

Interview for “The Travel Adventures of Lilly P Badilly: Costa Rica” by Debbie Glade

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to be joined by Debbie Glade, who is here to talk about her new children’s book “The Travel Adventures of Lilly P Badilly: Costa Rica.” I am also joined by Matthew Feliciano, our seven and a half year old reviewer, who will assist me in asking Debbie about her book which he just completed reading.

Debbie Glade has a Bachelor’s Degree in Creative Writing from Florida State University. She has worked as a freelance writer, specifically as a travel writer for upscale cruise lines. She refers to herself as an “armchair traveler,” which means reading, researching and writing without always traveling. Today, she is going to travel with us to Costa Rica through her characters’ experiences.

Tyler: Welcome, Debbie. Matthew and I are very curious to learn more about your book. Matthew has a question for you to start us off.

Matthew: How did you get the idea for this story?

Debbie: The story developed as I created the characters. I knew I wanted Lilly to be smart and play the piano. I also wanted her to use her brainpower to solve a big problem. To add to that it was important to teach the readers about geography and culture. Before I wrote one word of the story I made a list of goals for my story. It had to be unique, adventurous, funny, scary and educational. Plus it had to make use out of my voice talents. I hope I achieved all that!

Tyler: Debbie, will you tell us a little bit about the main character, Lilly P Badilly?

Debbie: Lilly is a heroine not just because she saves her family and new friends, but also because she learns to control her fears and emotions by using her intelligence. Like other children (and adults), Lilly has several fears that make new experiences scary for her. But, by talking through these phobias and concentrating on solutions, she bravely makes it through a very frightening situation.

Lilly is always kind and thoughtful. She uses her brain power and book knowledge to solve problems peacefully and rationally. She is curious about everything in the world, and knows that she can learn a great deal through books.

Lilly is also very musically talented. Music both motivates her and calms her down.

Matthew: Why did you choose to have Lilly be a millipede instead of anything else?

Debbie: I love insects! Living in South Florida most of my life, I have been exposed to many crawling critters. When I lived in Denver, Colorado after college, I received comments often about how awful it must be to live in Miami, a place with so many cockroaches, other insects and lizards. I would laugh at the thought that people were afraid of South Florida because of our bugs and reptiles. I am an avid gardener and have seen some of the most

unusual insects, spiders and snakes in my yard. I tend to look down when I am walking, so I see a lot of bugs on the ground.

I particularly chose a millipede because I find them to be fascinating creatures. They can fit through very small places, and they thrive in the humid climate of South Florida as well as Costa Rica. (I am sure there are many hiding in and around the Miami International Airport.) I love the fact that they have so many legs! And they live by eating decayed plant matter. What better character for a children's book than one who eats rotting plants only? Also in the real world, millipedes never harm humans or destroy homes like termites.

Tyler: What made you decide that Lilly would be a voracious reader and play the piano?

Debbie: My 15-year-old daughter, Rachel, inspired me to develop Lilly's character. Rachel always loved books, and was read to by many family members from the day she was born. She taught herself to read at a very young age and would beg us to buy her books and go to the library. She is in high school now and is a very voracious reader and a disciplined student. Rachel is an incredible problem solver! I am more of the somewhat excitable type. Her rational, practical way of thinking is very calming to me. She is the first person I go to for advice, and I can honestly say she has always steered me in the right direction. My daughter is also an accomplished pianist, who practices many hours each day. Her advanced sight-reading abilities allow her to experiment with all genres of music. My husband plays guitar and sings, and our house is always filled with music. The only downside is that I often trip on piles of sheet music.

Tyler: And what about Lilly's wonderful lyrical name? Is there a story behind its creation?

Debbie: Yes. My brother, Eric, always called my daughter "Silly Badilly" when she was young. He would tickle her and tease her relentlessly and repeatedly say, "You are such a Silly Badilly!" She would beg him to stop, but he wouldn't listen. Needless to say this was somewhat annoying, but it stuck with me. (Now my brother has 2 kids of his own, and I was planning to get back at him by teasing them, but his kids are too cute. I do talk to them a lot in my cartoon voice though, and they love it!) I liked the rhyming of Lilly Badilly and really get a kick out of it when Grandpa Willie calls his granddaughter "Silly Badilly." Of course, my brother wants full credit for the name.

