

Something About the Author: Facts and Pictures about Authors and Illustrators of Books for Young People, Volume 183

WEISS, Mitch 1951-

Personal

Born May 8, 1951, in New York, NY; son of Sidney (a businessman) and Janet (a psychiatric social worker) Weiss; married Martha Hamilton (a storyteller), June 18, 1983. *Education*: Cornell University, B.A., 1973. *Politics*: Democrat. *Hobbies and other interests*: Tennis, biking, running, crossword puzzles, hiking, gardening, travel, reading, golf, sports.

Addresses

Home—954 Coddington Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850.
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Career

Author and storyteller. Somadhara Bakery, Ithaca, NY, co-owner, 1973-75; Moosewood Restaurant, Ithaca, collective co-owner, 1976-84; professional storyteller, 1980—.

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HAMILTON, Martha 1953-

Personal

Born January 5, 1953, in Selmer, TN; daughter of Milford Hugh (a laborer) and Martha Madelyn (a homemaker) Hamilton; married Mitch Weiss (a storyteller), June 18, 1983. *Education*: Douglass College, Rutgers University, B.A., 1975; University of Michigan School of Library Science, M.L.S., 1976. *Politics*: Democrat. *Hobbies and other interests*: Gardening, running, hiking, reading, traveling, photography, quilting, various kinds of artwork.

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Home—954 Coddington Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850.
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Career

Storyteller and author. Elmira College, Elmira, NY, reference librarian, 1976-79; Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, reference librarian, 1979-84; professional storyteller, beginning 1980.

Member

National Storytelling Network, Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

Awards, Honors

Anne Izard Storytellers' Choice Award, 1992, for *Children Tell Stories*; Storytelling World Gold Award, 1997, for *Stories in My Pocket*; Parents' Choice Recommen-

dation, and National Parenting Publications Gold Award, both 1998, both for *Stories in My Pocket* (audio recording); Storytelling World Gold Award, and Parents' Choice Approved Award, both 2000, both for *How and Why Stories*; National Parenting Publications Gold Award, 2000, for *How and Why Stories* (audio recording); Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People; National Council for the Social Studies/Children's Book Council, 2001, for *Noodlehead Stories*.

Writings

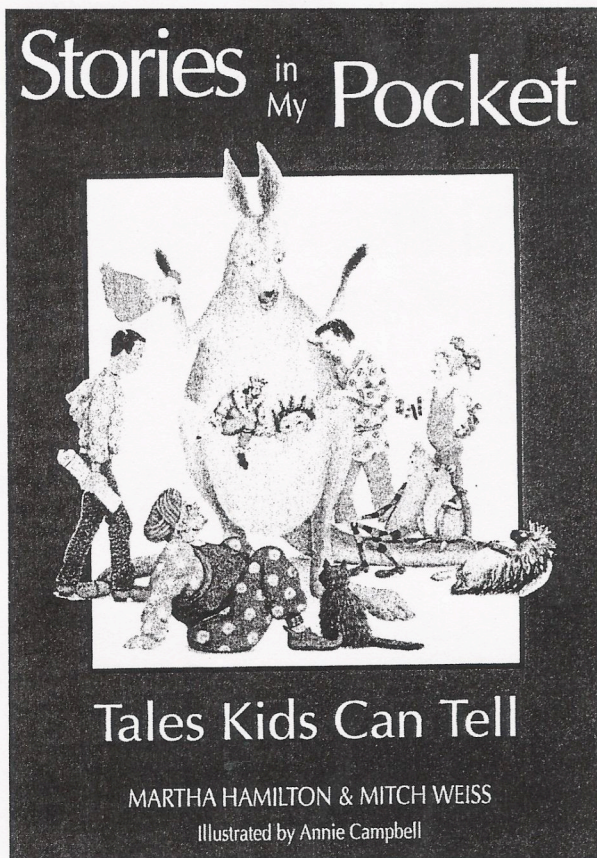
(With husband, Mitch Weiss) *Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom*, Richard C. Owen (Katonah, NY), 1990, 2nd edition, 2005.

FOR CHILDREN; RETELLER; WITH MITCH WEISS

- Tell Me a Story: Beauty and the Beast* (videocassette), Kartes Video Communications, 1986.
Stories in My Pocket: Tales Kids Can Tell, illustrated by Annie Campbell, Fulcrum (Golden, CO), 1996.
How and Why Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell, illustrated by Carol Lyon, August House (Little Rock, AR), 1999.
Noodlehead Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell, illustrated by Ariane Elsammak, August House (Little Rock, AR), 2000.
Through the Grapevine: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell, illustrated by Carol Lyon, August House (Little Rock, AR), 2001.
The Hidden Feast: A Folktale from the American South, illustrated by Don Tate, August House (Little Rock, AR), 2006.
Scared Witless: Thirteen Eerie Tales to Tell, illustrated by Kevin Pope, August House (Little Rock, AR), 2006.
A Tale of Two Frogs: Inspired by a Russian Folktale, illustrated by Tom Wrenn, August House (Atlanta, GA), 2006.
Priceless Gifts: A Folktale from Italy, illustrated by John Kanzler, August House (Atlanta, GA), 2007.
Rooster's Night Out (Cuban folktale), illustrated by Baird Hoffmire, August House (Atlanta, GA), 2007.
The Stolen Smell, illustrated by Tom Wrenn, August House (Atlanta, GA), 2007.
The Ghost Catcher: A Bengali Folktale, illustrated by Kristen Balouch, August House (Atlanta, GA), 2008.
Why Koala Has a Stumpy Tale (Australian folk tale), illustrated by Tom Wrenn, August House (Atlanta, GA), 2008.
The Well of Truth (Egyptian folktale) illustrated by Tom Wrenn, August House (Atlanta, GA), 2008.

