

## Farmer's Hat Productions: Notable Minnesota Moms

Creative Moms and their Stuff--JoAnne Pastel and Kakie Fitzsimmons

JoAnne Pastel, a former stockbroker, who decided to stay at home when her son was born, realized she needed something else to do. She discussed this with a "life coach," and together they realized there was a spark in JoAnne's voice when she mentioned that she wanted to write children's books. As a result, JoAnne forged ahead and began writing a draft of her first book. During that process, she decided to invite her friend, Kakie Fitzsimmons, to join her in this endeavor.

Both women are mothers of biracial boys, and while seeking to find books and toys for their sons that reflect today's ethnically diverse society, they noticed a void. So, in 2005 JoAnne and Kakie partnered to launch their company, Farmer's Hat Productions™. Bur Bur and Friends™ is the company's first line, which offers books, toys and products designed to reflect our diverse world while encouraging kids to be active and explore their surroundings. The company also offers an interactive website, [www.burburandfriends.com](http://www.burburandfriends.com) that features Bur Bur and his friends with music, games, and coloring pages.

Bur Bur is the name of JoAnne's son's imaginary friend, although according to JoAnne, her son now calls himself Bur Bur. The characters are all based on real people - real friends of Kakie's son and JoAnne's son. "We are inspired by our kids, and we appreciate the feedback they give us when in the writing process," says Kakie. The three books, Bur Bur's Boating ABC's, Bur Bur's Fishing Adventure, and Bur Bur's Throws Out the First Pitch, all are written in a simple style with fun, colorful, catchy illustrations. Their newest book, Anna Goes Hiking, is slated to come out in late November. The series introduces children to sports and outdoor exploration while encouraging kids to be curious. "We want all kids to become interested in sports and outdoor exploration, as well as learn from the educational component we have put into the back of the books," JoAnne explains. "There are deeper messages about sportsmanship, practice, and the importance of kids figuring things out for themselves."

The two women have a very strong relationship, and with the help of some 35 people who have worked to build Farmer's Hat Productions (there are currently about 8 people who are part of the team), they are extremely optimistic about the future of Bur Bur and Friends. There are several more Bur Bur books and products in the works. "We want Bur Bur to become a household name like Dora or Baby Einstein," beams Kakie.

Fitzsimmons and Pastel have made sacrifices to turn their dream into reality. Kakie, a single mom, had her job eliminated due to a restructure in 2006. As a result, she took about 8 months off which helped her focus on getting the Bur Bur and Friends brand launched. For JoAnne, having her office in her house, she often struggled with being able to pull herself away from her work. There were countless days when she walked around blurry-eyed from being up most of the night working. But according to both women, it was all worth it. "If you have a spark, you have to go with it," Kakie says. "And in order to make anything successful, you have to put the time in. Keep working hard -- it will pay off."

Visit the Farmer's Hat [website](#).

JoAnne lives in Orono, MN, with her husband and 4-year-old son. Kakie lives in Apple Valley, MN, with her 7-year-old son.