Matthew: Why did the millipedes have to go to Costa Rica instead of somewhere else?

Debbie: They did not *have* to go anywhere in particular. But it was important that they travel someplace interesting and unique with a lot of nature. With all my travel writing experience, Costa Rica was the perfect place. Besides, there are a lot of flights from Miami to Costa Rica as well as other Central American cities.

Costa Rica is home to some of the earth's greatest natural treasures. About one quarter of this small nation is protected wildlife. The diversity of plants, animals and volcanoes of Costa Rica are like that of no other place on earth. There are more than 1,500 different species of orchids alone. And brilliant blue morphos are among the countless species of butterflies in the cloud forests and rainforests. One of the most intriguing animals I've ever read about is the leaf cutter ant. There are scientists who devote their careers to studying them.

I really thought that since Lilly is such an avid reader and environmentalist, Costa Rica would be a fine place to travel. I hope that the book sends a message to children everywhere that we must preserve our precious environment.

Matthew: Have you ever been to Costa Rica?

Debbie: Not yet, but I am hoping to go very soon!

Tyler: Debbie, how on earth does a millipede travel to Costa Rica?

Debbie: Well, Lilly and her grandparents live in a hole in the wall in Concourse A of the Miami International Airport. They never really seem to go anywhere. It is Grandma Nellie's idea one day that the family members sneak into a briefcase to board a flight to Costa Rica. Of course, most millipedes pack lightly, but the Badillys travel with backpacks.

Matthew: Where were Lilly's parents and why didn't they go on the trip too?

Debbie: That is a great mystery that will be revealed some time in the future.

Tyler: Will you tell us a little bit about Lilly's travel companions?

Debbie: Lilly lives with and travels with her grandparents, Nellie O. Badilly and Willie Z. Badilly. Nellie is very bossy and adventurous. She wears a gray wig! Grandpa Willie is very cautious and gentle, so his wife generally gets to make the decisions! These two characters were inspired by my real life grandparents, who were wonderful and fascinating in every way. Grandpa Willie has some of my husband's traits as well.

Lilly's grandparents are protective of her. But they also look to her for expertise about a lot of things, because they know how smart their granddaughter is and how much she reads.

Tyler: I can't imagine it's easy being a millipede. What kinds of dangers do Lilly and her family encounter in Costa Rica?

Debbie: Being small has its challenges. (And I know this first hand, because I am just under 5 feet tall myself.) The members of the Badilly family have to make sure they are not squished by anyone or anything while traveling. They have to hide in a briefcase or suitcase on the plane, so no one sees them. People tend to scream when they see bugs and cause a big commotion. And it is scary in that darkness! Luckily Grandpa Willie has a flashlight.

Another challenge for them is transportation when they get to Costa Rica. But with proper planning and investigating they figure it all out. It can be convenient to fit in small spaces and squeeze through cracks.

Once they enter the rainforest, the Badillys are faced with unfamiliar territory. Not only do they have to protect themselves from terrible weather without the comforts of home, but they also have to protect themselves and others they meet along the way. All I will say is they encounter a creepy enemy named Ruth Less. It seems as though there is no solution to the sticky situation, but Lilly knows better.

Tyler: Why did you decide to create a companion CD for the book?

Debbie: I have a special cartoon voice I have always used, and it really makes people laugh. I created a few other voice characterizations as well. I wanted to give Lilly a memorable voice and make the story come to life. Also, even though "The Travel Adventures of Lilly P Badilly" is a picture book, it is quite advanced for young readers. With the CD, children who are very young or not quite ready to read at this level can enjoy the story. Even those who read well like the multidimensional aspect of the voices, music and sound effects. All the sound effects of the rain forest are authentic Costa Rican recordings from an amazing website at www.naturesongs.com. We are finding that parents are just as into the CD as the kids are, because it is very entertaining.

Matthew: How did you make all of those voices on the CDs all by yourself?

Debbie: I have had my Lilly voice since I was 9 years old. And I am always goofing around with voices. I tried to think about what each of the characters in the book would sound like. Then I experimented with a lot of different ideas before coming up with the voices on the CD. I sure had to practice a lot not to get confused with the different voices while recording it all! It's not as easy as it sounds.

