

	<b>Support Material: Author Interview</b>
	<b>Title: Interview with Author Paula Danziger</b>
	<b>Source: Scholastic</b>
	<b>Description: Author Paula Danziger talks about the inspiration for some of the characters and themes in her books.</b>

*Author Paula Danziger was interviewed by Scholastic students.*

**What inspired you to write?**

Loving to read books and having my parents read to me when I was little.

**Sometimes it's hard for us to think about what we want to write about. Do you have any advice for how to get good ideas?**

Sometimes it's also hard for me to think about what I want to write about. Sometimes I go into classes; sometimes I talk to kids; and sometimes I play-act in my head.

**Do you ever come to schools?**

Yes, I do. I don't do this as much as I used to. I'm visiting schools in Houston next Monday; I'm visiting schools in New Jersey, New York, and probably London, England. I also do volunteer work at a local school in New York City.

**Why did you become an author?**

I've wanted to be one since I was 7 years old, and I love telling stories.

**What happened when you were seven to make you want to be an author?**

I just learned how much I love books, and how much they mean to me, and how books can take you into other worlds and other places.

**What kinds of books did you read when you were little?**

When I was real little I read books like *The Little Engine That Could*, and as I got older I read books like Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys, and I moved into more serious fiction.

**What education or skills do you need to be a writer?**

The main skill is writing, and formal education is important to help us become well-rounded people, but you don't need a formal education to be a writer. HOWEVER, I do think it is important to go to college.

**How long have you been writing books?**

I started my first book in 1970, it came out in 1974 and it was *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*. I've been writing books since then ... a long time.

**When you wrote *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, was it based on your childhood experience?**

Partially. It's the most autobiographical of all my books, but a lot of it is still fiction. I wrote from the viewpoint of being a child, and from being a teacher - and I made some up. I was much like that child; my parents were much like those parents.

**Who is your favorite author?**

Do you have an hour? I have so many: Lois Lowry, E. L. Konigsburg, Bruce Coville - the list goes on. Then I have some favorite "adult" authors: Mark Twain, Toni Morrison.

**Do you like to read?**

I LOVE to read, but I don't have as much time as I used to because I'm so busy writing and traveling.

**What are your favorite books that you have written?**

It's hard to pick a favorite. I do have some favorite characters: Marcy Lewis from *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* , Matthew Martin, Amber Brown, and now Skate Tate (from the book that's coming out soon, *United Tates of America* ).

**Do you have your own writer's notebook?**

No. I do take some notes, but I'm not too organized and I usually lose them.

**Have you ever written poetry?**

When I was in high school, but it wasn't very good. But I used to baby-sit for a poet, John Ciardi. I baby-sat for his children, and he introduced me to a lot of poetry.

**What are you dreaming up for another book?**

I'm currently writing *Amber Brown Is Green With Envy* - it's due in a month.

**Where did you come up with the idea of Amber? Do you know someone like her?**

I got the idea for Amber because my niece's best friend was moving away. In the beginning Amber was a lot like my niece, except a lot of the facts were different; but Amber's spunk and humor were much like my nieces. Now, I just write Amber as Amber.

**How old is Amber Brown?**

Now she's in fourth grade, which makes her nine and I will continue to write about Amber until she leaves the sixth grade, and is 11, and then NO MORE! (I've just done prequels where Amber is seven.)

**What was your first Amber Brown book?**

*Amber Brown Is Not a Crayon*.

**Have you written any books for adults? If so, what are they?**

No, I haven't. I don't especially want to. I LOVE what I do.

**If you could be one of the characters in your books, which one would you most like to be and why?**

Great question, but I don't want to be any of them. I like being who I am.

**Where do you do your writing? Do you use a computer or a pen and paper?**

I do most of my writing at my desk in New York City. Although I also do most of my writing when I'm on the road. I mostly use the computer, and I also use pen and paper (I have two computers, one for writing and one for doing the scrapbook for *United Tates of America* ).

**What is the scrapbook like?**

In *United Tates of America* , Skate, the main character, is a "scrapbooker," and the book has 32 pages of her scrapbook (I've done it myself).

**How many times do you write and rewrite stories?**

Yikes. . . a lot!!

**Do you have a special place where you write?**

Yes, I'm there right now. It's a glass tabletop with my computers on it, my scanner, my printer, and my telephone. On the left side of it are a lot of children's artwork illustrations (Tony Ross, who does Amber) and I also have an antique bookcase that says "Famous storybooks for children and teenagers. Titles old and new. 59 cents." Behind me I have lots of art supplies.

**Do you live in New York City?**

Yes. I can see the Empire State Building from my window.

