

We all know an Olivia:

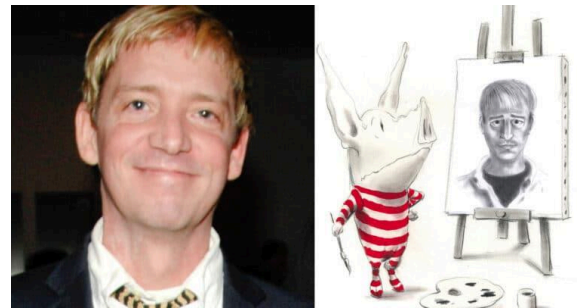
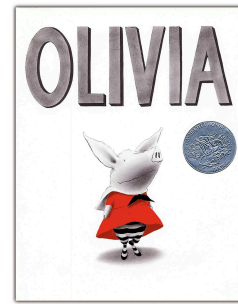
Remembering Ian Falconer

By Larissa Juliano

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We have all met an Olivia.

A sweet, precocious, vibrant, smart, and persistent child that always challenges us and teaches us more than we could ever imagine. Author Ian Falconer gave all of us such a beautiful and relatable character in his beloved Olivia series. She captivates readers from the first page with her wit and sass, little outfits popping with red (favorite page is her outfit changing party!), negotiations with Mommy about bedtime stories, and a walk through a typical day with Olivia and her family.



Of course, the writing and illustrations make it anything but typical, rather completely memorable and endearing. *The Reading Visual Narratives* so perfectly describes Mr. Falconer's style and says, "*the point is not to create her material world, but [Falconer] build[s] a picture of her energy and activity.*"



I first discovered Olivia and the works of Ian Falconer when I was doing a Caldecott winning book study with my first graders. We absolutely loved how he used just a FEW colors in the book (red, black, white, gray) and talked about what Mr. Falconer wanted to really emphasize in each illustration. Falconer starts with his ideas for a story, but illustrates the picture before putting text on the page. He shared, "I tell the story first in pictures, which is how kids, who don't know how to read yet, will see it."



Being a masterful creator, Mr. Falconer also included famous paintings by Jackson Pollack that Olivia LOVES looking at when she goes to the museum with her family. She is

captivated. Later on, Olivia tries to create her own version of Mr. Pollock's art in her bedroom. Mom was not happy, but readers understood the excited intentions behind Olivia's home artwork!

There are always so many giggles and gasps as I read this story to my students and children. Shock at Olivia's boldness and slight sass and equal admiration for the way she speaks her mind and has passion for so many things! Olivia has many struggles in her books as she negotiates with her Mommy about things she can and cannot do, tries to get along with her little brother, navigates new hobbies and talents, and visits a LOT of really cool places (Olivia in Venice!) What a heartbreaking loss for Mr. Falconer's family and the literature when he passed away in March 2023.



As an author, I also loved how Mr. Falconer veered away from the tried and true plot of problem and solution in the story. We are taken on an adventure with Olivia, her home life, outings, shenanigans with her brother and dog, and finally bedtime with Mommy- and lots and lots of book requests. There are also many more titles in board book format and early readers. Olivia is a character that reminds me of Angelina Ballerina, Corduroy, Betty Bunny, Trixie from

Mo Willems stories, and spunky, smart, and curious beings. Olivia was even brought into an adorable series on Nickelodeon Jr. in the late 2000's!

Fun fact! Mr. Falconer has designed and illustrated over thirty 'The New Yorker Magazine' covers! His work has been shared internationally and he had such a talent for captivating, unusual, slightly minimalist art - just stunning. The [New Yorker](#) wrote an outstanding piece showcasing Mr. Falconer's covers and talents which I found very inspiring as I wrote my own article about this beloved artist. Quote from Ms. Mouly's article... "*Falconer was exacting. He designed his children's books with such extraordinary simplicity that they became instant classics.*"

The magic and appeal of Olivia and her family is that they are just like so many of us...Families trying their best, exploring their interests, sometimes making mistakes, and loving one another through all the day to day busyness. Mr. Falconer and his stories were a gift (figuratively and literally!) to so many families and this timeless series with Olivia will be shared for years to come. A quote from this special author, told to the

New York Times in 2012... "If I had to say one thing, it would be to not underestimate your audience, children will figure things out; it's what they do best — sorting out the world"

~ Ian Falconer



Larissa Juliano is an elementary literacy teacher and children's book author living in Upstate New York with her family. She gets inspiration from her three children, students, nature (she loves writing poetry about the outdoors!), day to day life of carpooling, sports, gymnastic waiting rooms, and the bus stop.

You can check out all of Larissa's books and blog at www.larissajuliano.com.

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