

## **Interview with Jill Ammon Vanderwood** ***Through the Rug***

*Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to be assisted by Brianne Plach, our nine-year old book reviewer. She is here to help me interview, Jill Ammon Vanderwood, author of “Through the Rug.”*

*Jill Ammon Vanderwood was born and raised in the state of Oregon; she now makes her home in Utah, with her husband, Bill. Jill enjoys spending time with her family, going to movies, and camping. Her hobbies include quilting, reading mysteries, eating chocolate, and traveling. Growing up, she enjoyed reading books about children going on magical adventures. Her favorite author was Edward Eager. “Through the Rug” is the author’s first children’s book.*

Tyler: Thank you, Jill, for joining us today. To begin, would you tell us a little bit about the plot of “Through the Rug”?

Jill: Thank you Tyler and Brianne. First, I would like to thank Brianne for her great book review. I always enjoy sharing my story with kids. Of course, they have the best imaginations.

“Through the Rug” is a story about Grandma Emma who went to cooking school. She didn’t realize that she was actually learning to do magic. She thinks she was given an honorary degree, because of her age.

Her granddaughter, Alyssa, comes to visit for a week. When she discovers that Grandma has changed her black and white dog to pink and green, she is worried. Grandma’s dog, Domino, has caught the attention of the dogcatcher.

When Grandma Emma tries a formula for ‘more days in a week,’ the formula expands making a mess on the kitchen rug. Bending over to cleanup the mess, Grandma and Domino fall through the rug, followed by Alyssa and the dogcatcher.

They find themselves in Wishville, where all wishes are granted. Grandma and Alyssa experience a wedding reception where you can eat as much as you wish, without getting full. They encounter fish that dance, and travel to an island with no way to return to Wishville.

Have you ever seen a grandma riding on a skateboard, or a dog walking around with a small body and long spindly legs? Grandma and Alyssa have many magical mishaps before finally creating the magic of more days in the week.

Brianne: Ms. Vanderwood, where did you get your idea for writing this book?

Jill: One night I had a dream about a rug with green slime. Everyone would jump over the rug so they wouldn't get into the slime. The next day, in a writing class, the teacher asked the class to write a story about a visit to Grandma's house, where the grandma wasn't making cookies. That day I started the story of "Through the Rug." It began as a very short story, but included Wishville and the little man, who pops up and gives advice.

In my first story, Domino pushed Grandma through the rug, but didn't go with them to Wishville. He didn't become an important character until much later.

Alyssa is the name of one of my granddaughters. I started the story when she was eight years old and published it when she was thirteen. I have several other grandchildren waiting for a story of their own. I never intended for "Through the Rug to be a series." More of my grandchildren will show up in the second book.

Brianne: Do you have any good memories of staying at your grandmother's house?

Jill: I remember going with my grandmother into the cellar of her house. We saw an old table and chairs down there, very dusty and cobwebby like you might see in spooky movie. I asked, "Grandma, who lives down here?"

She answered, "Nobody lives down here. Well, maybe some mice."

My imagination began to work and I had dreams of a mice family having dinner on the table with cheese and goblets and all the goodies they scavenged from the house.

Brianne: Ms. Vanderwood, how many children do you have?

Jill: My husband Bill and I have one boy and three girls. We are the grandparents of two grandsons and four granddaughters. You can see a picture of my grandchildren on my Web site, [www.throughtherug.com](http://www.throughtherug.com).

Tyler: Did your family contribute to your ideas for the book?

Jill: Sometimes when I need inspiration for my books, I have brain-storming sessions with my grandchildren. I ask questions like: "What talent would you wish for if you could do anything you want?" or "Where would you go if you could travel anywhere you wanted?" The kids call out ideas and I write them down. There is evidence of these brain-storming sessions in "Through the Rug" when Grandma and Alyssa are trying to think of what to do on their special days.

Tyler: Were you inspired by any other children's books, such as "Alice in Wonderland" where Alice goes through the Rabbit Hole to have your characters go through the rug?

Jill: I am always surprised when someone brings up "Alice in Wonderland." The thought of Alice never entered my mind. I really think the only similarity is the part where they fall through the rug.

I was most inspired by books written by Edward Eager, "Half Magic" and "Seven-Day Magic." He wrote about ordinary children going on magical adventures. I wasn't thinking about his books when I wrote mine. But looking back I can see that I was influenced by his books, which I began reading in the fifth grade.

Tyler: Why did you choose for the story to begin at Grandma's house? Since Grandmas are not usually companions in fantasy story adventures, how did you decide to make her a main character?

Jill: I'm glad you asked, Tyler. I thought it would be fun to share a secret adventure, just between the grandma and her granddaughter. After all, her father took her to grandma's house, so he must trust his own mother, right?

I see the grandma character as myself in a lot of ways. The part where grandma went to the store in her slippers and locked her keys in the car was also one of my many mishaps.

Yes, I do many silly things. I look like a normal person, but look out. We really do eat pizza on the roof. My grandson and I are planning a midnight picnic and Easter egg hunt in August.

Tyler: Thanks for being honest, Jill. Writers are supposed to be eccentric after all. Jill, I am always curious in fantasy novels with a series of adventures how the author decides just how many adventures to include. For example, in "Alice in Wonderland," Alice meets many strange characters—why didn't she meet one more or less? Yet, in "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" there is a progression to the adventures, each moving the plot along. Are all your adventures in the book connected to one another, one leading to the next, or are the adventures written to provide variety rather than plot development?

