

Author's Corner

Meet Meredith Sue Willis

By Hikaru Hayakawa ■ 4th Grade Staff Writer
and Spencer Melee ■ 4th Grade

Meredith Sue Willis is an author of books for children and adults. She is also a teacher. Her children's books are *The Secret Super Powers of Marco*, *Marco's Monster*, and *Billie of Fish House Lane*. Her latest book for adults is *Out of the Mountains*. You can find *The Secret Super Powers of Marco* and *Marco's Monster* at Tuscan School Library.



Meredith Sue Willis was born in 1946, in Clarksburg, West Virginia, surrounded by farms and mountains. She now lives in South Orange, N.J., where she and her husband, Andrew Weinberger, a rheumatologist, raised their son, Joel Howard Weinberger, who is a computer scientist. Her son gave her the title for her first children's book, *The Secret Super Powers of Marco*. Her most favorite memory of growing up in West Virginia is that "kids and dogs ran free." She recalls having "a lot of freedom, and not having to make play dates, dogs didn't have to be tied, and there would be about twenty kids in [her] backyard playing all kinds of tag games, making circuses, biking, and just having fun after school."

South Orange has been a good place for her family. She enjoys the mix of people in the South Orange/Maplewood community and her vegetable garden. But most of all, she enjoys being close to New York, where she also lived.

Here are some questions and answers from our interview:

Q: How long have you been a writer and teacher?

A: It depends on how you count it, but I count it actually from when I was in first grade. I used to make

comic books, and that was my favorite thing to do!

That was the writer part. I started teaching right after college. I never had a classroom of my own with children, but I teach my own college classes, and I visit a lot of schools. I teach at New York University and for the New Jersey Writer's Project. They send different writers to visit schools in different towns of New Jersey.

Q: What inspired you to become a writer and teacher?

A: When I was young, I didn't know grown-ups did writing as a job. It was a kind of play for me. Both of my parents were teachers. My father was a high school teacher, and my mother was a substitute teacher, and I had three aunts who were teachers, and an uncle who was a teacher—a whole family who were teachers, so I knew all about that. It was our family business.

Q: What do you think is the best part of writing?

A: There are two best parts. One best part is when you get to show off your books and people ask you questions, as you're doing now. The other best part is when I'm actually writing. I feel like I'm somewhere else. It's like I go on a trip inside myself. They're both wonderful feelings. One is social and one is very private.

Q: What do you think is the hardest part of writing?

A: Tough question. I was with a bunch of adults yesterday teaching a class, and they all wanted to write novels, and they were all saying how hard it was. One of the hardest things is that you have to sit for a long time. You literally have to have your body on a chair or something. I always wished I were a painter because you get to stand up and move your arms around. So one of the hardest things is staying at the computer. I have to take lots of breaks.

Q: When did you write your first book?

A: I wrote my first book when I was in second grade.



I made little folder books and illustrations. But my first published book was when I was 33 years old.

Q: How did you get your ideas for your children's books?

A: All books are a combination of things—things that happened to me, things that I see, things that happened to people I know, from kids that I teach, so it's a mix. I get ideas from everywhere.

Q: What was your favorite book as a child?

A: Some of my favorite books were actually comic books. There was a whole series of *Uncle Scrooge*. He was Donald Duck's rich uncle. I liked the combination of pictures and words.

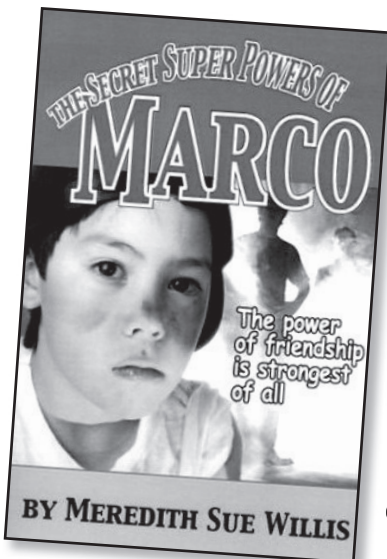
Q: What is your favorite memory of elementary school?

A: My best memory of school itself . . . OK, now should I be honest with you fourth graders or not? The truth is I didn't like school very much when I was in elementary school. I liked high school, and I loved college. But my elementary school made us sit all the time. We didn't have a story corner or a computer table or a corner with plants and animals. We sat in rows, and we had to be very, very still. It was just awful to have to hold still. When you're six years old, your body wants to move. I have a friend who is Japanese. His name is Takeshi Achiwa. He said in Japan out of every hour of school, for ten minutes, everybody runs outside and exercises and plays. I thought that sounded wonderful. I was a good student, and I would do my work pretty

quickly, so then I would draw. My favorite part of elementary school was my private drawing.

Q: What writing tips do you have for elementary school kids?

A: I have a webpage for kids, www.meredithsuewillis.com/kids.html. I have some writing exercises there. Thank you for interviewing me! I enjoyed it very much. ■



Science Questions

By Grace Finlayson
4th grade

1. Does all light produce heat?
2. Solid, liquid, gas and what—What is sometimes considered the fourth state of matter?
3. Is water vapor a gas? If not, why not?
4. Is gel a liquid or solid? Why?
5. How many hydrogen atoms connect to an oxygen atom to make water?

Answers: 1) Yes. 2) Plasma. 3) Yes. There is no significant difference between water vapor and gas. 4) Gel is a solid because it doesn't flow. Anything that doesn't flow is not a liquid. 5) Two hydrogen atoms.

By Olivia de Vanssay
5th Grade Staff Writer

