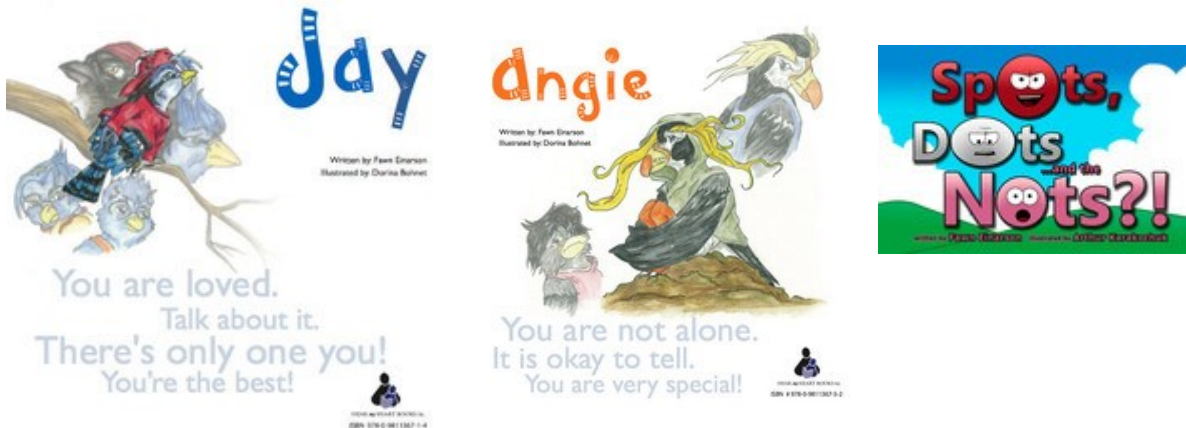




Mental health in infancy and early childhood affects social functioning, psychological well-being, and physical health throughout life.



## Hear My Heart Books. An Interview with Fawn Nelson

### Tell us a bit about yourself?

I am a Saskatchewan author who started “Hear My Heart Books Inc.” in 2005 to focus on social issues that affect children. During my years as an emergency care home provider, foster parent, and facilitator for adult survivors of abuse groups, I recognized a huge gap in resources available for those living in crisis and/or in difficult circumstances.

I was raised by my father. Being a single parent in the 60's wasn't easy, especially if you were a single dad. I was the youngest of three. We had live-in help during those early years until my dad remarried when I was 11 years old. I now have a large blended family. My parents always taught us about inclusion and acceptance. This certainly stayed with me into my adult life. I believe that the struggles I've had throughout my life have prepared me for the work my company is doing.

I live in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan with my husband Ray. We are blessed with a daughter Tasha, a son Ty, and our four-legged child Izzy.

We are the proud grandparents of Oaklen and Emmitt. We have hosted international students from all over the world for the last 14 years. Our home has always been a busy place resonating with the sound of children, pets, activity and mayhem.

### How did you first come up with the idea for “Hear My Heart Books?”

I've always been highly attuned to other people's suffering. One of the first people to teach me how to live well, despite a looming crisis, is my cousin Cindy. She was diagnosed with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) at 13 years old. I wrote '*A Legacy of Living Large*' to present to her on her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. Cindy was only given an 18-month prognosis. I guess the best part is she didn't know she wasn't supposed to survive; therefore, she never gave up hope. Cindy has always remained positive despite the ups and downs she has experienced as a result of her illness.

I was deeply touched by my family's reactions while interviewing them for the book. Cindy's sisters held deep unresolved emotions, which even surprised them. They realized that they hadn't had a chance to deal with their fear, anger, and sadness during the ongoing crisis of Cindy's illness.

I started to think of the children I had worked with and wondered how their circumstances would affect them in the future.

I realized how abuse impacts survivors in their adult lives. So many adult abuse survivors have unprocessed trauma, hurt, fear and pain. What if we could reach children, while they were still children, and let them know they aren't alone in their circumstances and that others care and want to help them? Would they fair better in their adult lives? The resounding answer is YES!

So, I took the stories I had abandoned on the shelf so many years earlier, dusted them off and started writing.

### **Tell us about Jay and Angie's stories?**

There are two books that I refer to as Crisis Management Tools. These aren't what you call traditional story books, but more appropriately an interactive program.

The first book "Jay" took a few years to design because the structure had to be designed to allow the maximum flexibility, while ensuring that the delivery was sensitive, and nonthreatening. We now have the second resource available for sale "Angie". Both of these stories come with interactive components.

When I was a foster parent and ran the emergency care home, the children in my care weren't interested in reading books about characters that were privileged beyond their understanding. They also had trouble sitting and struggled with literacy. I would tell them stories to engage them and from our reciprocal stories, the "Crisis Management Tools" were born.

### **How can these resources be used in the community by professionals?**

The Crisis Management Tools are interactive. The resources each come in a slide board format. This format works well for those reading to children in various age groups. Also included are an independent reader format (for older children to read on their own) and an activity journal. The activity journal is an interactive journal that works well for professionals working one-on-one with children. The larger size of the journal also works great for those working with groups.

***Jay's story can be used with groups of children or individually. "Jay" has been abandoned by his father, lives in poverty, is responsible for his two younger siblings, and is confused about the value of his father's gang. Jay struggles with low self-esteem, frustration, and anger.***

Children love helping Jay develop a safety plan and figuring out what to do in certain circumstances. They also enjoy learning about dangers in their own community and where someone can go to get help. The activity journal is a fantastic way to transfer knowledge to children.

We recommend that 'Angie' be read one-on-one by a professional or a trusted adult who knows the child. This story portrays sexual abuse and speaks to the issue of trust.

***"Angie" lives with her mom, who struggles with an addiction. Her younger sister has gone to Foster care, which in bird language is the "Foster Fowl Family". Angie is sexually touched by one of mom's friends. When Angie tells her mom, she isn't believed.***

### Tell us about the Spots, Dots...and the Nots book?

My newest book is quite different from the Crisis Management Tools. **"Spots, Dots...and the Nots?!"** was written on Pink Day 2011. I was sick with pneumonia at the time and a friend asked if she could take "Jay" to the event, as it touches on bullying.

I woke from a nap and this story started spilling out faster than I could write. It actually took me a few months to realize how many layers this story has. It's a book dedicated to the queer community - to help combat bullying. The story, however, speaks to anyone who has been bullied and excluded. Parents of children who have been bullied tell me that their child wants to read it every night.

Spots, Dots...and the Nots?! is a tale of evolution. It speaks to the struggle of the Pink Not, who is faced with intense repression and aggression from the red and white society. The Red Spots and White Dots both agree that Pink is a Not. When Pink rejects their label of a 'Not', Pink is able to convert the negative label into a positive self-image. Pink is able to teach the Spots and the Dots that by rejecting others, in essence, they are rejecting themselves.

In the end, Pink is successful in influencing the Red Spots and White Dots to try on the colour pink ... for a day. It's a great platform for teaching and talking to children about bullying.

### Have the resources been evaluated, pilot tested or part of a focus group?

For the Crisis Management Tools, I have relied upon the input and support of multi-sector professional focus group members, who critiqued and helped in the development of the resources. They provided suggestions for working with children, such as the activity journal and independent reader.

As well, the Jay story has been pilot tested in several schools in Saskatoon. The teachers really like the story and believe it is a great prevention and intervention tool.

Spots, Dots ... and the Nots?! was critiqued by youth at the Avenue Community Centre (Saskatoon). They feel it is as appropriate for adults as it is for children. I have developed activities that accompany the book for children, teens and adults.

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