

A conversation with Rosemary Wells about *Love Waves*



Tell us about the concept of love waves. What are they? Where did you get the idea for them?

All my life as a mother, I have spent time traveling. When my daughters were younger, I would talk to them and my husband, Tom, by phone from distant places, and each time I would send them “love waves.” They would say, “Oh, yes, I feel it!” And they would send them back, and indeed I could feel those love waves like a small cloak landing on my shoulders.

What inspired you to create the book *Love Waves*?

I thought it would be nice to reveal and describe this as-yet-unknown wave system to the general public. Sort of like discovering radio waves, which, of course existed long before Tesla and Marconi.

You have such a wide range of expertise — writing and illustrating picture books and also writing books for older readers. How do you choose your projects? Do you generally work on one book at a time or several at once?

Many books come to me at once. I have to order and reorder them. I do one at a time, but I always know the next book is circling in a holding pattern with the third and fourth and hopefully not running out of fuel!

What have you found to be most satisfying about your career in children’s books? Do you have some favorite moments that stand out?

I have been in this field since I was twenty-two, much longer than I haven’t been. I think the best

was the reception that the Mother Goose books received. It propelled me to do more and go further than I ever had. Another was the magical arrival of the whole story of *On the Blue Comet*, all at once. I hardly wrote it. It wrote itself.

Of course, being in the White House and having my hero, Hillary Clinton, present my book *Read to Your Bunny* to a large audience, then watching her applaud and say “Author! Author!” and welcome me to the front was not bad, either.

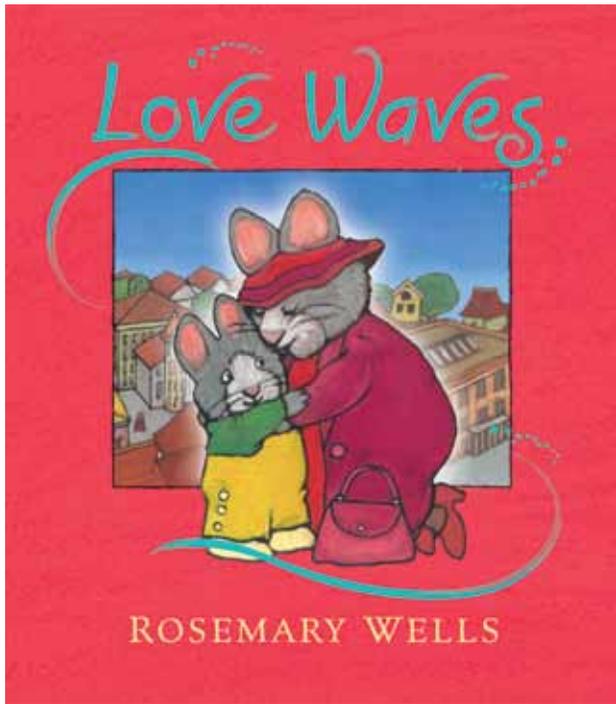
But I think one of the best things was a visit with high-school age girls in Lincoln, Nebraska, who were part of a program designed to keep pregnant and mothering teens on track to graduate. I had been asked to speak to these girls about the importance of reading to their kids. I didn’t know where to begin. Here were a hundred teens, all of whom were pregnant or had given birth recently and seen their lives change and often fall apart.

So I asked for a show of hands from anyone who wanted her little newborn, sixteen years from now, to be in the same situation. No hands. Much seriousness.

“Well, let’s talk about how to prevent that,” I said. “How to bring up a kid who can make critical choices in life. Books. Every day, every spare moment, turn off the TV and bring books into your life and your baby’s life. Let books and stories become the oxygen of your child’s life. In those books your child will find a self, an escape, and a ladder to a better life.”

Afterward, more than half the class lined up for library cards. It’s not saving someone from a burning building, but it maybe can make a little headway.

A Note About the Art in *Love Waves*



I wanted to use a new technique for the illustrations in *Love Waves*, other than the usual watercolor. I tried pastels. I tried them on colored paper, but that smeared terribly. Then I discovered “sanded paper.” This expensive pastel “ground” is available from many countries and in many shades and degrees of hardness. A softly sanded

surface holds and grabs the powdery color of the pastel and keeps it there (somewhat). Some of the sanded papers permit watercolor to be used as well. Some, like the French “Sennelier card,” have vegetable chips rather than sand adhered to the dark background, and if the artist is so foolish as to apply water, then a big white gap opens up.

What I found in the end is a marvelous paper called pastel deluxe, made only in summer in someone’s barn in Maine. It comes in the most beautiful blue, red, and aqua that I have ever seen.

Using pastels is a tremendous chore. Once the original line drawing is transferred to the darker pastel paper, you start working with the intensely hued, blunt, crumbly sticks of pure pigment. They create dust. They break in your hands. They get all over your fingers; they are horribly messy. But their intense colors sit up on the page as if they had a life all their own. They are un-erasable, fugitive, and permanent.

I love them, but I am glad not every book requires this much huge prep and difficulty.

– Rosemary Wells
Author and illustrator of *Love Waves*


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