

(July 2017 – Chicago, Illinois) – Author Bibi Belford answers questions on her first book, now on paperback, CANNED AND CRUSHED:

1. Tell us about yourself and why you wrote your first book?



Author
Bibi Belford

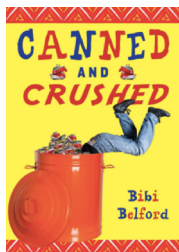
Hey there, I'm Bibi Belford, author of [Canned and Crushed](#), [Crossing the Line](#), and Another D for DeeDee (coming in 2018!). Before I became an author, I was a teacher at a public school in Illinois. I used to live in the quiet suburbs with raspberries in my backyard. Now I live in the busy Chicago loop where I love riding the bus and the L-train and being able to walk where I want, mostly to restaurants! I love books. Reading is one of my earliest memories, but since my family couldn't afford to shop at the bookstore, the public library became my happy place. Since I loved books so much, I always wanted to write a book. After teaching for many years and raising four children, I finally got serious and wrote that book I always talked about writing. I try to write everyday, but I also love to quilt, sew, read, garden, go to the beach, and volunteer in schools.

2. Why did you write the book Canned and Crushed?

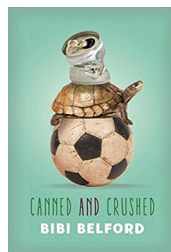
My reading intervention students worked so hard to learn to read, but then they'd tell me they couldn't find books they wanted to read, with characters they could relate to. I asked them if I wrote a book, would they read it? They said yes and were so excited when I visited their classroom to read the final chapter of the Canned and Crushed manuscript that their classroom teacher had been reading to them. I revealed that I was the author, and they couldn't believe it. They went all over the school telling their friends that their reading teacher wrote a book for them.

Later in the week a student I didn't know came up to me and said, "Mrs. B, I heard you wrote Candy Crush. I love that game." I was horrified. "No, I wrote Canned and Crushed. It's a book," I corrected him. "Oh, that's too bad," he said. "If you wrote Candy Crush you'd be rich by now." My four kids and my students are the best things that ever happened to me, and they inspire me everyday. If I can write a book that brings them joy and motivates them to be heroes, then I'm a happy camper.

3. Give a brief description of Canned and Crushed.



Book: hardcover and paperback
(also available as an eBook)
Canned and Crushed by Bibi Belford



When Sandro Zapote finds out his little sister needs heart surgery, he is determined to help his parents raise the money they'll need to help her get better. At first he plans to win the art contest and donate that money, but when that doesn't work out, he gets another brilliant idea: can collecting. Save the environment. Save his family. Maybe even save some spending money for the fabulous new bike he's been coveting.

Sandro is the kind of person you can't help but cheer for. He's a boy who loves drawing, soccer, and his little sister. And whether he's fishing a fuzzy, dust-coated turtle out from under his sister's bed, organizing a school-wide recycling project all by himself, or getting in trouble for picking on the most annoying girl in his class, Sandro is a smart, self-aware hero, who makes just a few mistakes along the way.

4. Since you write books about school-aged kids, what was your own childhood like?

My childhood was very strict, but because of the era, very free at the same time. I had two pairs of shoes—my school shoes and my play shoes. When the school day was done, we changed out clothes and shoes and took off with our neighborhood buddies: playing ball games in open fields, riding bikes, or building our own ramps for bikes and sleds. We climbed trees and made forts with leftover lumber. When the six o'clock whistle blew, we hightailed it home for dinner.

At home, we drank powdered orange juice, called Tang, and ate canned meat, called Spam. We helped pick fruits and vegetables and "put them up" which is nice way to say we ate our own canned produce because it was cheaper than food from the grocery store. We didn't own a TV until I was ten so we spent our family time playing games and listening to classical music.

My father was a college professor and my mom had a teaching degree, but stayed home to take care of me and my two brothers. In today's terms my family would have been considered low socioeconomic. Almost all the gifts I got were used, but lovingly reconditioned by my mom or dad. *(continues on next page)*

(continued from previous page) My favorite gift was an old two-wheel bike that my dad painted pink and white. I insisted on parking it next to my bed for at least a month after I got it, so if I woke up in the night I could be sure it wasn't a dream.

