



ALUMNAE SPOTLIGHT



Emily Buenzle '09

Writer specializing in Children's Literature

Emily Buenzle '09 is a writer in the greater Philadelphia area, specializing in brand storytelling and children's literature. Together with Marie DiLeva '09, Christine Kline '89 and John Kline, she owns and operates an independent publishing house, Tolle Lege Learning, which creates educational books for early readers. When Emily isn't busy writing, she loves spending time with her husband, two sons, and dog on their third-generation family farm.

What's a favorite memory from your time at SHA or a lesson you took with you?

Some of my favorite memories from my time at SHA take place in Mrs. Markowitz's art room. It was a space that gave my brain a break, shifted my focus, and pushed me to find creative solutions to conventional problems. I used to spend free periods in there when I had the chance to refresh my mind which actually helped me a lot in my other classes. Most of all, I remember how Mrs. Markowitz's words of encouragement helped me work my way through life's challenging moments. Aside from that, my other favorite memory is my classmates and I running through the halls, singing the Alma Mater at the top of our lungs.

What sparked your interest in writing children's books?

I've always been drawn to the craftsmanship behind children's books—it's fascinating to see how words and pictures blend together to create a truly magical and immersive storytelling experience. After years of telling brands' stories in my work as a marketing writer, I was looking to add a little more joy, whimsy, and moral value to the work I do, and after having two kids of my own, children's books felt like a natural fit.

What inspired the story behind your books?

The story behind my books starts at SHA in Mrs. Markowitz's art class my junior or senior year. I drew some penguins for an assignment and there was just something about them that had a lot of personality and potential. I saved the illustration, tucked it away in the back of my mind, and about eight years later I started writing and illustrating a story about those penguins during my lunch break at work. From there, I decided to publish, and that experience helped give me the confidence to collaborate and launch a publishing house this past year with Marie DiLeva '09, Christine Kline '89 and John Kline.

What is something about the publishing process that surprised you?

What surprised me the most about the publishing process was how much easier it has gotten. When I was an English major in college, my writing professors prepped us for a strenuous road to try to get published, which involved research, query letters, agents, rejections, and always keeping a copy of Writer's Market on hand. Even the self-publishing landscape in the early 2010s looked different, with a lot of upfront cost. But when Amazon's publishing program took off, things changed a lot. It's simple and streamlined in a way that emerging writers can easily self-publish and establish themselves in the market on their path to greater success. It's less intimidating now and I think that's great.

What advice would you give to a student who has a creative idea but isn't sure where to start?

My best advice actually comes from another SHA teacher, Mr. Kline, who taught art when I was in middle school, and is now one of my business partners at Tolle Lege Learning. He would cut the erasers off all the pencils in the art room, encouraging us to incorporate our mistakes into our work, rather than erasing over and over in search of perfection. I've carried that with me throughout my career: Just start. You'll make mistakes along the way, but you should never discount them because they have the power to become an incredibly valuable part of your life's illustration.