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Inside *THE MISADVENTURES OF THE MAGICIAN'S DOG*

A Conversation with Debut Novelist

Frances Sackett

Q: What was the inspiration behind *THE MISADVENTURES OF THE MAGICIAN'S DOG*?

A: This book was originally inspired by my friend's five-year-old daughter, who adopted the world's scruffiest dog shortly after being diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. The dog adored her and in many ways made her life bearable despite her disease, so I started telling her stories about how the dog used to belong to a magician and knew how to talk and do magic. When the US went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, I became a little obsessed with the kids whose parents were deployed for long periods of time. I eventually decided I wanted to write a novel about the son of a deployed soldier who adopted a magician's dog.

Q: What makes this book special to you? What important message do you feel it brings to young readers?

A: I wanted to write a book that would help my son and his friends understand what it's like for kids whose parents are deployed. I also wanted to write a book that explored the relationship kids have to their often imperfect parents. Peter's father is in some ways failing him by not being there—yet that doesn't change the fact that he loves his son. Peter is angry at his father because of his absence—yet that doesn't change the fact that he loves his dad. I wanted this book to be funny, exciting, and magical; and yet I also wanted the emotions at its core to be as true as possible.

Q: What was your favorite book growing up?

A: That's quite possibly the hardest question you could ask me. I was obsessed with books as a child and read constantly. I probably reread Julie Andrew's *Mandy* at least twenty times; ditto for *The Secret Garden* and *The Little Princess*. I loved *The Phantom Tollbooth* and *The Neverending Story*. I also loved everything by Louisa May Alcott, and by fourth grade I had reread *Jane Eyre* several times because I thought it was so wonderful.



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Q: What is your favorite memory from childhood?

A: Dancing by myself in the middle of my school's playground one night when I was waiting to be picked up. It was one of those warm desert evenings, and there was something so magical about the color of the sky and the feel of the air. That one moment has stuck with me all my life.

Q: Did/do you have any pets?

A: I've always had pets: right now, I have two cats, a crested gecko, and a fish. I've wanted a dog as long as I can remember, which is probably why I inevitably write about them!

Q: What inspired you to write and when did you know you would become an author?

A: I read my first novel—*The Little House on the Prairie*—in second grade. That was when I decided I wanted to be a writer. I couldn't believe that words could create a whole world.

Q: If there is one thing you could tell your readers about life, what would you say?

A: It's a little cliché, but I would tell them to approach life with open, fearless hearts. And I would tell them to believe in themselves, no matter what anyone else says or does.

Q: Name three of your favorite authors of all time.

A: Roald Dahl, Alice Munro, and James Agee. Those were the first three who came to mind!

Q: What book from your childhood changed your life? Adulthood?

A: I really believe that every book I've ever read has changed my life. When I was young, books taught me how to be human, in the deepest sense of the word. They still help me to see the world from other points of view. *The Island of the Blue Dolphins* is a book that truly moved me when I was a child, and *Jacob's Room* by Virginia Woolf is probably the book that most influenced me as an adult.

Q: Who is your favorite children's book character and why?

A: I love Winnie the Pooh. He has a great approach to life.

Q: If you could live in any book, which would it be?

A: I wouldn't want to live in most of my favorite books—I like them because exciting things happen, but I don't mind a slightly calmer real life.

Q: If you could have a magical talent (e.g., becoming invisible or the ability to fly), what would it be?

A: I've always wanted to fly. That's why Peter flies in my novel!

Q: Who was your hero growing up? Who is it now?

A: My hero now is my grandmother, who recently passed away. One of my aunts was born with Down Syndrome fifty years ago. My grandmother became an advocate for my aunt and ended up the national president of the Association of Retarded Citizens. She really fought for my aunt, and I think there's nothing more admirable than fighting for the people whom you love—particularly when doing so makes the world a better place for everyone.

