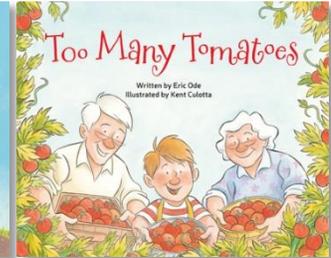
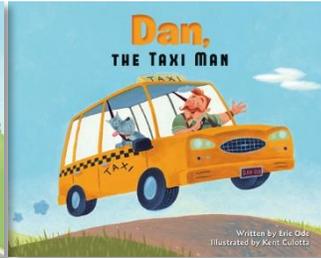
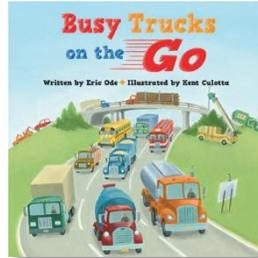




ERIC ODE is the author of three picture books published by Kane Miller: [Busy Trucks on the Go](#); [Dan, the Taxi Man](#), and [Too Many Tomatoes](#), all illustrated by Kent Culotta.



Kane Miller Books: What role did books and reading play in your home as a child?

Eric Ode: There were always books in our house. My mom began as an educator. She understood how important it is to, early on, connect children with books. All the same, I was a little slow to enjoy reading. Not slow in learning to read – at least I don't think so – but it took me a number of years before I understood what a joy reading can be. Now I love to get lost in a book! Typically I've got two going at once.

KMB: As a young reader, which poets, authors or lyricists captured your attention most?

EO: True confession. I was more captured by songwriters than authors or poets when I was young. During the 70s, everyone had a variety show – Glen Campbell, Sonny and Cher, Donny and Marie, The Carpenters. I remember Mac Davis had this bit where he'd come out with his guitar and sit on a stool surrounded by the audience. He'd ask an audience member to throw out a song title, and then he'd improvise a song to fit that title on the spot. It always blew me away! I don't think Paul Williams ever had his own show, but he frequently turned up as a guest. To this day, Paul is one of my all-time favorite songwriters.

KMB: How did your time as an elementary school teacher impact your career as an entertainer?

EO: I am so thankful I was a teacher, mostly because I love providing author assemblies and workshops in the schools. All of those years in the classroom mean I feel so at-ease and have so much fun in the schools. But I'm not sure my teaching background has much impact on what I choose to write. For the most part, I try to entertain and challenge myself. I enjoy playing with language and story, but I don't spend a lot of time wondering if what I'm writing is something children will find captivating.



KMB: Describe an average day of writing. Do you draw inspiration from any daily rituals?

EO: I am one very lazy writer. I can find any and every excuse to not write. Part of that is fear, I'm sure. If I begin with what looks like a promising seed, I worry that it won't grow into the story or song or poem that I imagine – that I'll be disappointed in the results. Right now I'm in the middle of three different projects – projects that I think could really work. But I can go several days in a row without touching any one of them. I don't have any rituals except that, if I really want to write well, I get away from the house.

KMB: In *Too Many Tomatoes*, you deliver a celebratory message of community and generosity. Why did you want to tell this story?

EO: My first and foremost hope is that children simply enjoy the story. I had a lot of fun with the language and meant for the book to be a bit of a word party. Kids understand that message of sharing. They know how important it is that we reach out. It's just a treat for me that the book gives parents and caregivers an opportunity to celebrate that message with their children.

KMB: This is the third Kane Miller book you've done with illustrator Kent Culotta. Describe the feelings you have as a writer, the process of handing your story over to be interpreted by another artist.

EO: Every time I have a book accepted for publication, I am over-the-moon thrilled. I've had people ask me if I get worried handing over the words for someone else to illustrate. Never. I'm only a small part of the project. It's exciting to see what someone else brings to the table. And of course Kent is brilliant! That said, someday I will illustrate one of my own books. I love to draw.

KMB: You're often on the road. What are three items that you never travel without?

EO: Guitar, spiral notebooks, iPod – favorite artists when flying: Indigo Girls, Jackson Browne, Jimmy Buffett, Eva Cassidy, and a mess of NPR podcasts.

KMB: Pick up the book closest to you. What is it?

EO: Mitch Albom's *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto* is sitting next to me, bookmarked a third of the way in. It's signed! (The book, not the bookmark.)

KMB: Thanks for the chat, Eric!

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