Tyler: Will you tell us about the CD? Who wrote the music and the song lyrics and how it was recorded?

Debbie: As I mentioned, I use different voices for each character. I also narrate the story. The CD is very lively and really brings emotion and depth to the plot. I wrote the lyrics to all the songs. Rachel wrote the entire musical score and then worked with me on the songs to fit in with the themes of each scene. It was a time consuming process, because we wanted everything to be original, funny or scary and lively. Rachel is always swamped with homework from school, so it was challenging to fit time in for writing sessions. Somehow we did it. And I have to say we laughed a lot during the process.

My husband, John, wrote 2 of the songs and really livened up the music with his harmonica! John and Rachel practiced the music together and directed me the day of the recording. I am the only Glade family member without musical talents. I am not that great of a singer, but with my cartoon voice, it somehow works.

The day of the recording was really special. Somehow we recorded the 35-minute CD straight through, from narration to music and voice to voice. We went back and changed a few things, but we were well rehearsed. Cliff, the sound engineer at Sunflower Recording Studios had a good laugh that day at my voices.

John plays the guitar and harmonica on the CD. Rachel plays the piano, sitar and tambourine. I would never have even tried to record the story without music, and I could not have done it without their talents!

Matthew: Why did you decide to put music and singing in the book?

Debbie: Music is such an important part of life. My house is always filled with music, since my daughter plays the piano daily and sometimes the sitar, and my husband plays the guitar and sings often. Plus music is what saves Lilly from her enemy!

Matthew: Why was all the singing really funny? I liked the singing and thought it was funny to listen to.

Debbie: I am glad you thought it was funny! I think readers really want to laugh and be entertained. Even if something frightening is going on in the story, it is okay to laugh. And I can tell you firsthand that parents want to be entertained as much as their kids.

Tyler: I thought the music was hilarious, myself, Debbie, but I want to ask you about the illustrations. They are so colorful and enjoyable to look at. Were you inspired by photographs of Costa Rica in choosing their colors?

Debbie: Yes, I was inspired by photographs and a lot by the gardens around Miami. I have a lot of gardening books too. We have a similar climate to Costa Rica and grow some of the same plants here. Of course, we do not have any volcanoes in Florida! I wanted to make the pictures as colorful as possible. Like most people, I am always drawn to books and art with vivid colors.

Tyler: How did you draw them? It looks like they were outlined with a pen or marker, but did you use paints, or markers or colored pencils or a mixture?

Debbie: I used watercolor pencils, then a wet brush to turn them into paints. I also used pan watercolors to cover large surface areas. And I outlined a lot of the figures with black ink to make them pop off the page. One technique I experimented with was drawing some of the smaller insects and animals on separate sheets of paper. Then I cut them out and glued them on the page over other artwork. After the pages were scanned, those pictures almost looked like they are raised on the page.

Tyler: Did it take you longer to make the illustrations than to write the story? What made you decide to have illustrations and to do it yourself?

Debbie: I spent so many hours on the illustrations, the revisions of the story and the music—over 1 year. But I think the rewriting and proofreading took the longest. I wrote several versions of the book and then started painting. If the paintings were not interesting enough, due to the story not developing quickly enough, I changed the story to make it flow better. It is important to keep the reader interested at all times.

I painted the pictures at the dining room table in my house, because that room has the best natural light. I went back and forth from the dining room to my home office to make copy changes on the computer, on the other side of the house. I wonder how many miles I walked in my own house.

Tyler: Have you been painting for long? What kind of artwork have you done in the past?

Debbie: I have always been an artist of sorts. I used to paint with pastels when I was younger. I have done thousands of craft projects. Rachel and I have volunteered at a senior center several times to make holiday crafts. I am handy at decorating and painting walls. I also love to make quilts, and I made the costumes for my daughter's school play.

Tyler: What age group do you think will enjoy “The Travel Adventures of Lilly P Badilly” and what responses have you received from readers so far?

Debbie: Kids ages 5-10 will enjoy the book. Those who are too young or not advanced enough to read the book can listen to the CD and look at the pictures. Even though many ten-year-olds read chapter books, they will still enjoy this picture book because it is quite sophisticated. The first child who read my book is my friend's ten-year-old son. He is bright but has a bit of trouble concentrating when he reads. He sat still through the entire recording and followed along in the book. He loved it!