Adaptations

Stories in My Pocket: Tales Kids Can Tell was adapted by Hamilton and Weiss as an audio recording on cassette and compact disc, Fulcrum, 1998; *How and Why*



Among the story collections created by Martha Hamilton and husband Mitch Weiss is *Stories in My Pocket*, featuring artwork by Annie Campbell. (Fulcrum, 1996. Illustration © 1996 by Annie Campbell. Reproduced by permission.)

Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell was adapted by Hamilton and Weiss as an audio recording on cassette and compact disc, August House, 2000.

Sidelights

Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss are a husband-and-wife storytelling team who are known collectively as Beauty and the Beast Storytellers. Beginning their storytelling career in 1980, the couple became published authors ten years later with their book *Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom*, which, according to *School Library Journal* contributor Lee Bock, was released in a "comprehensive" new edition in 2005. The book documents Hamilton and Weiss's passion: teaching the tale-telling art to children of all ages. During their long career, Hamilton and Weiss have produced a steady stream of books, audio recordings, and video recordings, all of which feature their entertaining retellings of traditional tales from around the world.

In *Stories in My Pocket: Tales Kids Can Tell* the coauthors arrange thirty tales in order of ease of telling, inserting into each page appropriate breaks to aid in learn-

ing and adding suggestions for gestures and actions. An introduction aimed at young storytellers also contains helpful advice on how to learn stories and develop characters. A guideline for adults, including information on helping student storytellers deal with stage fright, rounds out the offering. The audio version of *Stories in My Pocket* pairs student storytellers in action with Weiss and Hamilton demonstrating their own storytelling skills. Liner notes provide tips from the tellers, rounding out a work that "provides storytellers with a you-can-do-it-too encouragement," according to John Sigwald in *Booklist*. Nancy L. Chu, writing in *School Library Journal*, also remarked on the inspirational value of including child storytellers in the audio version of *Stories in My Pocket*, going on to praise Weiss and Hamilton for choosing a wide variety of stories from a number of different cultures. "This excellent collection would be particularly useful to teachers and librarians seeking to introduce storytelling to potential tellers of all ages," Chu concluded.

The focus shifts slightly in *How and Why Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell*. Here Hamilton and Weiss present twenty-five pourquoi tales, traditional stories that attempt to explain natural occurrences such as why dogs chase cats or how the tiger got his stripes. As in *Stories in My Pocket*, the emphasis in *How and Why Stories* is on encouraging children to become storytellers and giving them the tools to do so successfully, including advice on preparing and performing the tales printed in the book as well as general tips on storytelling. Writing in *School Library Journal*, Elizabeth Maggio called *How and Why Stories* "a useful book for anyone eager to learn the storytelling process." The audio version of the book features child narrators, demonstrating that kids really can be effective storytellers. "The performances are both adorable and professional," claimed a reviewer in *Today's Librarian*, the critic adding that "each story is bracketed by delightful musical interludes."

Weiss and Hamilton collect twenty-three tales from around the world in *Noodlehead Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell*. In addition to familiar stories such as "The Wise Fools of Gotham" and "Seven Foolish Fishermen," the collection also includes unusual stories about simpletons and discusses how different versions of the same story may be found in separate cultures. Calling *Noodlehead Stories* "a good storytelling tool for children," *School Library Journal* reviewer Marilyn K. Roberts added that the brevity of the selections "makes them easy for the youngest, most inexperienced storytellers to perform." In *Booklist*, John Peters predicted that "budding tellers will find these short, simplified versions easy to learn and perform, particularly because each is followed by practical tips for delivery."

Continuing the series, *Through the Grapevine: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell* presents another collection of thirty-one short tales with international pedi-

grees, while *Scared Witless: Thirteen Eerie Tales to Tell* focuses on spine-tinglers such as “The Coffin That Wouldn’t Stop,” “The Ghost with Bloody Fingers,” “The Boy Who Was Afraid of Plants,” and “The Hairy Toe.” Like Hamilton and Weiss’s other books, these selections include useful tips for budding tall-tale tellers, and *Scared Witless* gains a humorous element from Kevin Pope’s quirky cartoon illustrations.

