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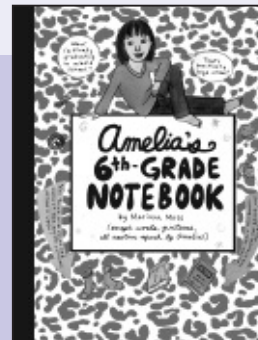
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Marissa  
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“Amelia’s a lot like me and the things that happen to her really happened to me (mostly).”

I've been making children's books for a *loooooong* time. I sent my first picture book to publishers when I was nine, but it wasn't very good and they didn't publish it. I didn't try again until I was a grown-up, but I didn't stop telling myself stories and drawing pictures to go with them. I drew constantly—on the furniture, on my homework, on tests. I couldn't stop my fingers from moving, and as they drew, I'd make up stories about whatever it was that emerged from my pen.

Still, I didn't think of myself as a writer. To me, an author was an old man with a long, flowing beard with a wife to bring him endless cups of tea while he worked on his books. I don't know why I had that image, but I did. It didn't occur to me that I could actually write stories myself. Instead, I thought I'd be an artist, illustrating stories that other people wrote.

For two years, I took my portfolio to New York, hoping to find a publisher who would give me a book to illustrate. People liked my art, but I always heard the same thing—"You'll have to wait until we find the right story to go with your style." I'm not a patient person, and I was tired of waiting, so I thought I'd come up with the right story myself.

I'm not patient, but I'm determined. It

took five years of sending out stories, getting rejected, revising the stories, and sending them back over and over until I got my first book. I never thought of giving up. I got enough encouragement from editors to keep on going, and besides, what else could I do? Telling stories and illustrating them was the only thing I was good at. There was no backup plan. I waited tables while I worked on books, and I'd be a waitress still if I hadn't got that first book.

*"The best part of writing, for me,  
is that on paper I can make  
whatever I want to happen, happen.  
You can't do that in the real world."*

Now I've published more than forty books, and each new one is still hard in its own way. Each one takes a lot of revising because I never get things right the first time. That used to frustrate me. Now I expect it. And I don't mind, because that gives me permission to make mistakes. It means I can take risks and try new things because I don't have to be perfect—I can always make changes.

I had already published nearly a dozen books when I got the idea for *Amelia's*

*Notebook*. I was buying school supplies for my son when I saw one of those black-and-white composition books. It reminded me of the notebook I had when I was a kid, so I bought it (for myself, not my son) and I wrote and drew what I remembered from when I was nine. Amelia is what came out. I didn't plan on the book becoming a series, but the first one sold so well and Amelia had so much to say, I kept on going.

Amelia's a lot like me and the things that happen to her really happened to me (mostly). I change some details to make better stories, but I do have an older sister a LOT like Cleo (her name has been changed because she hates these books—I wonder why).

With Amelia's notebooks, I hope kids can see that they can write about anything, that their lives are interesting. Because it's not what happens that makes a good story, it's how the story is told. Everyone can make their own notebook and anyone can draw as well as I can. The best part of writing, for me, is that on paper I can make whatever I want to happen, happen. You can't do that in the real world. You can't do that anywhere except in your imagination. That's what makes writing so magical. No one is the boss of your notebook except you! ■