



Meet Author Maggie Lyons



Maggie Lyons was born in Wales and brought up in England before hopping across the pond to explore the land of gold-paved streets and winding up in Virginia. Trained as a classical pianist, she spent several years in performing arts management, which is all about herding cats, or rather,

fundraising, marketing, public relations—and writing, writing, writing. Her love of words eventually led her to editing for an academic publishing company, and she continued to edit, as a freelancer, after so-called retirement. A few years ago, she discovered the magic of writing for children.

Q: What are some jobs you have had in your life? Have they influenced/inspired your writing?

For many years, I gave private piano lessons to children of all ages, which probably influenced my writing for children in an indirect way. Writing program notes for concerts of the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington, DC and other orchestras in the USA and UK provided the basis for a career of writing in other business fields—yes, the performing arts is a business. All that nonfiction writing helped my efforts to become a better writer of both nonfiction and fiction, though I am far from fluent in the art. That is still an aspiration. My middle-grade adventure story *Vin and the Dorky Duet* is directly inspired by my love of music, which found an outlet in my work in performing arts.

Q: Can you share some writing experiences with us?

One experience rockets to mind even though it happened decades ago, when Paul Hume was music critic at *The Washington Post*. For several years, I was the program annotator for the National Symphony Orchestra, which has its home in Washington, DC. Program annotators contribute notes on the music that can be found in concert program booklets. It is that stuff most people in the audience do not read because they are too busy trying to find their names in the list

of donors. Mr. Hume decided my notes were too frivolous and said so in the newspaper three weeks in a row. Since I prefer to avoid aspersions cast against me in newspapers, or wherever, I began including technical musical analyses in my notes, even though I suspected many, perhaps most, of the few who read the program notes would bypass even a whiff of technical analysis. That dried up the flow of invective from the *Post*, but more people fell asleep during the concerts.

Q: Tell us briefly about your book and what you feel is the most important topic/sub-message you share.

The story is about the disasters that pile up when a seventh-grader's brilliant plan to meet his sister's challenge takes more than one wrong turn. Life tosses challenges at all of us. It would be incredibly boring if it did not. What matters is what we learn from them.

Q: Please describe to us your relationship between you and your editor. What makes an author/editor relationship a success?

My relationship with my editors can be slightly tense at times because I am a professional editor and therefore quite opinionated about editorial matters. When I manage to get off my high horse about editorial style, I find my editors have some amazingly wise advice about writing style. The two things are not necessarily related. While my nonfiction writing experience helped improve the fluency of my fiction writing, it did not do much to hone the stylistic techniques that distinguish the highest levels of that particular art.

Q: What inspired you to write?

I have always loved words. My parents read stories to me when I was small and I became an avid reader. Language has always been a great love of mine, including learning how to read, write, and speak foreign languages, and read, interpret, and play music.

Q: Do you consider yourself a born writer?

Not really. I struggle with it because I am fatally attracted to challenges and because, especially in my dotage, writing offers a wonderful exercise for the “little grey cells,” as Monsieur Poirot would say.

Q: Who is your favorite author and what is your favorite genre to read?

That is a supremely impossible question to answer. A recent addition to my “adult” favorites is Jane Gardam whose *Old Filth* is a treasure of beautifully crafted language and storyline. A recent addition to my “children’s” favorites is Jerry Spinelli whose *Maniac Magee* is another example of powerful writing. Though, with this book, I suspect adults appreciate Spinelli’s powerful prose far more than the young readers it is written for. I do not have a favorite genre. Any book that will not allow me to do anything except read it is a favorite.

Q: When they write your obituary, what do you hope they will say about your books and writing? What do you hope they will say about you?

She made some children laugh and turn a page or two. Literacy is critical to well-being. Children who become avid readers, and therefore proficient readers, can look forward to adult lives of a much better quality than children with minimal literacy skills. If I can make a nano contribution to encouraging children to read, I had be proud have that in my epitaph.

Q: Where you have lived and what you have experienced can influence your writing in many ways. Are there any specific locations or experiences that have popped up in your books?

I was born in Wales. My next book, *Dewi and the Seeds of Doom*, is about a Welsh dragon. My first book about Dewi, published in *knowonder!* magazine—yes, the entire chapter book—a few years ago, briefly alluded to Welsh history and legend. I am glad to say that I have not experienced any of the mishaps that Vin runs into in *Vin and the Dorky Duet*, though I have had my share of stage fright before concert performances. And I only play the piano. Vin plays the trumpet, one of the most fearsome of musical instruments. So what he feels in his tummy are not butterflies but, as he puts it, pterodactyls.

Q: Is there any particular book that, when you read it, you thought, “I wish I had written that!”?

Absolutely. Too many. The list includes Jerry

Spinelli’s *Maniac Magee*, “Dog Days” in Jeff Kinney’s *Wimpy Kid* series, any of Cressida Cowell’s *Heroic Misadventures of Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III*, Gary Paulsen’s *A Christmas Sonata*, Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*, Shel Silverstein’s *The Giving Tree*, Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*, Kate DiCamillo’s *Because of Winn-Dixie*, Suzanne Collins *Hunger Games*...how much more space do I have? And those are only the children’s books. On the adult side, among the ones I’ve read recently are Jane Gardam’s *Old Filth* and Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and I have fond memories of Anne Morrow Lindbergh’s *Gift from the Sea*—which reminds me I must reread that inspiring little treasure.

Q: Have you had any training to become a writer?

