
Katherine Hannigan

Ida B

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Q: Where did *Ida B* and the idea for her story come from?

A: *Ida B* came out of a lot of things in my life—moving to the Midwest and falling in love with the space, the hills, the woods, the people who have no idea who you are but who wave and smile at you as they drive by. She came from a love of laughter and being outdoors, a fondness for people with a good dose of punkishness in them. I think in many ways *Ida B* has the life I would have chosen if I could have.

Q: You were teaching at a university when you started writing this novel. What made you think about writing a children's book?

A: When I moved to Iowa, I decided that I wanted to write, on top of the teaching and making art and exhibiting I was doing. I wrote an article and a story, and I started a book a few times, but I always gave up after about ten pages because I didn't think I knew enough about what I was doing. Then a couple of years ago, on a whim, I went to hear somebody named Kate DiCamillo speak in St. Paul. I'd never read anything by her, but I thought I'd like to hear what an author had to say about the process and inspiration and that sort of thing. So I went to the Fitzgerald Theater and I started crying before Kate even opened her mouth. The place was full of people who had obviously been deeply affected, in a positive way, by this woman's writing, and that moved me profoundly. That night, I went home and started writing *Ida B* in a spiral notebook.

Q: The serious themes in *Ida B* are interwoven with a good deal of humor. How did you manage to find just the right tone for the story?

A: I don't know. If it is just the right tone, I'd have to give credit to the voice of *Ida B*. Certainly she's funny and has a unique way of looking at life. But the constant throughout the story is her love—for her family, the trees, Rufus and Lulu, Ms. Washington and Ronnie, fun and freedom. The really hard times she faces are losses of love. Even though she won't always admit it, *Ida B* never stops loving and trying, and I think that's what make the tragedies even more poignant, and the good times and the humor so heart-filling.

Q: Are you *Ida B*?

A: Somebody told me the other day that I was *Ida B*, but I'm not. Sometimes I wish I were. I wish I had had the confidence, when I was young, to speak my mind more and not to be embarrassed by the things that make me unique. I think sometimes I try to live up to her example—the way she fills her days with the things she loves, completely in touch with what she cares about and believes in, living life to the fullest. I understand her, and I agree with her most of the time. I'd just express things a little differently than she does sometimes.

Q: But what about the 'Soap Mask' episode?

A: Well, that doesn't mean *Ida B* and I don't share some traits and adventures. Like *Ida B*, I decided that covering my face with dish soap and letting it dry overnight might be a very successful solution to a disturbing problem. But my 'problem' was, I think, my first blemish. I experienced the same 'flashes of flame' as *Ida B*, and I guess my mom and I bonded on the trip to the doctor's. But I was acutely embarrassed by the failure of my invention and the circumstances that gave rise to it. *Ida B*, on the other hand, was only encouraged by the results of her creative endeavor.