**What's the most fun about being an author?**

When the book comes out and I love it. When I get to travel to places and meet people who love my book. My latest new fun thing happened last weekend; I went up to Syracuse to hear *United States of America* recorded as an audio book (with lots of kids acting in it). It was so much fun; I loved it. I was the teacher in the audio book. I also loved when I lived in England, talking about my books and other books. I mostly love the writing when it goes well.

**Do you think that a person can just be a writer and nothing else? Why or why not?**

No. I think a lot of people have other jobs, partly because of financial reasons and partly because they want to do other things. I don't think you have to be just one thing in life.

**I love to write, but I have a hard time thinking of good ideas sometimes. Do you have any suggestions on how to get some?**

Remember in the book *Harriet the Spy* how Harriet was told that to be a good writer you have to be a spy? I think that's true. Listen, watch, and imagine, and don't get so nervous about it.

**Why do you like writing so much?**

Because I can do it, because I don't have to have a "regular" job, and I get to travel and meet wonderful people.

**What do you do in your spare time?**

I don't have a lot of spare time. I like to read; I like to be with my friends; I like to do volunteer work with my schools (a class of fourth graders). I also like going to scrapbooking weekends because it gives me a chance to develop my skills. I'm beginning to do more artwork.

**Do you worry about grammar when you write? Or do you rely on your editors?**

I worry some about grammar, and I also rely on my editors. Sometimes people don't speak perfect grammar, so I have to know that when I'm writing and not worry about it.

**What's your favorite type of art?**

I don't know. I'm just learning a lot about it. Probably watercolors and pastels and collage.

**Will you illustrate one of your own books someday?**

I would love to, but I'm not sure I'll ever be good enough. (I am proud of the scrapbook pages I did. That was hard because I had to do it as an 11-year-old child, not as I might have done.)

**I would like to know what inspired you to write *P.S. Longer Letter Later* and *Snail Mail No More*?**

Ann M. Martin and I have the same agent, who was always nagging us to write something together, but we didn't. Then somebody came up with the idea for each of us to write in our own voices, mostly alternate chapters, and we thought that was a terrific idea.

**In *This Place Has No Atmosphere*, I like the way you make the lunchroom at school on the moon so similar to our lunchroom and yet make it different. The variations make things fun. Do you make lists of what things are like now on earth before you write moon scenes?**

Yes, with that book I did. I also used my imagination a lot and I did a lot of research.

**Your Web site is great! How often do you add new things to it?**

Actually Scholastic's Web site is great. I'm getting my own together now, so be on the lookout for pauladanziger.com; hopefully it will up in three months. I will be adding a lot of things to it, once I can figure out how to work it all.

**Are you building your own Web site, or do you have people who will develop and maintain it for you?**

I'm not savvy enough to do it myself. I will have someone who will build and maintain it, but I will learn how to do it too.

**Have you ever written a book that got rejected or not published?**

I've never had a book rejected; but I wrote one with the art teacher at my school where I used to work many years

ago, and we never finished it. It was called *This Locker Is Condemned* .

**Do you ever get discouraged when you write?**

Yes. *United Tates of America* took me five years to write for a variety of reasons. *Amber Brown Is Green With Envy* was not going well for a while, and now it is. It is due in a month. Discouragement is just part of what happens sometimes.

**Do you just write books on the slightest whims or do you think about it a lot?**

I don't believe that anybody could write a book on the slightest whim and remain respectful of themselves and their readers. I think about it a lot.

**Do you think you will ever stop writing?**

I love what I do. Why should I stop? As long as I can, I will.

**Do you go to your local library?**

Yes. I make a call to my not-local library, the Plymouth Public Library in Plymouth, Massachusetts, because they helped me research *United Tates of America* . I LOVE libraries.

**Does anyone help you write your books?**

My editors help me a lot and also I have a writing buddy, one of my best friends, Bruce Coville. We read to each other over the phone every day when we are working, and we read what we are writing, and help each other out and offer suggestions.

**What advice would you have for someone who wants to get into writing?**

Read as much you can; write, rewrite, take acting lessons.

**I am writing about you for an author studies project. What does it feel like when you accomplish your goal of finishing a book?**

It feels WONDERFUL!!

**When you were in school, did you always get A's in writing?**

No. Sometimes I was creative when I wasn't supposed to be; sometimes my teachers just didn't like my writing.

**Do you think you will ever run out of ideas for writing? That would be scary!!**

No, I'll never run out of ideas for writing. That would be scary, but it won't.

**Anything you would like to add?**

I'm very appreciative that you took the time to tune in today. I hope that all of you read books, and those of you who want to write become published writers. I want to thank the teachers and librarians for what they do.