



# Author Spotlight

# Lynn Plourde



## Did you enjoy reading as a child?

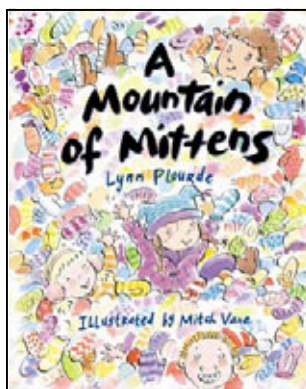
I was a definite bookworm. My nose was always in a book. My parents had to shoo me outside to get some fresh air and exercise—but I did sneak the books outside with me, of course! I learned to read with “Dick, Jane, and Spot” in school. I read the “The Bobbsey Twins”, “Nancy Drew”, and the “Hardy Boys”.

## Did you find the “Dick and Jane” series a fun first reading experience?

“Dick, Jane & Spot,” in hindsight, were not what I’d call fun reading. But READING was FUN, and powerful. I learned to read easily in Kindergarten and I think that’s a big part of the reason why school was always fun and easy for me. I realize that “Dick, Jane, & Spot” have made a re-appearance again—after all, for those of us who are baby boomers, we seem to love anything and everything that’s retro and takes us back to our childhoods. We remember our childhoods as a magical time and we want to share that magic with our kids and grandkids. There’s no harm in reading “Dick, Jane & Spot,” but I think there are so many more exciting early reader books available for kids today.

## In another Author Spotlight, author Jackie Farmer also said she loved reading “The Bobbsey Twins” and “Nancy Drew” mysteries. What do you think the great appeal of these books is?

It’s simple—they were the only ticket in town (which was true for “Dick, Jane & Spot” too). When I grew up, those were the books available. I loved reading and so I read what was available. In the 1950s & 60s when I grew up, there were few reading options. Kids today have a wealth of reading options and book choices—I’m soooooo jealous!



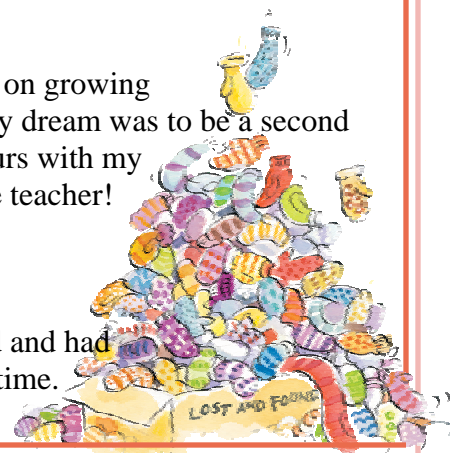
978-1-57091-585-7 HC \$15.95

## What did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be a teacher. In first grade, I planned on growing up to be a first grade teacher. In second grade, my dream was to be a second grade teacher. And so on. I played school for hours with my sister and brothers—as long as they let me be the teacher!

## How did you become an author?

I started thinking about writing for children after I got married and had three- and four-year-old stepsons to read to every night at bedtime.





When the boys fell asleep after a few books, I went into the living room and read the stacks and stacks of picture books that I checked out of the library. I was fascinated by them and began to dream that maybe I would write picture books. It only took me 13 years of rejections before I had my first picture book, *Pigs in the Mud in the Middle of the Rud* (Scholastic 1997).

Did your experiences as a mother and a teacher inspire *A Mountain of Mittens*?

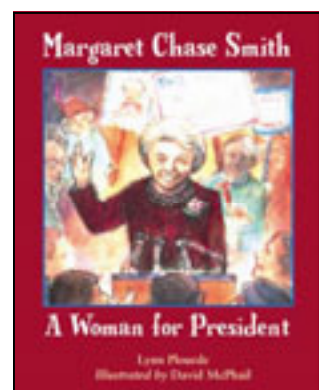
Yes! My own three kids kept coming home without mittens, coats, boots! And while working in schools, I saw first-hand the incredible growing lost-and-found piles that filled a whole stage floor or covered four long cafeteria tables by springtime. Schools spread things out to make it easier for kids to find their own missing belongings, but I wondered what they'd look like in one great big pile.

