

• Meet the Author •

Ann Ingalls and Maryann Macdonald

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



Photo from redfoxliterary.com

Ann Ingalls likes to read, write, play bridge and rummy, walk with friends, work in the garden, and spend as much time with family and friends as they will allow. She and her husband love to travel and are currently planning two trips to South America. She is the author of over one hundred stories, poems, prayers, meditations, ACT exams, and Praxis II exams. *Highlights*, *Highlights High Five*, *The Kansas City Star*, *Primary Treasure*, *Babytalk Magazine*, Pflaum, Learning Express LLC, Reiman Publications, Adams Media, Focus on the Family, and many other publishers have featured her work.

Maryann Macdonald enjoys a lot of the same things she did as a child—skating, playing games, and especially reading. Growing up outside of Detroit, she

dreamed of exploring faraway places and later traveled to Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. She brought up her two daughters in London and now lives in New York City with her husband. She has written more than twenty-five books.

How did your interest in Mary Lou Williams begin? What drew you to her as a subject to research and write about?

AI: I had written a picture book manuscript called “J is for Jive.” In the process of seeking endorsements, a member of the Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors suggested I take a look at Mary Lou Williams. When I did, I became so intrigued with Mary Lou’s story of overcoming adversity to become the greatest female jazz musician and most prolific composer/arranger of all time, that I determined to write about Mary Lou. When I shared Mary Lou’s story with Maryann, we decided to partner on this project.

How did the two of you come to work together on this picture book biography?

MM: Ann’s enthusiasm for Mary Lou Williams and her life is contagious. After I read the biography of Mary Lou Williams, *What’s Your Story, Morning Glory?*, I was hooked,



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too. We had worked together before, and we decided that this was another book project we’d like to do together.

Which sources were the most helpful to you as you conducted your research on Mary Lou Williams? Any hidden or surprising gems?

AI: Linda Dahl’s biography, *What’s the Story, Morning Glory?* and Tammie Kernoodle’s biography, *Soul on Soul*, were enormously helpful in writing *Little Piano Girl*. We both interviewed Peter O’Brien, Mary Lou Williams’ agent. Maryann did some research at the Mary Lou Williams Foundation at Rutgers University, and Ann studied liner notes and interviews in old *Melody Maker* and *DownBeat* magazines. Ann spoke to jazz musicians in Kansas City who knew and had played with Mary Lou. All of this was very satisfying.

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At what point in the writing process did you come up with the wonderful unifying element of Mary's SHOES (or lack of them)? How did that happen?

MM: Having the right shoes is so important to kids, and I was touched when I read that Mary was so poor that she had to wear her mother's too-big shoes to school. Later, looking at archival photos, I noticed what gorgeous shoes Mary wore in performances in later life. I deduced that she was making up to herself for her childhood deprivation by giving herself beautiful things in later life. And I liked that she never seemed self-pitying but was definitely self-nurturing.

If you were able to meet Mary Lou Williams today, what would you be most likely to ask her and why?

AI: What I'd like best to ask her is why she was so determined to mentor others, to provide for their physical needs at great cost to herself financially, why she wrote tirelessly for others without fair compensation. She was selfless and generous with her time, talent, and treasure.

What was your joint writing process like? Do the two of you plan to continue to write together? Do you have any new upcoming joint projects?

MM: Ann and I just click. We always have. She reads my solo manuscripts and tells me what she thinks, and I often do the same for her. We generally agree on matters of taste, and when we don't, we have been known to compromise. That's not to say there weren't rough spots and misunderstandings in the process of creating *The*

Little Piano Girl, but hey, we're sisters! We talk to each other and work things out. We have one or two more projects in the wings and we're hopeful about finding the right publishers for each of them.

How can readers learn more about each of you?

AI: The best way is to go to our websites: www.maryannmacdonald.com and www.anningallswrites.com. We are always pleased to receive notes from readers of all ages.

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Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of fourteen picture books, most recently Lighthouse Christmas (Dial, 2011) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.

