



Q & A With Trefoni Michael Rizzi

What did you most like to do when you were a child?

I enjoyed school. I liked learning new things, but most of all I enjoyed seeing what I learned, in action. Summer vacations were some of my favorite times. My parents would take us on camping vacations to the National and State Parks and Forests and I loved going to the Visitor Centers and learning all about the places we were visiting. We went to the Evening Park Ranger campfires and slideshows and it was always great fun meeting new people and seeing photos of things in the park. Then we would go on Park Ranger guided hikes or self-guided trails and see and learn more. I guess I was a real sponge for knowledge. I was most interested in what eventually became known as interdisciplinary interactive education.

What audience did you have in mind for your career as a writer – adult or children?

That's an interesting question. I set out to write a book for children; specifically, the 8-12 year old range. But, when I finished the book, it was clear that it appealed to "children" of all ages. Adults are enjoying the book as much as children are and in fact, many adults are purchasing the book for themselves!

If you didn't write as a child, then when did you start writing and what inspired you to start?

I was never a big writer or journaler as a child. It wasn't until I was in my 40's, that I began to think of writing as a career path, and it's funny to think of this, but I never really set out to be a writer. It was my photographs that got me thinking about telling a story and putting a book together to share my story with others. As I began to assemble the idea for *Teddy's Travels*TM and a teddy bear telling about his adventures, it was clear to me that I also needed to write the text of the book. I was his eyes and ears. I also had to be his voice, and so, I began writing.

Do you focus on fiction or nonfiction? Which do you prefer? Do you find one easier than the other?

Teddy's Travels is technically, a non-fiction book. But, Tedrick de Bear, a fictional character, writes it. So, I guess I am writing both fiction and non-fiction at the same time! It's actually been quite an adventure. Finding Tedrick's voice was, probably the most difficult part of putting the book together. I wrote for close to a year before I found his rhythm and vernacular. By that time, I had finished the first half of the book and continued on to complete the book. Then, I had to go back and rewrite the first half of the book in Tedrick's complete voice to keep the voice of the book consistent. The real challenge has been to insure that the factual information is correct, but at the same time keep the journal style of the writing very personal and accessible.

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**What kinds of things inspire you to write?**

I've got a pretty wonderful basis of inspiration for the *Teddy's Travels* books. The National Parks are a great source of information, history, science and people. So, inspiration has never been a problem in the writing of *Teddy's Travels*. I will say, though, that I have always been inspired by the world around me. I learned many years ago, to keep my eyes open and look up when I walk through the world. If you're looking down all the time, you're sure to miss something spectacular. I guess that's why I love to take photographs whenever I travel. But, I also have to make sure I don't end up seeing my adventures through the eye of a camera and not through my own eyes. Sometimes, I have to force myself to put the camera away, and just enjoy the moment for the moment.

**Have any of your books earned special recognition?**

*Teddy's Travels – America's National Parks* was recently awarded the Silver Medal in the ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Awards in the Young-Adult Non-Fiction Category. It has also been awarded the Silver Medal in the Benjamin Franklin Awards in the Children's/Young-Adult full color Cover Design Category.

**What do you most want students to get out of your school visits?**

My primary goal in talking with students is to get them excited about the world around them. To make connections between the places they visit, the people that cross their path and the history that connects us all. Most importantly, I hope to challenge children to spend their lives looking up, seeing the world around them and experiencing life to its' fullest.

**Is there anything about yourself that you'd like to share - hobbies, where you were born, special talents other than writing/illustrating.**

I was born in Los Angeles, California and grew up in Alhambra, California. I've lived in Hawaii, Alaska, Connecticut, New York and of course, California. Other than traveling, writing and taking photographs, I am also a professional Scenic and Lighting Designer for the Theatre. I have designed at regional theatres across the country as well as Off-Broadway and have won a number of awards. I also sing and collect miniature nativities.

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