

Year of the Book

Back Story

Like Anna Wang in *Year of the Book*, my youngest daughter, Ann, made a drawstring bag and used it for her lunch and other important things like acorns and buckeyes. In our family we save scraps of fabric, leftover yarn, paper, and use them to make new things. I think this is why so many of the characters in my books are resourceful and creative like Anna.

Her character is based on a combination of my two daughters, Jane and Ann, and myself. I always called Jane my reader girl. She learned to read at age 4 and read almost obsessively in elementary school. Sometimes her teachers told me that they were worried because her book world seemed more real to her than the events going on around her. But Jane seemed happy, even if at times alone.

My younger daughter Ann was more sociable than Jane, and got along more easily with other kids. But like Anna, she sometimes felt left out and found solace in making things. She liked to draw and make cards and cheer people up.

Anna is like me too, in many ways, and some of her experiences are mine. I had a crossing guard who told me every day how many more minutes we had until the bell rang. I put icicles and hailstones in the freezer. And I escaped into the world of books.

Ms. Simmons is based on my kids' second grade teacher. I wished they could have stayed in her classroom forever. She understood and loved the quirks of her students. She was open yet firm, and funny too. What a gift.

My husband is Chinese and our children are half Asian. Many of the experiences that Anna has in this book are based on the feelings of my children growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio. Often they were the only Asian kids in their classes, and if there were other Asian girls, people sometimes mixed them up. We tried hard to give our children a strong Asian identity, but in a city that is not very diverse, this was sometimes hard. On the other hand, our children's lives have been enriched immensely by their multicultural background and they are proud of all facets of their heritage.

Year of the Book is like a collage of my family, neighbors, and friends. I hope that readers will see part of themselves in Anna and her friends as they navigate the world of family, friends, and community.