In addition to story collections, Hamilton and Weiss have also created several solo-story picture books. In *The Hidden Feast: A Folktale from the American South* a rooster is disappointed by the food served at a neighborhood barnyard party until he learns that something special is hidden inside the simple offering. Two sisters with different personalities find that those same differences come in handy in *A Tale of Two Frogs: Inspired by a Russian Folktale*, and *Priceless Gifts: A Folktale from Italy* retells a traditional story in which a merchant from Genoa is richly rewarded by the king of the Spice Islands when he suggests a way to rid the palace of rats, but when a greedy rival attempts to gain a similar treasure his efforts gain a surprising result. A story from Cuba, *Rooster’s Night Out* finds a dusty-feathered fowl seeking assistance from Grass, Cow, River, and Sun when he needs to make himself presentable at a party. A barber uses his wits and his trusty mirror to outsmart some scary, but unintelligent ghosts in *The Ghost Catcher: A Bengali Folktale*. “Children will easily absorb the lessons” of *Priceless Gifts*, according to



Hamilton and Weiss recount a story of friendship in *The Hidden Feast*. (August House, 2006. Illustration © 2006 by Don Tate. Reproduced by permission.)

Booklist contributor GraceAnne A. DeCandido, and Jayne Dameron praised Hamilton and Weiss for their “short text and upbeat tone” in her *School Library Journal* review. Noting that *The Hidden Feast* is enlivened by Don Tate’s “lushly painted acrylics,” a *Kirkus Reviews* writer cited the coauthors’ use of “contemporary clichés” in calling the story “fun for telling or retelling.”

“All of our books were written as a direct result of our teaching experiences in the classroom,” Hamilton and Weiss told *SATA*. “We feel strongly that children should be given the opportunity to tell stories because of the many benefits storytelling provides: increased self-esteem, poise and confidence when speaking in front of others, improved listening, writing, reading, and inventive thinking skills, to name a few. Perhaps most important, storytelling is a fun activity that children enjoy.

“Our stories are meant to be shared orally, whether read aloud or told without the book. We realized early on that, in order for a classroom of young students to feel successful as storytellers, they needed to be presented with numerous short, simple stories from which to choose. Folk tales were the most obvious source for they foster an understanding of other people, places, and cultures. Folk tales are also good, time-tested stories.

“First, we do research to find as many versions of a folk tale as possible. We then retell it in lively, simple language that feels comfortable on the lips of children. By listening to children retell the stories, we learn a great deal about any problem area, and then revise the tales further. Oral storytelling helps immensely with the writing process because a teller quickly learns what works (and what doesn’t!) in a story. The teller gets immediate feedback from the faces of the listeners and their reactions to the story.

“One of the greatest joys of our work is seeing the excitement about reading and writing that storytelling generates. When students hear or tell a tale from *Noodlehead Stories*, *How and Why Stories*, or *Scared Witless*, they can’t wait to get their hands on the book to read more stories. Afterward, they are motivated to make up their own. During the course of a project where students tell folk tales, they learn not only their own stories but those of their classmates. It’s as if they go inside these stories and live there for a while. By doing so they discover, on a visceral level, what makes a good story. Their own subsequent stories show much more creative use of dialogue and contain more of the standard story components: beginning and end, plot, characters, setting, and theme.

“We continue to be highly motivated to retell and create good tales for kids to tell because, as we write, we can imagine them having a great time telling the stories and the reactions of their listeners. After parents watch a classroom of young tellers share their tales, they often

remark about what a great job we have. We agree—it's hard to imagine more gratifying, meaningful work, and the writing is an integral part of it."

Biographical and Critical Sources

PERIODICALS

Booklist, January 1, 1997, Karen Morgan, review of *Stories in My Pocket: Tales Kids Can Tell*, p. 850; May 15, 2000, Hazel Rochman, review of *How and Why Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell*, p. 1755; October 15, 2000, Paul Shackman, review of *How and Why Stories*, p. 470; February 15, 2001, John Peters, review of *Noodlehead Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell*, p. 1132; March 1, 2006, Gillian Engberg, review of *The Hidden Feast: A Folktale from the American South*, p. 95; June 1, 2007, GraceAnne A. DeCandido, review of *Priceless Gifts*, p. 78.

Kirkus Reviews, April 1, 2006, review of *The Hidden Feast*, p. 347; September 1, 2006, review of *Scared Witless: Thirteen Eerie Tales to Tell*, p. 904.

School Library Journal, January, 2001, Marlyn K. Roberts review of *Noodlehead Stories*, p. 146; February, 2002, Marlyn K. Roberts, review of *Through the Grapevine: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell*, p. 120; April, 2006, Catherine Threadgill, review of *The Hidden Feast*, p. 126; July, 2006, Lee Bock, review of *Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom*, p. 136; June, 2007, Jayne Damron, review of *Priceless Gifts*, p. 133.

ONLINE

Beauty and the Beast Storytellers Home Page, <http://www.beautyandthebeaststorytellers.com> (September 15, 2007).

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