

# ERIC VELASQUEZ

## Biography

Illustrator Eric Velasquez, the son of Afro-Puerto Rican parents, was born in Spanish Harlem and grew up in Harlem. His dual heritage coupled with the experience of living in dual cultures in New York City gives Eric a rich and unique cultural perspective.

As a child, his love for doodling and drawing was strongly encouraged by his mother. From his grandmother he inherited a love of music and from his father he developed a love of film. Growing up in this setting, Eric says, "Becoming an artist was a natural choice for me. I have never thought of being anything else."

Eric attended the High School of Art and Design and earned his BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 1983. In 1984 he completed a year of studies with Harvey Dinnerstein at the Art Student's League. Eric is a member of the Art Student's League.

Upon completion of his studies with Mr. Dinnerstein, Eric began his career as a freelance illustrator. Over the next 12 years he completed a body of work of over 300 book jackets and interior illustrations. Such works include Beverly Naidoo's award-winning "Journey to Jo'Burg" and its sequel "Chain of Fire;" The complete series of "Encyclopedia Brown;" The complete series of "The Ghost Writers;" "The Apple Classic" series, published by Scholastic Books, "The Terrible Wonderful Telling at Hog Haven; and Gary Soto's "The Skirt" and its sequel "Off and Running;" as well as the cover of the 1999 Coretta Scott King award winner "Jazmin's Notebook" by Nikki Grimes.

In 1997 Eric expanded as an illustrator with his first picture book "The Piano Man" by Debbie Chocolate, published by Walker & Co. Eric says he approached

this project as a Technicolor movie extravaganza.... He was awarded the 1999 Coretta-Scott King/John Steptoe award for new talent for "The Piano Man."

Eric undertook his second picture book entitled "Escape, A story of the Underground Railroad," by Sharon Shavers Gale, published by Soundprints. Eric describes the project as a very emotional undertaking.

In 1998 he began his third picture book "The Sound that Jazz Makes" by Carole Boston Weatherford, published by Walker & Co. In this work Eric was finally able to marry his love of art with his love of jazz. This book was recently awarded the CBC-NCSS Carter G. Woodson award in the field of Social Studies. It was also nominated for the 1999 NAACP Image award in children's literature.

In 1999, Eric again expanded his range as an illustrator/storyteller with his authorship of "Grandma's Records." This is an autobiographical picture book based on his childhood in Spanish Harlem with his grandmother. Eric describes this book as an inspirational tribute to his grandmother. "This was an emotional journey through time to the place I come from."

"Grandma's Records" has been translated to Spanish for publication here and internationally.

"Champion: The Story of Muhammad Ali" written by Jim Haskins is Eric's fifth picture book. Muhammad Ali has always been one of Eric's childhood heroes "It is an honor for me to be illustrating a book on Muhammad Ali." This recently published book has received great reviews including a starred review from Publishers Weekly. Eric has also appeared on C-SPAN 2 Book TV discussing the process of illustrating the book "Champion: The Story of Muhammad Ali."

Eric's sixth picture book, "David Gets His Drum" by the late jazz musician David Panama Francis, was recently published. His artwork has received very favorable reviews.

Eric's considers "Liberty Street" for Walker & Co. one of his favorites.

With "Houdini: World's Greatest Mystery Man" Eric was able to realized his longtime dream of doing a picture book on the legendary magician Harry Houdini. Eric introduced the idea of doing a book on Houdini to his editor Emily Easton she liked the idea and quickly began searching for the right author for the project. She quickly found Kathleen Krull who coincidently shared the same passion for Houdini as Eric.

After Houdini Eric challenge himself again by deciding to illustrate his next picture "Jesse Owens: The Fastest Man Alive" in pastels. Eric had not worked in pastel in over twenty years however Carole Boston Weatherford beautiful poetry compelled him to illustrate the book in pastel because of it's spontaneous and immediate nature. The result is a stunningly beautiful book that has received two starred reviews.

That same year Eric completed ten interior illustrations for "The Other Mozart" by Hugh Brewster for Abrams books. The story of Joseph Bologne Le Chevalier de Saint-George. Though Eric had never heard of Joseph Bologne before working on this project, he now considers him one of his personal heroes. Eric posed himself as the main character as a tribute to the legacy of this man.

Eric has just completed "I Matthew Henson" for Walker Books for Young Readers due out in 2008.

Eric Velasquez lives and works in Hartsdale New York.