

# Who Wrote That?

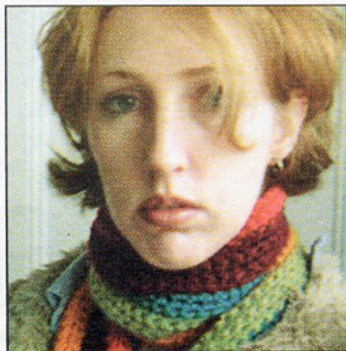
The Creators of Your Child's Favorite Books

Featuring **Meghan McCarthy** By Patricia M. Newman

Sports and art figured prominently in Meghan McCarthy's childhood. She remembers playing outfield in a kickball game in elementary school. "Joe Lloyd was up next," she says. "My memory of him is as a hulk!" Joe was the kid everyone in the field backed up for because he could kick the ball far into the outfield. On that day, Joe's kick rocketed toward McCarthy and she caught it. She was a hero and forever after picked first when her friends chose up sides.

In fourth grade, McCarthy was diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder. "Math was not a good subject for me," she says. "I was the kid at the back of the room doodling and getting in trouble for not paying attention." According to McCarthy, her artist father was instrumental in nurturing her talent. She remembers posing with her sister for hours while their father painted their portraits. "He'd wheel the T.V. up so we could watch while he painted," she says, still remembering the strong odor of his oil paints. After McCarthy finished posing, she'd paint her own portrait wearing the same clothes she wore in her father's painting. "My mom said when I turned five it was obvious I had artistic talent." Hailed as the class artist, she created murals and posters for a variety of purposes. "Art saved me," she says.

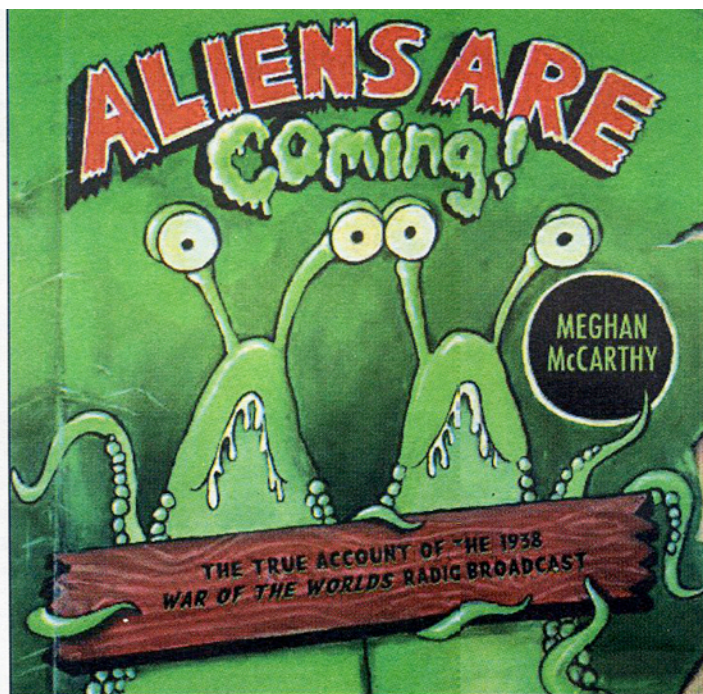
In college, McCarthy imitated the style of a particular artist for a class project. "Claus Oldenburg makes giant everything," she says. "Sculptures have been things like clothes pins and shovels, but my favorites are his earlier soft giant sculptures of things like hamburgers and drum sets." McCarthy



Meghan McCarthy

wanted to make a giant pencil, but her teacher suggested she think of another idea. "I'm a determined individual," she says. "Especially when someone tells me I can't do something." Using only an ax, she cut down a tree in the woods and hacked the geometric sides and the pencil point by hand. A mixture of silver and black paint represented graphite, and a pink pool float became an eraser. "It looked just like an old chewed up pencil," says McCarthy. "Of course, I cut [the deadline] too close and the paint wasn't dry. By the time I got to class my whole back was yellow."

McCarthy graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design with a degree in illustration. With graduation imminent, she visited the career center and discovered that illustration jobs were nonexistent. Heartbroken, she felt like she'd wasted four years. A children's book class at RISD kindled a small flame of hope, however, and she pursued the idea of illustrating her own text rather than



someone else's. While delivering pizzas for the local pizza joint, she submitted stories and her portfolio until an editor expressed interest.

McCarthy's first four titles were fiction, but she has since dedicated herself to nonfiction. "I lost interest in fiction," she says. "The market is saturated. So many picture books have been done it's kind of like we're recycling old ideas." McCarthy sometimes comes up with her ideas in keyword searches on the Internet. *Aliens Are Coming* grew out of one such search when she stumbled across Orson Welles's 1938 radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds*. Another search on circus sideshows led her to Charles Atlas, "the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" and former sideshow performer. *Seabiscuit the Wonder Horse* came from a PBS special on the unlikely champion. McCarthy recalls waking up

from a snooze in front of the television and seeing the comical-looking horse on the screen.

Two ideas gelled for McCarthy in *Astronaut Handbook*. As a child, she loved anything to do with outer space and even built a cardboard replica of a space ship in her garage, convinced she could make it fly to Mars. A fascination with people's jobs and how they get them led her to learn more about astronauts. McCarthy takes her interest in jobs one step further in an upcoming book on trash that demystifies the qualifications needed to become a trash collector. McCarthy's research uncovered the New York City physical fitness test for sanitation workers and sanitation worker blogs.

Although McCarthy's new website slogan is "Nonfiction that is fun!" she

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