

Who Wrote That?

The Creators of Your Child's Favorite Books

Featuring **Katie Davis**

By **Patricia M. Newman**

In fourth grade, Katie Davis was bullied by her classmates. A self-described ADD sufferer, she says, "ADD kids are often targets because they don't get social cues." The bullying continued throughout the school year and Davis resigned herself to being "a loser." When her teacher read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl, Davis was captivated. "It was all about bad kids who get their come-uppance. That was for me!" she says. "You can make that happen in a book." Although she allowed other kids to treat her like a "doormat," bullying made her a "kinder more empathetic kid" and gave her the confidence to stand up for herself in two situations involving adults: once as an eleven-year old when an X-ray technician touched her inappropriately, and once as a junior high student when a cab driver made a racist remark. When Davis reflects on her painful experience with bullying, she realizes it made her a writer.

The author/illustrator of several humorous picture books and the author of a funny middle grade novel, Davis says, "I was always good at writing and always bad at math." In elementary school, she heard phrases of description in her head and stretched her imagination to create metaphors and similes.

After college, Davis held several writing-related jobs in advertising, public relations and marketing, and also collected picture books. In the 1980s when she sold ceramic pieces paired with



funny sayings, she discovered "the freedom to write what I wanted rather than what I had to." She began to noodle around with the picture book format, and met a man who also collected picture books. When they married and moved to Los Angeles, Davis' husband discovered a writing conference sponsored by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (www.scbwi.org) and pushed her out the door. Davis walked into the conference hall with hundreds of like-minded writers and artists and said to herself, "This is why I was put on the planet. This is me. This is who I am!"

Davis' first book, *Who Hops?*, sold to an agent she met at the conference. When she submitted the manuscript for his consideration, she says, "I kissed the package and put it in the mailbox." The seed for the book grew from a game she played with her children in the car as a distraction to forestall their tantrums. With bright bold acrylics and sly humor, Davis asks, "Who hops? Frogs hop. Rabbits hop. Kangaroos hop. Cows hop. No they don't!"

According to Davis, the inspiration for stories can come from anywhere. A student in one of her school audiences pointed out that she seemed to have a fear of the dentist because of frequent references in her books to teeth and bad breath. Davis turned the comment into a story idea and created a wacky character named Mabel, the first tooth fairy. "Mabel is the fun-

niest character I've ever created," Davis says.

Little Chicken's Big Day started as an idea from Davis' husband who creates feature animation. "You write it," Davis said. "It's not my story, it's your story." So he did, and she illustrated it.

The Curse of Addy McMahon, Davis' first middle-grade novel, "is a perfect example of how a book can be inspired by anything." In this case, a *New York Times* article about a road crew in Ireland that refused to knock down a tree in the way of construction because it was rumored to be a fairy tree and would bring bad luck. Davis created a sixth grade character named Addy McMahon who blames her bad luck on a great grand-dad who chopped down a fairy lair tree. She illustrated the novel with Addy's comic-book-style pencil drawings

Davis did not attend art school because her parents saw no financial future in it, but she enjoys testing her limits and experiments with a variety of illustration media for each book. *Who Hops?* and *Who Hoots?* are painted with acrylics, but Davis switched to pencil sketches colored in PhotoShop for *Mabel the Tooth Fairy* and *How She Got Her Job*. Davis describes the illustrations for *Kindergarten Rocks!* as "much more sophisticated than anything I've ever done." She digitized crayon-colored sketches and crayon-brushed them in PhotoShop. In *Little Chicken's Big Day*, Davis scanned her pencil sketches and added a digital overlay to create a smooth graphic look that brilliantly

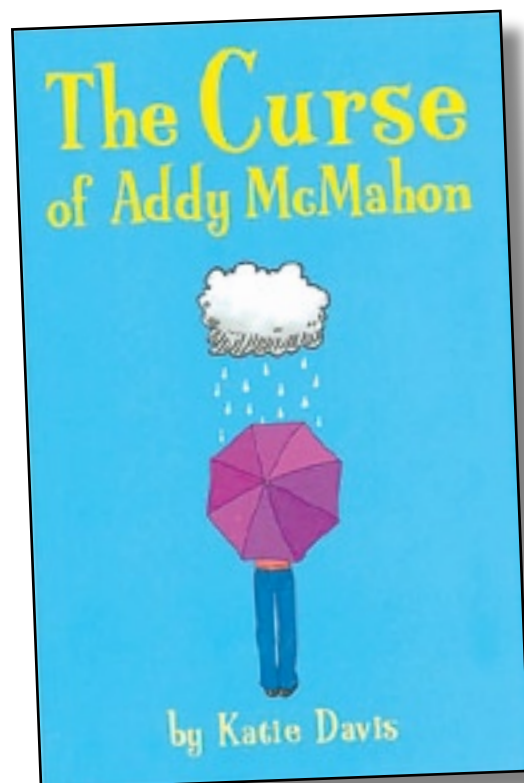


conveys Little Chicken's every emotion.

Davis is the mother of two teenagers and works from her home in New York. She laughs at the concept of a schedule, but divides her work hours between writing, illustrating, promotion, and her Katie's Brain Burps podcasts and webinars which feature authors, illustrators and other industry professionals. She says, "There is no rhyme or reason" to how she divides up her day. Whatever she's excited about.

Next month: Anna Dewdney

Patricia Newman is the author of *Jingle the Brass* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), recommended by the Smithsonian National American History Museum. Her newest book, *Nugget on the Flight Deck* (Walker), received the California Reading Association's Eureka! Silver Honor Award for excellence in children's nonfiction. Visit her website at www.patriciamnewman.com to watch the trailer.



MORE ABOUT KATIE DAVIS

How to Contact KATIE DAVIS

Website: www.katiedavis.com

KATIE DAVIS' LIBRARY

Little Chicken's Big Day with Jerry Davis, Margaret K. McElderry, 2011.

The Curse of Addy McMahon, Greenwillow Books, 2008.

Kindergarten Rocks!, Harcourt, 2005.

Mabel the Tooth Fairy and How She Got Her Job, Harcourt, 2003.

Scared Stiff, Harcourt, 2001.

Party Animals, Harcourt, 2002.

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I Hate To Go To Bed!, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999.

Who Hops?, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998.

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How to Promote Your Children's Book: Tips, Tricks, and Secrets to Create a Bestseller, August 2011.