5. What aspects of your own life helped inspire this book?

The main character, Sandro, in Canned and Crushed has a sister that gets sick, and I had a little brother that got sick when I was in elementary school. Both my parents were at the hospital a lot and I stayed with friends or relatives. I remember my stomach felt like termites were chewing away in there, while on the outside I acted like a regular kid, getting in trouble and playing with my friends. And just like Sandro, I tried my best to help my parents out by cleaning the house and keeping things that happened at school or with my friends a secret so my parents wouldn't worry.

6. Sandro, the main character in Canned and Crushed, likes new ideas and shows off difficult vocabulary words. What interested you about those elements of his character?

In some ways I'm like Sandro. I'm always coming up with new ideas. For example I think umbrellas should open sideways so if you want to stand against a wall you can leave the umbrellas half open. I also want to invent an instant cold compartment in the refrigerator, so if you forgot to put your root beer in the fridge you could stick it in the instant cold compartment and voila, instant cold!

I also love learning new words and finding the perfect word when I'm writing. A person's vocabulary tells others a lot about them, and Sandro, the main character in Canned and Crushed wants people to know he's smart. He not only uses impressive vocabulary, he gives his readers lots of pointers on how to remember those new words.

7. The idea of getting to know people before you judge them is strong in your book. What about that idea moved you?

It's so easy to make assumptions about people based on their outward appearances or your first impression, but people are usually very interesting and remarkable once you really get to know them. Building relationships would prevent so many of the conflicts in schools, communities, and countries. I truly believe we have more in common than we think, if only we would take the time to find out.

8. What was the most challenging part of writing this book?

Even though I've worked in a district with bilingual and ESL students for my entire teaching career, I'm not a Latina myself, and since I don't share the main character's heritage, I always worry I don't have a right to tell Sandro's story. My goal as a writer is to write books that represent my students, to be inclusive rather than exclusive. I hope to create books with diverse characters represented so that many diverse readers can see young characters like themselves as powerful protagonists in their own stories. In the U.S., the latest publishing facts show that only 2% of the books published in 2016 were written by Latinxs and only 5% had Latinx characters.

As a member of the publishing community, I hope to change these facts, by continuing to write books with diverse characters for middle grade kids, and by promoting diverse authors and books with diversity.

9. What drew you to this particular story?



I've had so many really cool and amazing students and I tried to wrap them all up in one incredible character named Sandro. Many of the things Sandro does in Canned and Crushed were things my students did. For example, I really did have a student who spit over the third floor railing. I also had a student who brought a comb to school that looked like a pop-out jackknife.

Abiola, another important character in Canned and Crushed, was developed because of an experience I had with a Pakistani student, being bullied. Her family almost transferred her to another school, but after a few meetings, the situation was resolved and the two girls became friends.

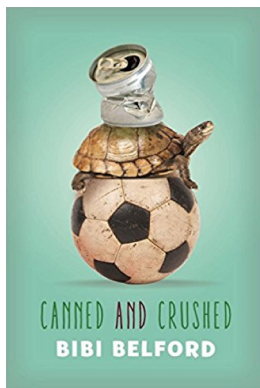
10. What other books have inspired you? (see the author's answer on the following page)

(continued from question on previous page) I love so many different authors. I guess my favorite books have everyday, unlikely heroes, just like Sandro in Canned and Crushed.

The little mouse, Despereaux, from Kate DiCamillo's book, saves the princess, and who would think a spider could save a pig—like Charlotte did in E.B. White's book, Charlotte's Web. Of course who doesn't cheer for Harry Potter, a boy who came from living a sad life under his aunt's stairs to defeat the greatest wizard of all time. Then there's Esperanza from Esperanza Rising by Pamela Muñoz Ryan, whose whole life is turned upside down when she escapes from Mexico, but she never gives up hope, and works to make things better for her family.

