



Author Spotlight with

Julia Moberg

Your previous book, *Skies Over Sweetwater*, is a young adult novel. What made you want to write a children’s book about the presidents’ pets?

I don’t necessarily think that I made the switch for any particular reason. To me, both books are similar in the fact that they explore little known pieces of American history. In *Skies Over Sweetwater*, I wrote about the Women Air Force Service Pilots of WWII, a group of women not many people learn about in history class. The same can be said about *Presidential Pets*. Not a lot of people know that animals such as alligators, bear cubs, and goats once lived at the White House. Little known pieces of history such as these have always fascinated me. When I started doing research on all the different presidents’ pets, it just made sense to make it a children’s book. The subject matter lends itself better to a younger audience. Children love animals.

When you were growing up in Michigan and Texas, which pet would you have wanted around the house? Do you have any animals now?

My family adopted a Siamese cat when I was thirteen years old. We named him Caruso—after Enrico Caruso, the famous Italian opera singer—because he had a really loud and dramatic meow. We also had hamsters, fish, a rabbit, and lizards around the house as well. In Texas we had a pond on our property, and several families of ducks and geese lived there. I remember my brothers and I would go down by the water and feed them breadcrumbs all the time.

I think the one pet I would have wanted to own growing up would be a Macaw parrot. I think they are absolutely gorgeous, and I’m fascinated by how smart parrots are in general. An African Grey, for instance, can associate meaning with words and form full sentences. I think that’s amazing.

Right now I don’t have any animals (they’re not allowed in my apartment building), but my husband and I really want to get a Pomeranian puppy someday.

In your research, was there any particular pet that pulled some funny stunts at the White House that stood out to you?

There were several mischievous animals over the years, but my favorite has got to be Benjamin Harrison’s goat Whiskers. Whiskers would often pull Harrison’s grandchildren in a small little cart around the White House grounds. One day the White House gate was accidentally left open and Whiskers took off down Pennsylvania Avenue. President Harrison ran after them, waving his cane in the air and shouting at Whiskers to stop. Eventually he caught up with them and his grandchildren were safely rescued. The next day though, several newspapers featured the story about our “runaway President.”

Throughout *Presidential Pets* you write poems about interesting moments in the pets' and presidents' lives. Do you prefer writing poetry, fiction, or non-fiction?

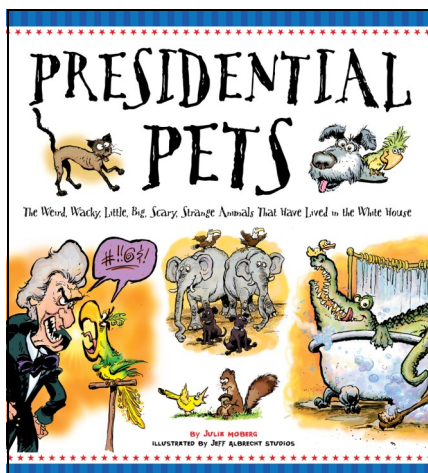
The poems in *Presidential Pets* actually started out much longer than they are in the book. When I was rewriting, I worked hard to make sure that the rhymes and the humor and each word fit together how it should. I had a great editor who pushed me to make some tough choices. That said, I don't really prefer writing in one medium over the other. For me it's about what fits best with the subject matter. I will say, though, that one of my favorite things about writing *Presidential Pets* was seeing the stories come to life through Jeff Albrecht's wonderful illustrations. His artwork added a whole new layer of humor to the book and that's something I've never experienced as a fiction writer.

What made you want to become a writer? Is there any particular moment while studying for your BFA or MFA at New York University that has had a profound impact on your writing style?

I've been writing and creating stories my whole life. I remember writing short stories about a giraffe named George when I was in the first grade, often accompanied by my own illustrations. And whenever I played with my dolls, I would make up stories about their lives and interactions with one another. I always knew I wanted to be a writer.

When I was at New York University I studied playwriting and screenwriting. Both of these areas gave me a great foundation in terms of learning all about story, character, tone, and how to write dialogue. But I think the most important lesson I learned was how to take and process criticism. In the classroom setting, I was constantly receiving and giving feedback. I quickly learned that as a writer you're never going to get it right on the first try, and that should never be your main goal. You have to be willing to listen to other people's opinions, learn how to weed through all the comments, and then go forward and connect (or disconnect) the dots.

By Julia Moberg



It's been said that if you want a friend at the White House, get a dog. Or, we might add, perhaps a cat, bird, or maybe an alligator! Throughout America's history, the presidential menagerie has included an array of creatures both big and small, ordinary and absurd.

This inside look at the White House's animal residents features a rollicking, rhyming verse for each commander-in-chief's pets, accompanied by cool facts, presidential stats, and laugh-out-loud cartoon art.

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