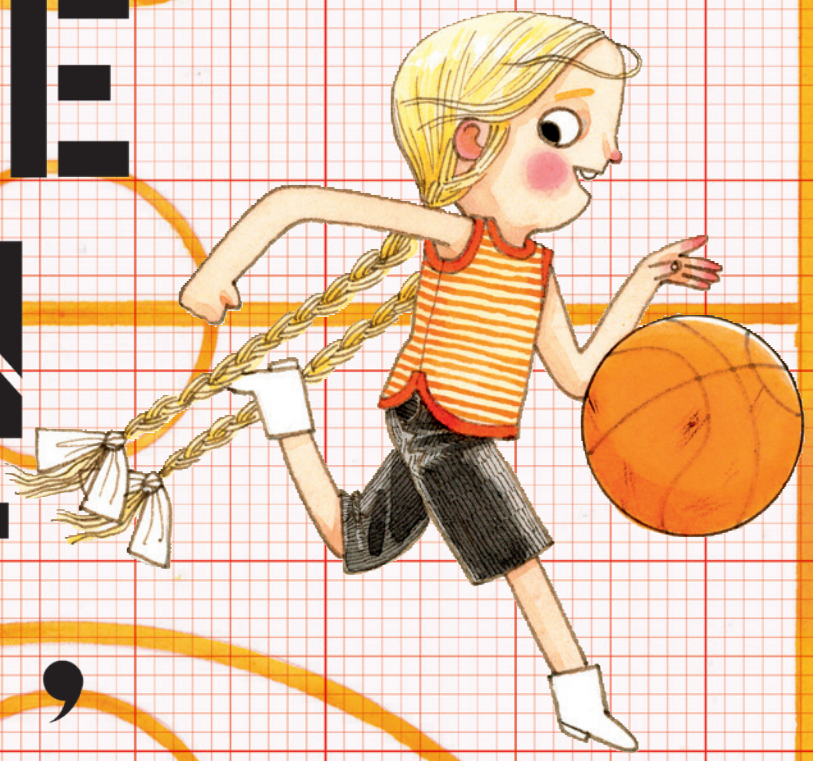


BILLIE JEAN PEET, ATHLETE



by Andrea Beaty

illustrated by David Roberts

Abrams Books for Young Readers, New York



To Our Abrams Family,
thank you for twenty years
of the Questioneers!
—A.B. & D.R.



Author's Note

No one is born a great athlete, musician, teacher, writer, or anything else. We are just born as babies who eat, cry, sleep, and look adorable.

A few, like Iggy Peck, Rosie Revere, and Ada Twist, know early that they want to be an architect, engineer, or scientist. MOST people do not!

Most of us are like Billie Jean. We figure it out as we go. Sometimes, that feels frustrating, but it's also filled with possibility. That is a wonderful, powerful thing!

I never thought of becoming a writer until I was thirty years old. Before that, I studied biology, computers, gardening, history, and many other topics. I tried different jobs. I found things I loved and things I did not. Things I was good at. Things I was not good at. And things I could *become* good at with hard work.

I needed all those experiences to become who I am. To write these books.

Don't compare yourself with others. Each person has their own talents, skills, and ideas. Each person has their own journey. What a dull world it would be if we were all the same.

Your job is to be curious. To work hard. To be kind. To be the best you that YOU can be.

And to always remember: You are amazing.

—

Though her story is her own, Billie Jean Peet is named after one of the greatest tennis players of all time, Billie Jean King.

King is a champion on the tennis court and off. She founded the Women's Tennis Association and the Women's Sports Foundation and was a key advocate for Title IX legislation, which passed in 1972.

Title IX does many important things, but it is best known as the law that ensures girls have access to school sports programs just like boys do.

The illustrations in this book were made with watercolors, pen, and ink on Arches paper.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for and may be obtained from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4197-7574-1
eISBN 979-8-88707-352-1

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Illustrations © 2025 David Roberts
Book design by Pamela Notarantonio

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Printed and bound in China
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Billie Jean is the middle kid.

Born after Addie. And just before Syd.

She has midsize ears and midsize feet.

She lives midway down Midway Street

in a midsize apartment with her pet mouse, Pop.

On a midsize planet that spins like a top.



The Peet home is chaos, in the very best way.
There's nonstop music to sing and to play
from the first light of dawn until stars fill the sky,
when they drift off to sleep with a sweet lullaby.



Then they get up the next day and do it again.
Two parents. One mouse. And three best friends.



The world spins and spins, as everyone knows.
Like Sydney and Adelaide, Billie Jean grows.
While Sydney loves drumming and Addie can sing,
Billie Jean is not great at—well—*anything.*

She tries all the instruments.
She's sharp *and* she's flat.
She squeaks and she squeals like a cranky bobcat.
The noise is sublime, but, alas, she must stop,
when she freaks out the neighbors and frightens poor Pop.

So she gives up on music, but deep in the night,
a thought wakes her up like a tiny bug bite:
She's never amazing like Addie or Syd.
Is she just the middling middle kid?





Like many bug bites, if left alone,

such negative thoughts can fade on their own.

And yet, she starts scratching, and before too long

that bite starts to swell, and soon, *everything's* wrong.





She loves making noises, but who gives a hoot

if she makes a big bang or a terrible toot?

She likes basketball, but she's only so-so.

She can't play the drums or the flute or oboe.

She can't sail a sloop or a catamaran.

Even Pop dances better than Billie Jean can!!!



She can't shake it off.

She keeps scratching that bite.

So when the moon sets at the end of the night,

Billie Jean Peet can't do *ANYTHING* right!