

Q&A

A Conversation with

Kathleen Krull

Author of

Hillary Rodham Clinton: Dreams Taking Flight



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Q: There is so much information out there about Hillary Clinton, especially in these past few months. What inspired you to write a children's book about Senator Clinton?

A: The idea for the book came out of a discussion with Rubin Pfeffer after watching the Las Vegas debate on November 15. I was so excited by how sure of herself she was, completely surrounded by men, articulating her positions with precision, plus the poise to make retorts like, "People are not attacking me because I'm a woman; they're attacking me because I'm ahead." To me she looked like a sure-fire winner, and I was thrilled to plan the first book out there about our possible first woman President. The next day I remembered that she had originally dreamed of being an astronaut and that NASA had rebuffed her (no girls allowed, back in 1961). The book took shape from there—"Once there was a girl who wanted to fly"—with a flying metaphor to convey the barriers she's had to overcome in her distinguished career.

Women's history is one of my passions (as with my earlier books such as *Wilma Unlimited*, *Pocahontas: Princess of the New World*, and especially *Lives of Extraordinary Women: Rulers, Rebels [and What the Neighbors Thought]*); so is doing whatever I can to promote the idea of a woman president, as in another book, *A Woman for President: The Story of Victoria Woodhull*. Woodhull was the first to run, Clinton the one who has gotten the farthest, with twenty-eight other women in between. When I visit schools I ask how many kids think they will see a woman in the White House during their lifetime. Almost all hands shoot into the air, except for those of a few frowning boys. So there is still work to do.

Q: Tell me about the research you did prior to writing this book.

A: Like many people, I actually knew a lot about her because I've been following her career for a long time. But to research this story I read every recent, reliable book about her. As with all my projects, I look for scholarly books that an authority has spent years on, most notably in this case Carl Bernstein's *A Woman in Charge*. Normally I mistrust autobiographies as a source, as the writers tend to exaggerate and rearrange to their own advantage, but Clinton's *Living History* was helpful in giving clues about where she derived her strength, the words of wisdom/positive messages I sprinkle through the book. All of the information in this book comes from the list of sources at the end.

For all that people do know about her, I also find that there are lots of misconceptions. So I was excited about getting some of this research out there—for kids *and* adults. For example, her career has been truly stellar (twice she was named one of the hundred most influential lawyers in America); competing in politics on her own as a New York State senator was one of the hardest decisions she's ever made; she's faced innumerable instances of discrimination besides the NASA rejection when she was fourteen; and much more.

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Q: How were you able to make Senator Clinton's complicated life story age-appropriate and accessible for young children?

A: I broke her life story into fifteen scenes that were representative and visual. In this book I wanted to reach the youngest readers, both boys and girls, and so I kept distilling the story into its most elemental arc. Basically, it's a lot of hunching over a computer, whittling, synthesizing, simplifying, excavating the meaning of events. I saved all the details for the back matter, for kids writing reports or those who want to know more.

For their help, I owe deepest thanks to my editor, Alexandra Cooper; the book's designer, Laurent Linn, and above all Amy June Bates, whose illustrations bring Clinton to life on the page in the most amazing way.

Q: What do you hope children will retain after reading this book?

A: That girls can do anything, and it's thanks to women who paved the way before them. The fact that Clinton didn't win the nomination is disappointing to be sure (although: go, Obama!). But when I wrote the ending to this book the nomination was still up in the air, so I worded it carefully to clarify that no matter what happens, she's succeeded in making a difference. Or, as she more eloquently pointed out in her concession speech, this particular glass ceiling now has "about 18 million cracks in it."

And of course the story is not over (as of this moment in June)—who knows what else she will accomplish? As the poet Maya Angelou writes in a powerful poem about Clinton: "You may tread me in the very dirt/But still, like dust, I'll rise."

Q: Why do you think it is important for children to be informed about our election process?

A: I remember, as a kid, staying up late with my parents to watch the Kennedy-Nixon debates, which is where my interest in politics began. Whatever we can do—my particular method is biography—to hook children into learning about how our government works is crucial. As the last eight years have shown, the person in the White House makes a very real difference. We all need to be paying more attention—maybe *especially* kids, as they grow into informed voters who take an active part.

Q: What are you working on next?

A: Many projects, including my "Giants of Science" series of chapter-book biographies, which included a strong woman last year (Marie Curie) and is continuing with Einstein and Darwin. Please visit www.kathleenkrull.com and my blog at <http://inkrethink.blogspot.com/search/label/Kathleen%20Krull>.

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