

Q&A with Alison McGhee

Author of *A Very Brave Witch*



Photo Credit: Jeffrey Farnam

"Who are you inspired by in the world of children's literature?"

This is a tough question, because I'm inspired by so many authors both past and present. Some of my favorites include Ezra Jack Keats, Maurice Sendak, the Hobans, Laura Ingalls Wilder, M.T. Anderson and Kevin Henkes.

"What were some of your favorite children's books growing up?"

I lived and breathed the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, and I loved "My Side of the Mountain," by Jean Craighead George and Swiss Family Robinson, by Johann Wyss. (I wanted to be a pioneer girl, and barring that, I wanted to live in a treehouse or in a hollow tree.) I also loved Mickey in the Night Kitchen by Maurice Sendak and all of Robert McCloskey's picture books.

How did you get inspired to write *A Very Brave Witch*?

My friend Harry Bliss's favorite holiday is Halloween. He wanted to write a Halloween book but preferred to have me do the words. Since I like to write and he likes to draw, we were a good pair. I liked the idea of writing from a witch's point of view, and the story grew from there.

While the story is fanciful, there are some real-life lessons here about friendship, cultural diversity, and curiosity. How have kids responded to this story?

Kids seem to love the book for the illustrations and the humor and the little witch's bravery, including her personal interpretation of the meaning of "Trick or Treat." Adults tend to be the ones who appreciate the cultural diversity aspect of the book.

What do you think of Harry Bliss' illustrations?

They're great. The colors he chose, the dark Halloween sky, and that long vertical double-page spread are all wonderful. And Harry's always funny - he makes kids and grownups laugh.

Were you involved in the development of the animated version of your story? How did this production (animation, narration, music) affect the story, in your opinion?

I was not involved in the development of the animated version, but I've certainly enjoyed watching it. A writer tends to be nervous about the translation of her words to the screen, but the movie version stays completely true to the story, so it was purely pleasurable.

Did you ever dress up as a witch for Halloween when you were a kid? What's your favorite Halloween experience?

I did dress up every year for Halloween, because I loved getting a big bag of candy. But I was a lazy child when it came to costumes, so I usually just stuffed a pillow under one of my dad's oversize t-shirts, attached a stuffed bandana to a stick, and trick or treated as a hobo. Lame, I know. But I still got the candy.

"What's your favorite Halloween candy?"

Miniature Butterfingers!

What are you working on now? Are there any more Alison McGhee stories that will be adapted for the small screen?

I'm working on several picture books right now, including *So Many Days* and *Snowman*, both of which come out next year. And I'm writing another children's novel in my Julia Gillian series. And I'm looking ahead to next year, when I want to get busy writing a historical novel for adults.