So far the response to my book has been very positive. People really laugh when they listen to the CD. I have had a lot of positive feedback on my illustrations as well. My goal is to collect short reviews from all the children who read the book and post them on my website at www.lillybadilly.com.

Tyler: Debbie, did you always want to be a writer?

Debbie: I used to want to be an actor, so I guess in a way I had my opportunity on the CD. Ha! The truth is that I entered college with no direction and was confused about what to study. I had chosen Communications on a whim, but quickly learned that it was such a popular major that I had trouble getting the classes I needed to finish in 4 years. I was waiting in a long line to sign up for classes (before computers and internet). I overheard several students saying that it was going to take them 6 years to get their degree, because there were not enough spaces in each class for all the students. I asked someone in line behind me what college was housed in the brick building across the street. I was told it was for English majors, so I left the line and changed my major. I did not want to spend 6 years doing something I should have been able to (and did) finish in 4. Of course, I would not have done it had I not liked to read and write.

What is funny is that I sort of fell into becoming an actual writer. I was working for a bank doing some customer service and marketing work. A lot of people got laid off from their jobs, including me. A woman I had worked with, who also lost her job, got a marketing position at a cruise line. One day she called out of desperation asking me to help bail her out. Her professional writer had a personal crisis and the cruise line had an emergency deadline to finish a HUGE brochure. She had remembered that I was known at the bank for my writing skills. I told her that I knew nothing about travel writing, but I would try my best. They gave me some information I could use about the destinations, and I went to the library and checked out a lot of books about the world. I had to stay awake as many hours as I could during a 72-hour period and write, write, write. It was stressful, but I did it. The photography and layout of the final brochure was spectacular, and the cruise line won an advertising award. That marked the beginning of a 13-year career writing for upscale cruise lines. (The artist responsible for that brochure, Tim Ravenna, helped me with the layout of my book 20 years later!)

I also wrote a lot of resumes and cover letters for people and other marketing pieces for a wide variety of businesses. Over the years, you would not believe how many times my name was referred to people who needed help when their writers did not pull through. Being reliable is just as important as writing well.

Tyler: Debbie, what do you hope children will gain from reading about Lilly and her adventures?

Debbie: More than anything, I wrote the book so children could make reading a life long pleasure. As I came up with the idea for this travel adventure, I kept teachers in mind as well, knowing it could help entertain their students and get them interested in books. Also, geography knowledge among students and adults is something that is lacking in America, and we need to start educating our kids about the rest of the world starting at the earliest possible age.

I'd like to think this book stirs up the curiosity in all who read it to go out and seek more information—whether it is about geography, culture, insects, plants, conservation, volcanoes or music. Just as much as I like to read and write, I love to research. There is so much information out there about any and every subject—not just on the internet and in books, but also in the minds of the many people we meet in our daily lives.

Another message I wanted to relay in this book is that it is cool to be smart and that kids do not have to fit into any specified group to have a happy and productive life.

Tyler: Debbie, do you think Lilly is likely to have any more adventures?

Debbie: I would love to see Lilly board another plane to some place exotic and experience something totally new. There's a whole wide world out there waiting to be discovered.

Tyler: Thank you for joining me today, Debbie. Before we go, will you tell us about your website and what additional information our readers might find there about “The Travel Adventures of Lilly P Badilly: Costa Rica”?

Debbie: My website is www.lillybadilly.com. The home page offers those interested in the book a sample of Lilly singing as well as some of the authentic Costa Rican sound effects. There are also sample pages you can click on to hear and see some of the inside of the book. I have devoted a long page to facts about Costa Rica, and I have written about some of the most interesting or most abundant plants and animals. I also painted watercolor pictures of each plant or animal described. There are photos of my family recording the CD and we’ve each written a paragraph about our experience recording.

I hope readers enjoy navigating the site. There is page to order the book online, and also if you click on Smart Poodle Publishing and then on Smart Poodle Blog, you can add comments. I love to hear from readers, parents, grandparents and teachers alike!

Tyler: Thank you, Matthew, for assisting me today. I bet you have a long career before you as a book reviewer, and hopefully, Debbie, you’ll come back again so Matthew and I can continue to talk to you. We wish you and Lilly Badilly many more exciting adventures.

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