Jill: I feel the adventures in the book were written in sequence *and* to move the plot along. Sometimes one wish causes another. When the characters make wishes, things move fast.

At one point, I thought my book was complete. I sent it to several people to review for me. Everyone said the same thing. "Why do Grandma and Alyssa have to go home now?"

I came to realize that if I were on this adventure, I wouldn't want it to end. I wanted to make the book like a ride at Disneyland, just long enough to make you feel satisfied, but not so long that the reader gets bored. For more adventures, you will just have to wait for my next book.

Brianne: Did you always want to be a writer?

Jill: When my children were young I made up songs and poems for them.

I was always writing letters, keeping a journal and writing stories to send to the Readers Digest, but I didn't realize I was a writer.

Brianne: What steps did you take in order to become a published author?

Jill: Since I had been out of school for so long, I needed to learn to write, so I took two creative writing classes. Next, I needed to learn how to use a computer. I had keyboard classes in high school, but I was afraid to even try E-mail.

When I joined the League of Utah Writers, my writing really took off. I found out about different kinds of publishing. This book is published by Authorhouse and my next book will be published by Mill Creek Press; however, they are both considered to be self-published books. If you want to self-publish a book, there are many companies to help you. It is critical to have your work edited before publishing. There would be nothing worse than to have a poorly written or poorly edited book with your name on it. If you choose to self-publish, you will have most of the responsibility for promotion.

Tyler: Jill, it can be difficult to write a book and publish it. What difficulties did you come across and what advice do you have for other people who want to write and publish?

Jill: When I thought I had finished writing my book, I entered it into a contest. Some of the comments I got back were hurtful, rather than encouraging. Besides these comments, I was told that my book needed to be 2/3 longer for the 8-12 age group. I went home and threw the manuscript into a drawer and I was done with it.

Several months later, a friend asked me to be the secretary of my writing group. Writing a monthly article gave me the courage to start writing again. I wasn't sure whether I could do it, but I began rewriting "Through the Rug." It took me one year to finish the book I had been working on for three years. In the end, I had a much better book. I hired my own illustrator to do my pictures and after editing, it was ready to be published.

If you are a writer, don't give up. It is time to fulfill your dreams. You are in a business that requires critique, but criticism is difficult to take. Take the good and helpful remarks and disregard the rest.

Brianne: Do you plan on writing more books? I sure would love to read them.

Jill: I have completed my second book, "Through The Rug 2: Follow That Dog." It is a continuation of "Through The Rug." This book is at the publishers right now. I hope it will be available this fall. I have begun writing my third book in the "Through the Rug" series. I am also working on the first in a new series of magical adventures.

Tyler: Do you think you will always write children's books or do you think you will write books for adults too?

Jill: I have many ideas swimming around in my head. Most of my books will be for children. I do have an idea for a young adult book and an adult book, in the future.

Tyler: What do you think is needed to make an effective children's book?

Jill: I have been told in writing groups that a book for children should either teach a moral lesson, or be educational. There are many good authors who write by these principals.

The main point of my book is to spend as much time as possible with the ones you love, and to enjoy every adventure life brings you.

I think that in a world where there is so much for children to worry about, it is enjoyable to read a book that is just plain fun.

Tyler: Jill, I also understand you want to use your writing to benefit others. Would you tell us a little about your community involvement?

Jill: For my book, "Through the Rug," I held a combined book signing and party to benefit the Literacy Action Center, in 2006. In July 2007 my husband and I took a trip to the Northwest Kiwanis Camp to volunteer for a week with the handicapped children. While we were there, I did a reading from for the campers, and taught "The Fishy Song" from my book.

When my second book, "Follow that Dog," comes out, we are planning a fundraiser for the Wheelchair Foundation. I will have a book party right out of the pages of my book. All proceeds for the party and the sale of books [at the party] will go to provide wheelchairs to children and adults who are in need but cannot afford them. I will post information about this party on my Web site.

Tyler: That's wonderful, Jill. What made you decide to help handicapped children?

Jill: When I was in the eighth grade, I was a junior counselor at a Kiwanis Camp. After that, I became a member of a Kiwanis service club for youth.

A few years ago, I was a reading tutor for the Literacy Action Center. For one year, I tutored a young woman with Cerebral Palsy.

My husband and I are at a place in our lives where our children are grown and we have nearly everything we need. I feel its time to give something back. We found a cause we believe in and jumped in.

Tyler: Jill, before we go, I want to say I was very impressed with your Web site, which goes beyond giving the reader information about your book and is designed to be interactive for children. Would you share with our readers your Web site address and what they might find there?

Jill: I'd love to. My Web address is [www.throughtherug.com](http://www.throughtherug.com). My daughter Karen has been working on my Web site. You will find information about the author, illustrator, and Web mistress. She has an Alyssa doll to dress up, games, puzzles and information about upcoming events. On my home page, Domino and several other dogs are lined up for a dog show; all you need to do is click on one of the dogs, and a page will open up.

Tyler: Brianne, thank you for being my guest host today, and Jill, thank you for joining us today and sharing "Through the Rug" with us. We both wish you lots of success with "Through the Rug" and your future books.