In terms of formal training, one summer, centuries ago, I attended a short creative writing course at Georgetown University. Informally, all those years of writing business-related nonfiction certainly helped, as have countless pieces of advice from members of my critique group and articles on writing, and reading the works of master writers.

Q: Does your family and friends inspire any of your books, characters, or plots?

My son was an inspiration for *Vin and the Dorky Duet* and to some extent for *Dewi and the Seeds of Doom*. My fiancé is a great inspiration when it comes to humor. And then there is my great-uncle Bertie, former canyon leaper and master raconteur—just kidding.

Q: Tell us about your writing space.

I live in a cottage on a creek on Virginia’s east coast. My writing space overlooks the creek, which opens onto a beautiful river. It is one of countless waterways in a quiet farming and fishing community. When I look out of my window, I often see the creek’s resident heron cruising the shoreline for an unwary fish, or an osprey swooping down to snag another dozy victim. Yes, this peaceful neighborhood is quite violent at times. You cannot let your guard down. But I surround myself with various reference books on writing and editing for protection, along with a large box of tissues I grab when my writing

overwhelms me.

Q: Is there anything you would go back and do differently now that you have been published, in regards to your writing career?

I wish I had started writing for children decades ago, when my son was young enough to draw me directly into his world and keep me up-to-date on kidspeak and kidthink. I now have to consult my friends' grandchildren to keep current on the children's world, which is my approach to continuing education.

Q: Do you do first drafts on a computer or by hand?

I am now highly keyboard-oriented and find scribbling with a pen or pencil too slow. I do sometimes jot down ideas on a writing pad, which helps me remember how to write by hand.

Q: What is your creative process like? What happens before sitting down to write?

I have to have a framework, a storyline, before I write anything. That may take me days or weeks to figure out. I am not a writer who can just sit down and let the ideas flow, not unless I have poured a glass of wine, but then I may wish to pour out the ideas and keep the wine.

Q: Do you do a lot of research for your books?

I love research so much I often allow it to delay the task of writing. I thoroughly enjoyed researching ancient Japanese battle weapons, whales, ragtime music, vintage automobiles, and other fascinating topics for *Vin and the Dorky Duet*.

Q: What voice do you find most to your liking: first person or third person?

Vin and the Dorky Duet is written in the first person because I wanted to try bringing the middle-grade reader closer to the seventh-grader whose story this is. *Dewi and the Seeds of Doom* is written in the third person, which I think may be better suited to younger readers. I have no favorite voice. I am still experimenting.

Q: Do you participate in competitions? Have you received any awards?

Not yet, but I will explore that territory more in the coming months. I am in the research stage right

now. I recently read a very good article by Victoria Strauss on how to distinguish between legitimate and fake writing contests and how to assess a legitimate one.

Q: What advice would you give to a new writer?

Write, read, read, and write—everything you can, not just on the art of writing and promoting your work. Study the work of great writers. Join a critique group and online writers' groups. You cannot have too much input from others.

Q: Do you have any book signings, tours or special events planned to promote your book that readers might be interested in attending? If so, when and where?

Look at my WOI schedule found at <http://tinyurl.com/9t24kgy>

Use this space to tell us more about who you are. Anything you want your readers to know. Include information on where to find your books, any blogs you may have, or how a reader can learn more about you and writing.

My books' website is:

<http://www.maggielyons.yolasite.com>

My Amazon author page is:

<http://www.amazon.com/authormaggielyonschildrensbooks>

You can read reviews of *Vin and the Dorky Duet* and buy the book on Amazon at:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B008AK7ALE>

My Facebook author page is [http://](http://www.facebook.com/MaggieLyonsChildrensBooks)

www.facebook.com/MaggieLyonsChildrensBooks.

As of August 1, the paperback of *Vin and the Dorky Duet* is available at <http://halopublishing.com/bookstore/Maggie-Lyons> and will soon be available at Amazon.

I will announce the release dates of the e-book and paperback versions of *Dewi and the Seeds of Doom* on my Facebook page and website, and you can look for them at MuseItUp Publishing and Halo Publishing International as well.

Maggie Lyons' Book:



Magnetic compost heaps, man-eating bubble baths and other disasters erupt when an inventive seventh-grader meets a challenge to win a David Beckham autographed soccer jersey if he can befriend an unsociable nerd and introduce his sister to the nerd's hunky brother.

The story is about the disasters that pile up when a seventh-grader's brilliant plan to meet his sister's challenge takes more than one wrong turn. Life tosses challenges at all of us. It would be incredibly boring if it didn't. What matters is what we learn from them.

Title: Vin and the Dorky Duet
Publisher: Halo Publishing Int. & MuseItUp Publishing
(Canadian e-book publisher)

ISBN: 978-1-61244-091-0 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-77127-073-1 (eBook)

Genre of Book: Children's Chapter Book Adventure

About the Book:

A twelve-year-old boy named Vin, goes on a mission—reluctantly. He doesn't share the optimism of the knights of old who embarked on impossible missions without a doubt they'd succeed. When magnetic compost heaps, man-eating bubble baths and other disasters erupt, Vin comes close to packing in the whole ridiculous business. He calls it Operation BS, his code name for a mission to introduce his sister to a boy she has a crush on. He doesn't want to play match-maker, but Meg's promise to reward him with a David Beckham autographed soccer jersey is a decisive incentive.

Get a sneak peek of the book at http://youtu.be/Qtgtp_rnAZ4
Available wherever books are sold and online.