



## Inside *THE BOOK BOAT'S IN:* A Conversation with Cynthia Cotten

**Q:** *Where were you born? Where did you grow up?*

**A:** Lockport, New York (for both)

**Q:** *What are your interests and favorite activities?*

**A:** I love books, crossword puzzles, movies, and theater (especially musical theater). I've always loved history – I enjoy learning about the local history of wherever I'm living and especially the history of Western New York, where I'm from. Paranormal investigation fascinates me, and I've taken part in some investigations. Hobbies include photography, art quilting, and traditional Irish music. (I play tin whistle and bodhran.)

**Q:** *What was the inspiration behind the book?*

**A:** I was inspired by an article about a floating library/bookstore that traveled the Erie Canal between the mid-1830s and the mid 1850s, written by Douglas Farley, Director of the Erie Canal Discovery Center – Lockport, NY, and published in the *Lockport Union-Sun and Journal*.

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

**A:** I've always loved books, and I can remember saving my money to buy a book I really, really wanted when I was twelve. It cost \$4.98, and I still have that book. I don't know if there's an important message, but I hope the story conveys the excitement you feel when you find a book that you love.

**Q:** *What was your favorite book growing up?*

**A:** I could give you a list of hundreds. I had a special love for the Oz books. I had a book of Greek and Roman myths that had been my mother's, which I almost wore out. (I still have that one – it has no cover, and is held together by a rubber band.) Biographies. Horse books. Historical fiction. But to pick one particular title – I can't do it!

**Q:** *What is your favorite memory from childhood?*

**A:** There are actually three that come altogether. 1) Sunday afternoons spent at my grandmother's summer cottage on Lake Ontario, about half an hour from home; 2) staying for supper at my other grandmother's house and playing cards or working crossword puzzles with her; 3) finally being old enough to ride my bike to the library, where I would take out as many books as would fit in the basket.

**Q:** *Did you have any pets as a child?*

**A:** I've almost always had dogs. Like my books, each has been special to me in its own way. My favorite dog is always the one I have at the moment.

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

**A:** When my daughter was two, I was looking for a retelling of the Christmas story in a picture book and couldn't find anything I liked. In frustration, I uttered the fateful words, "I could do that!" (and scared myself silly!). I ended up taking a correspondence course, which gave me enough of a taste that I knew I wanted more. Then a published children's author started a children's writers' workshop in our local library. I was one of the first members – that was the real start of my career.

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

**A:** Each life is a story – make yours a good one, one you're proud to claim. And remember that if you don't like the way it's going, you can always revise.

### **Did You Know?**

**Q:** *Name three of your favorite authors/children's book authors of all time.*

**A:** Bruce Coville, Susan Cooper, and L. Frank Baum.

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

**A:** From childhood – probably *National Velvet*. I saw how the main character knew what she wanted and believed in her dream. From adulthood – Madeleine L'Engle's *Circle of Quiet*, about the years before she was published.

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

**A:** I've always loved Jeremy Thatcher, from Bruce Coville's *Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher*. To me, Jeremy is as real as any kid I've ever met – one I would have liked to have been friends with when I was 11 or 12.

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

**A:** I can't think of any one book. Maybe *Little Women*, or *Anne of Green Gables*, because I always thought I'd like to be friends with Jo March and Anne Shirley.

**Q:** *If you could have a magical talent what would it be?*

**A:** I'd love to be able to snap my fingers and bring about world peace – or wave a wand and instantly housebreak a puppy.

**Q:** *What is your favorite food?*

**A:** Ice cream! And it's been my favorite since childhood.

**Q:** *What food did you hate growing up but came to love in adulthood?*

**A:** Brussels sprouts.

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

**A:** I have thought and thought, and truly cannot remember any one particular person from my childhood I'd call "hero." There were many people I admired – certain teachers, people whose biographies I read... Today, I think that there are two people I might call "hero": Katharine Hepburn and Queen Elizabeth II.

## **THE BOOK BOAT'S IN**

**by Cynthia Cotten, illustrated by Frané Lessac**

This nostalgic story is based on the 1800s book boat, a floating library and bookstore that traveled along the Erie Canal.  
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