

• Meet the Author •

Amy Young

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit www.tonibuzzeo.com).



Photo from amyyoungart.com

Amy Young grew up near Boston, Massachusetts. She wrote and illustrated *The Mud Fairy*, as well as the popular *Belinda The Ballerina* series. Her work has been praised in the *New York Times Book Review* and elsewhere, and has received various awards. Amy also has illustrated books written by other authors, including *Spike And Cubby's Ice Cream Island Adventure* by Heather Sellers, and *Moi And Marie Antoinette* by Lynn Cullen. Amy lives in western Michigan with her husband, Paul, their graceful dog, Sophie Rose, and Xena the Warrior Kitty.

Do you have a particular interest in fairies? If so, where did it come from? Tell us a bit about your history with fairies.

AY: As a child, I was fascinated by all magical possibilities—talking animals, ghosts, fairies, sentient trees. I remember hearing

about fairy rings: dark circles in the grass supposedly caused by fairies. I wondered what would happen if I stumbled upon a wild group of fairies dancing in the moonlight. Here in Michigan, I live pretty close to nature, and it easy to imagine fairies flitting around at sunrise and at dusk. The fact that I have never seen one only goes to show how good they are at hiding.

Those of us who aren't illustrators always wonder which comes first, the illustrations or the words. So, with *The Mud Fairy*, which came first? Tell us about the creative journey from idea to final book.

AY: First came the idea: Emmalina was inspired by a little girl who was six when I met her. She *looked* like a fairy, but she wasn't the dainty type at all. Then I had to figure out Emmalina's story. I wrote at least ten drafts, maybe more. During that time, I did character sketches and flower studies, but I held off on doing actual rough sketches for the book until the story was more or less set. Otherwise I would end up redrawing everything over and over. By the time I started painting, the text was pretty much decided, except for minor tweaks that didn't change the art.

You have written and illustrated your own books, but you have also illustrated the manuscripts of others. How are the two experiences different for you? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

AY: Writing is hard for me, so in some ways it is easier to illustrate someone else's words. I get to skip the hardest part! On the other hand, I can't change one word, which sometimes drives me a bit nuts, because I am so used to tinkering with my own words until the last minute. Also, when I have written the story, it is mine, inside and out; I really know the characters and what makes them tick. I have to get to that same point in order to illustrate someone else's work well.

Emmalina's voice is completely charming, a lovely mixture of innocence and humor. Was her voice inspired by the little girl you tell us about on your website? (<http://amyyoungart.com/inspiration.html>)

AY: Emmalina's nature and actions were inspired by Zoe, the girl you mention, but the language she uses came from me. My husband's grandmother used to say "HA!" so I got that bit from her.

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You live in a wintery place (Michigan). Have you considered writing a book with magical elements about your cold, snowy home? If you did, which scenes and bits of the environment would you be sure to include?

AY: I could certainly imagine the fairies romping around in the snow, living in tiny ice palaces and coating dead leaves with fingers of frost. Emmalina might find herself in a muskrat's home. Their homes look like little wigwams on the marsh, and when steam rises

from them, it looks like smoke coming out of a chimney.

If you were a fairy—and you couldn't be the Mud Fairy, because Emmalina already has that title—what fairy would you most want to be and why?

AY: I have always really like milkweed, so I would be the milkweed fairy. I would make sure that it got scattered properly at the right time. My bed would be so soft and downy! Maybe I would even weave a coat out of it.

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

AY: Go to my website at www.amyyoungart.com. You will also find some games and activities there. Enjoy!

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Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of eleven picture books, most recently No T. Rex in the Library! (McElderry, 2010) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.