Some good laughs! It's meant to be a fun, playful, over-the-top story. Readers can even join in with the book's repetitive chorus by wearing mittens (if they can find them) and doing the gestures shown on the endpapers of the book. Teachers might use the book as a challenge and ask students to be "pattern detectives" and find as many patterns as possible in the book—patterns in the illustrations, patterns/repetition in the action of the story, and patterns/repetition in the words of the story. The more I write, the more I believe patterns are a powerful tool to use in writing children's books.

You are also a speech-language therapist. How did you become involved in this field and does it influence your writing?

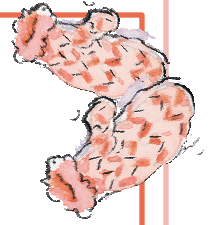
I always did want to be a teacher growing up, but the more I thought about it I wondered if it might be difficult to teach and meet the needs of a WHOLE class of kids. So I started questioning if people worked in schools with smaller groups of children. I heard that speech therapists worked with small groups. It was a relatively new field at that time and I liked the idea of trying something new, so I did! I went to the University of Maine to study speech therapy and from day one, I loved it!

My background as a speech-language therapist influences my writing several ways. While studying speech, we had to learn how all the sounds are made (plosives with the lips, nasals with vibration in the nose, and so on). When I write I love playing with sounds and words. I read early drafts aloud over and over again—wanting each word, sentence, and paragraph to sound pleasing to the ear. I tend to use lots of rhyming, alliteration, and assonance when I write. But speech therapy also taught me that words are not just how they sound, but also what they mean. My specialty as a speech-language therapist was language development which included helping kids to improve their vocabulary, to understand concepts such as *behind*, *before*, *left*, to use correct grammar, to talk in complex sentences, and so much more. The language development part of my job made me aware that all words are not equal—*small*, *teensy*, and *miniscule* do not mean exactly the same thing and as an author I search long and hard for the perfect words that say exactly what I mean to say. My books tend to be filled with language development opportunities too; for example, I wrote a moose book that has hidden moose in the illustrations and I challenge kids to describe (no pointing allowed) where they see the hidden moose, plus many of my books have a repetitive chorus/chant in the book which encourages children to join in on those parts and as a result improve their auditory memory skills. So you see that I may not still actively work as a



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speech-language therapist anymore, but the speech-language therapist part of me is always active, alive and well as I write my kids books.



### How did you discover Margaret Chase Smith?

Margaret Chase Smith was an icon in my hometown of Skowhegan, Maine. I am proud to live in the same town as her. She was in Congress when women weren't supposed to be in Congress. She ran for president in 1964 when women weren't supposed to run for president. She stood up against McCarthyism when men didn't dare to do so. She was famous in Maine, in the United States, and even around the world—and she came from my very own small town!

### How important was it for you to get her story out?

I wanted to write a kid's biography of Margaret Chase Smith for more than twenty years, but the time never seemed right and I couldn't find the right way to tell her story. In hindsight, I'm glad I didn't do this book until now—I don't think I had the writing skills to do her story justice before now, plus the time has never been better for people to pay attention to Margaret Chase Smith's story with Hillary Clinton running for president. There could never be the first woman president, or the first black president, or the first Hispanic president if it were not for those who tried and failed before them and left the door open a little wider with each attempt.

As I did more and more research on Margaret Chase Smith, I grew more and more passionate about sharing her story. I learned so much about her that I didn't know and didn't expect. Her family was so poor they couldn't afford their own house. She flunked history in high school. She was considered an outcast by her own Republican party. She was polite and proper, but also feisty and fiery. She lived close to a hundred years and I believe her influence will be felt for another hundred years as long as her story continues to be shared.

### What's the best part about being an author? What's the worst part?

My two favorite parts of being an author are writing new stories plus I love sharing my books with kids and I get to watch them smile, cry, or laugh in all the right places.

The worst part for me is being organized. Being an author requires juggling lots of parts of my job: writing new stories, revising old ones, editing, researching, doing author visits to schools and libraries, doing book signings, publicity, dealing with e-mails and phone calls. It feels so scattered sometimes and the piles on my desk just keep growing and growing. But the variety also keeps my job interesting, never boring!

### What is the funniest thing a student has ever said to you?

The funniest thing a student said was "Will you cut off a piece of your hair and give it to me for a souvenir?" I didn't—she had to settle for an autograph instead!

