

Love Story

Joy Jordan-Lake's *A Crazy-Much Love* explores the irrepressible love of parents for their adopted child

BY [JULIE DANIELSON](#) | Chapter 16 | NOVEMBER 7, 2019

Joy Jordan-Lake isn't new to publishing — she's authored multiple books for adults — but *A Crazy-Much Love* is her first book for children. It's a tribute to the abundant love parents carry for their children, in this case a couple who engage in a transracial adoption: "We dreamed about you and pictured you waiting for us," Jordan-Lake writes, "just like we were waiting for you."

Illustrator Sonia Sánchez matches the author's exuberant descriptions ("our crazy-much love for you would grow and grow more and spill out the windows and bust down the doors") with energetic lines and vivid colors. It's a story about family, the milestones of childhood (first laugh, steps, words), and the unconditional love these parents have for their much-awaited daughter.

Jordan-Lake spoke with Chapter 16 via email to talk about this book, why she felt compelled to write it, and how it is based on her family's own experience with adoption.

Chapter 16: This is your debut children's book. What were both the joys and challenges of writing your first picture book text?

Joy Jordan-Lake: It's great fun, actually. And so entirely different from writing a novel for adults that, even though it's clearly work, it feels like such a needed change of pace — like getting to switch from the butterfly to the backstroke. Putting a toe in the crowded water is part of what's hard, since every Tom, Dick,

and B.J. Novak has written a picture book. The joys include just the sheer play of trying to write lyrically in a way that won't sound too stuffy or didactic — kids can sniff that out every time — but won't speak down to them either. As adults, we all know that special magic of a picture book that, when a child begs you to read it for the 4 zillionth time, you're happy to do it. Or the ones that can still make you teary or crack you up, 16 readings in. It's that sort of magic you're after — and the real challenge is trying to capture that. Like so much in life, it's a whole lot harder than it looks, honestly. Which is part of the joy — and part of keeping a writer humble!

Chapter 16: To what extent have your own life and experiences as a mother informed this book?

Jordan-Lake: I started writing picture books by telling my three kids that, since I was an author, I'd write a picture book for each of them. I enjoyed the process so much, I actually wrote several more — none of which are published yet. I originally wrote *A Crazy-Much Love* for my youngest child, the only adopted one of the three. In her elementary school class, they were discussing genetics and family history, and I wanted to help her push back at all the "Do you have your mom's eyes?" and "Are you much like your grandfather?" kind of thing and, instead, have her own joyful story to tell.

That first version of the book was called *It Was You*, and we "illustrated" it with photographs of Jasmine that fit the text. She proudly took it to school, and we read it to her class. So, in the case of this particular book, it was deeply informed by my frustration that there weren't more picture books out there for adopted kids to directly address that reality in a celebratory way. Also, though, I tried to write it in a way that any child would enjoy it — and feel a family's crazy-much love.

Chapter 16: What was it like for you to first see Sonia Sánchez's vibrant artwork for this book?

Jordan-Lake: I'm nuts about Sonia's gorgeous artwork. That's another delightful part of the picture book process — that you have a partner in bringing the words to life. In writing novels, it's just you hoping to bring those characters and settings to life for a reader. But with a picture book, an illustrator has her own perspective and ideas that don't just echo your words but add to them and even take them over the top.

Sonia lives in Spain, and we've not met in person, though I'd love that someday. I may just have to show up at the door of her little house on the Mediterranean and bring a bottle of wine. Meanwhile, I get to applaud her work across an ocean.

Chapter 16: You have previously taught writing and literature at the postsecondary level. Do you ever miss teaching?

Jordan-Lake: I do miss teaching at the college level, yes. A lot. I miss the vibrancy and noble life goals and giftedness of the students — some of whom are friends, years later. But (and it's a big but) as the book contracts have come more regularly, I began feeling that I wasn't giving enough of my heart and soul to my students. I always felt like I could be a decent writer, parent, and professor — choosing two of the three. Trying to balance all three of the above always looked like it would work on paper, and it would work for a while — with lots of grading of papers at wrestling tournaments. But life always became too harried, and either the teaching or the writing would suffer. And always the sleep cycle.

So for now, I'm glad for chances to teach on retreats or at workshops where I can feel all-in, but for a shorter period of time, yet still really get to enjoy watching and being a part of other people's creative processes.

Chapter 16: You grew up in Signal Mountain, Tennessee. What is one thing that, as a writer, you still carry with you from home?

Jordan-Lake: I love that you asked about my hometown. Like a lot of writers, I was a painfully shy kid. So, it was a great gift to grow up in a small town, where I could ride my bike to the tiny public library or sit for hours in a tree beside the stream and read a Nancy Drew mystery. All my friends as a child were also avid readers, so even when our parents ordered us outside, we were acting out our favorite stories and characters and adventures. Interestingly, from among my closest childhood friends, we went our separate ways by middle school — some to private schools in Chattanooga, some to public, and some moving away — yet the majority of us went on for graduate degrees in English lit and still try to balance reading and teaching and writing. I still carry that sense of community, the beauty of making time for connecting with the natural world, and for getting lost in a book.

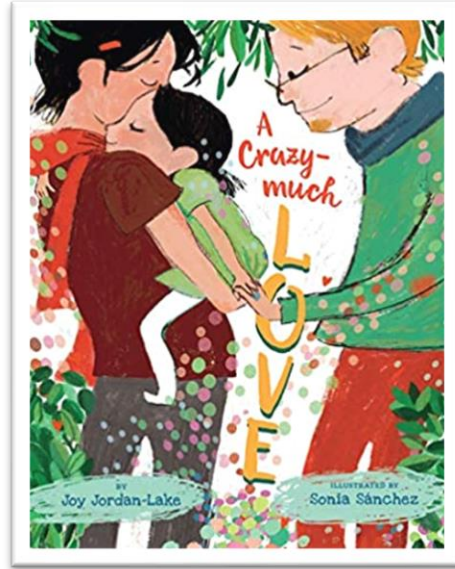
Chapter 16: Are you planning to write any more children's books?

Jordan-Lake: I'd love to! My older two kids insist they're just a little miffed that their books haven't been acquired yet, so that's on the to-do list, of course. And ever since one of my dear friends adopted a fabulous son with a prosthetic leg, I've been aware how few picture books feature a limb-different child as the hero. So, that's a story rattling around in my head, too.

Chapter 16: I have to ask: Did one of your own children actually try, just like in the book, to sneak your pet dog onto the school bus?

Jordan-Lake: I think they tried everything but that. We've always had dogs, and my youngest child and I especially try to take our current dog, Teddy the Rescue Pup, everywhere — mostly because he's cuddly and adorable, but also because

he gets insecure when left in the care of neighbors and marks on, in that charming male dog way, anything not in motion.



Joy Joy Jordan-Lake is the author of eight books, including the #1 Amazon Bestseller *A Tangled Mercy* and *Blue Hole Back Home*, which won the Christy Award in 2009 for Best First Novel. Her upcoming novel *Under a Gilded Moon* to be released on 12.01.20.

She holds a PhD in English Literature, is a former chaplain at Harvard, and has taught literature and writing at several universities.

Jordan-Lake lives outside of Nashville with her husband and three children.

www.joyjordanlake.com