

Author Spotlight

With

Jacqueline Farmer



Did you always want to be a writer?

I never really thought about a career as an author. However, I can still recall the pride I felt when my sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Chapin, complimented me for using the word “versatility” in an essay. Since I still remember this incident, it may have been a defining moment that convinced me that I “had a way with words.”

Still, it wasn’t until I was presented with the opportunity to write *Bananas* that I began to write seriously. Initially *Bananas* was a fictional tale with which I had great fun! The final version, of course, was nonfiction, and it led to *Pumpkins, Apples, and O Christmas Tree*. I really enjoy the process of creating these books!

What inspired you to write a book about the history of the Christmas tree?

The choice was not difficult. I have always enjoyed gardening, and I have always loved Christmas. Writing about Christmas trees presented me with the opportunity to learn more about how these beautiful plants are grown, and to explore a special holiday tradition as well!

What is your process for writing informational books such as *Bananas, Pumpkins, Apples, and O Christmas Tree*?

Once a topic is selected, I make a list of the areas that need to be fleshed out. For a nonfiction book, these might include history, trivia, growing information, and traditions. Some topics, such as nutrition, may be unique to the particular book being researched. The next step, of course, is to find children’s books that have already been written on these topics.

What was the most interesting thing you learned during your research for *O Christmas Tree*?

It was fun to learn that for several years the trunk of the famous Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree has been donated to the U.S. Equestrian Center. There it is used to train many talented horses to jump!



Illustrations © 2010 by Joanne Friar

You grew up riding horses, and have mentioned that as a child you often dreamed of being a riding instructor or veterinarian. Do you have any plans to write a children's book about horses or equitation?

Up to now my books have dealt with agricultural topics. Still, the horse as a book subject would be a fascinating but huge undertaking, and I would certainly enjoy the challenge. The hard part of such a project would be to narrow the topic to fit into a 32-page format! A book on "equitation" would be challenging simply because so much has changed since I rode in competitions. I would certainly learn a lot if I wrote on this subject.

What is your favorite holiday and holiday tradition?

This one's easy! I have many wonderful memories surrounding the Christmas holiday. It is a time of year that brings me great joy! Right after Thanksgiving I start making my plans. Cooking the fudge, the chocolate, peanut-butter chestnuts, and of course the hundreds (thousands?) of cookies, consumes most of my time leading up to Christmas day.

In *Apples and Pumpkins* you offer recipes for apple and pumpkin pies—great fall-time favorites. What's your favorite winter holiday recipe?

This is a really, really, hard question to answer! I have several recipes that have stood the test of time. Two treats are mega favorites, and both rank at the top of the sweetness scale: Grandmother's Fudge and Frosted Sugar Cookies. I have chosen a favorite based on the amount of trouble I would be in if I eliminated it from my repertoire. The winning recipe, which is about eighty years old, follows.

Grandmother's Old Fashioned Fudge

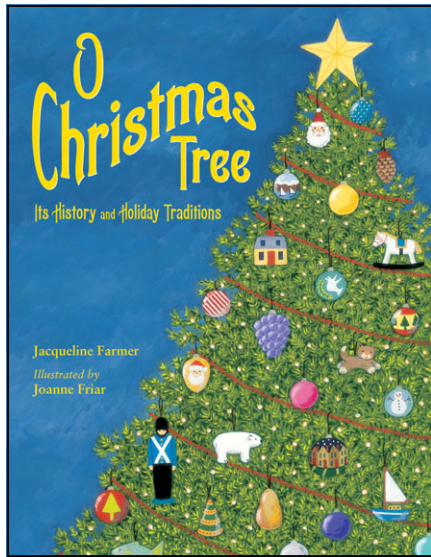
5 cups granulated sugar
5 squares unsweetened baking chocolate
2 cups half & half or milk
¼ cup light Karo Syrup
Dash salt
1 tsp vanilla
5 T butter
¾ small jar marshmallow fluff



Combine the sugar, chocolate, milk, Karo and salt in a large, heavy-bottomed pot. (Avoid a non-stick pot if possible.) Over medium-high heat, bring the mixture to a boil. Stir constantly until the chocolate is completely melted. (I use a metal spatula to stir. It scrapes the chocolate from the bottom of the pan so that it doesn't burn.)

Attach a candy thermometer to the side of the pot and continue to cook, stirring occasionally for about ten minutes, until the temperature reaches 236 degrees. The fudge will be glossy and start to thicken.

Remove pan from the heat and add butter, marshmallow and vanilla. Allow the mixture to cool slightly, without stirring.



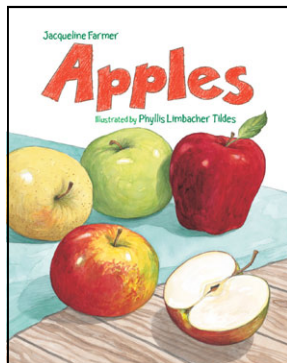
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O Christmas Tree

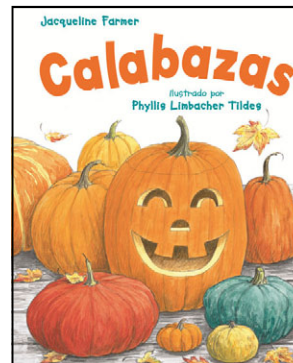
Its History and Holiday Traditions

Even before there was a Christmas, people decorated their homes with evergreens in celebration of the winter solstice. Around 1300 BCE, Egyptians used palm branches to celebrate longer days and the hope of a good crop. In the eighth century the fir tree became a Christian symbol for the Holy Trinity, but it wasn't until the eleventh century that people began to decorate trees in Paradise plays—the story of Adam and Eve. In *O Christmas Tree*, readers learn how evergreens became a common holiday tradition, what kinds of decorations have been used over the years, how many different kinds of trees there are, and more.

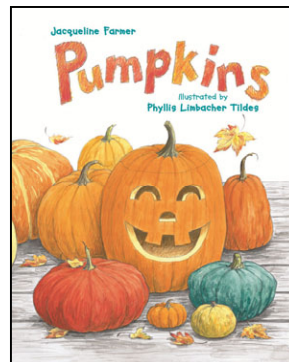
Other Books by Jacqueline Farmer



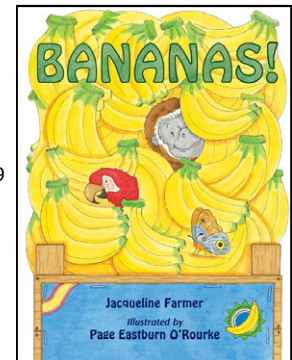
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