I love hundreds of other books, but there's just one more I want to share. Bridge to Terabithia, by Katherine Paterson, has a hero that reminds me of Sandro. He's artistic and turns a tragedy into a reason to make something that will help others. And just like Sandro, he cares about his sister.

11. How did you come up with the title?



The book was originally titled Canned, but one day I googled "Canned" and was shocked to find out that another author had written a book with the title Canned. I quickly changed it to Canned and Crushed and realized that was a better title anyway, because of the double meanings of the words canned and crushed.

When the main character, Sandro, starts a recycling program, they don't want the cans to be crushed. So Canned (for the cans) and Crushed (for not crushing). That's the surface meaning.

But another meaning of canned is fired, and Sandro makes so many mistakes that get him "fired" from lots of things. And when so many things go wrong, it's easy to get discouraged and have your hopes crushed. So Canned (for Sandro's mistakes) and Crushed (for how he feels when everything starts going wrong.)

12. What is your favorite passage in the book and why?

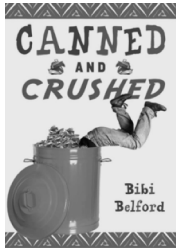
When everything starts to go wrong for Sandro, he blames Franklin, the school mascot turtle, that's become a temporary pet since his sister accidentally brought home from school.

"I need a sinkhole to swallow up me and my problems. I need a time machine to take me back to that moment when things started to go belly up. Help me out here. When did my life suddenly take a turn for the worse? Are you thinking what I'm thinking? I'm thinking of a cold-blooded, snaky-eyed, shell-packing stowaway—that's when it all started. Well, Franklin, mi casa no es su casa. That's over."

I love this because it's such typical human behavior. We always like to find someone to blame when things go wrong and yet poor Franklin, the turtle, had nothing to do with all the problems Sandro faces.

13. What can readers hope to learn from this book? (see the author's answer on the following page)

(continued from question on previous page) Sandro learns to trust people to help him with his problems, even though help comes from the most unlikely person. Some of the lessons he learns are proverbs.



Nothing is as it appears.
Look below the surface.
Worry about yourself.
Be the better man.
Never bite the hand that feeds you.
One man standing is always alone, but two equals eleven.
A good dog deserves a bone.
Visualize it and it will be.

Thanks for taking the time to share with your readers about this book.

Bonus question—your main character in this book is a boy. Do all your books feature boys, or are you writing any books with other types of main characters?

Hey, are you trying to get me to tell you secret information? You already know that I wrote Canned and Crushed for some boys that couldn't find any books with interesting characters, and that is a passion of mine. I know boys can be picky about what they want to read, so that's why I wrote Canned and Crushed and Crossing the Line, both books with main characters that are boys. But guess what? Three girls came up to me last year. "We have a question, Mrs. B. Why do you only write books with boys in them?" "That's not true," I said. "Abiola is a girl and she's in Canned and Crushed." "But she's not the main character. We want a book with a girl main character." So, I'm excited to tell you that Another D for DeeDee will be coming next year. DeeDee isn't just any girl. She's wildly creative, a super dancer, and a skateboarder. And she's trying to get control of her diabetes while she secretly searches for her dad that she thinks got stuck in Mexico. I'm also working on three more books and one of them will have a boy and a girl share the main character role.



Featured in this Q & A

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Bibi Belford lives in Chicago, Illinois and is the author of books for middle grade readers: CROSSING THE LINE, CANNED AND CRUSHED, THE GIFT, and ANOTHER D FOR DEEDEE (coming 2018).
Visit Belford's author website at bibibelford.com.

PUBLISHER INFORMATION

Sky Pony Press is the children's book imprint of Skyhorse Publishing. Following in the footsteps of their parent company, Sky Pony press seeks to publish books for young readers with diverse interests.
To learn more about Sky Pony Press, visit skyponypress.com.

BOOK INFORMATION

Title Canned and Crushed
Author Bibi Belford
Publisher Skyhorse Publishing
Imprint Sky Pony Press
Published 20 June 2017
Format Paperback (also available on hardcover and eBook)
ISBN-13 9781510716612
Dimensions 5.75 x 8.25in.

###