a realistic way.

"She is stumbly, flumbly at times and doesn't always fly right," Julie said. "She's not all pink and frilly; she's kind of a tomboy. It's not all about Lilly either. Actually she's only seen by the reader. Her job is to stand back and observe what's going on. And she doesn't magically fix anyone, but instead writes a plan to bring someone into the story so they can learn the lesson themselves. Once the lesson is learned, Lilly turns back into an eyelash and sprinkles them with their own magical eyelash to help guide them the rest of their life."

Although not yet published, the fourth book, *The Kackin' Kitchen*, will be set in Julie's former home state of Wisconsin and is about a milk carton who bullies and must learn the important life lesson of respect, and working together as a team. Julie recently spent over two months back in Wisconsin visiting family and promoting her books at craft fairs, book signings, schools, and Girl Scout events.

"Lilly is an eyelash. Who would have ever thought," Julie said with a laugh. "But children understand that we see things through our eyes. She lived on my eye and saw things and she showed me how to look at the world. We see the bad things and we see the good things and we can take the negatives and turn them around to see positives. That's what I try to get across to every child in every book; Lilly showed me how to see the world as a whole and to make it my own."

Julie gives her high-energy Lilly the Lash presentations at schools, scout groups, organizations and clubs, and says that tears and goose bumps are regular responses. The quality and depth of the questions and insights by the children are astonishing. One question that always comes up concerns the similarity in looks between Julie and Lilly.

"The children ask me every single time why Lilly looks like me," Julie said. "I ask them what they think, and within a guess or two they conclude that she's MY eyelash and I say, 'Yes, DNA.' So if Lilly looks like me, like we often look like our parents and family members, then what would YOUR eyelash fairies look like? The children are excited to imagine that they have their own eyelash fairy that looks like each of them."

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"...as odd as an eyelash may absolutely be; children, parents, grandparents, teachers and therapists alike, get it, and love it. 'It's old fashion values with a modern day twist.' We need to get back to those values and Lilly is taking them there — she has a charisma that is roping them in. We'll fix the world one reader, one eyelash at a time."

- Julie Woik

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The Life and Times of Lilly the Lash books are available through global distribution, as well as www.lillythelash.com. Books purchased through Lilly's website have the advantage of being personalized and signed by Julie, and the site offers additional merchandise like the storybooks on DVD, t-shirts, and other gifts.

"Lilly the Lash is affecting people in a way that reaches to their very core," Julie said. "And as odd as an eyelash may absolutely be; children, parents, grandparents, teachers and therapists alike, get it, and love it. 'It's old fashion values with a modern day twist.' We need to get back to those values and Lilly is taking them there — she has a charisma that is roping them in. We'll fix the world one reader, one eyelash at a time." *



Ms. Casey the jelly fish, and Lilly from the *Ocean Commotion* book.