

## INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER HOLM

**QUESTION:** Earlier this year, you won your third Newbery Honor for *Turtle in Heaven*. I understand you missed the call the first two times. Did you get it this time?

**ANSWER:**

Actually, it turns out I am pretty consistent in life. I missed this call, too (although I have a good excuse—I was taking my seven-year-old son to school!)

**QUESTION:** The research for your historical novels is outstanding. Can you talk a little bit about what you do for research?

**ANSWER:** A lot of my historical novels are inspired by family history, so inevitably that means I spend a lot of time talking with family members and going through old oral histories. I also spend a lot of time crawling through historical archives. For *Turtle in Paradise*, I was incredibly fortunate because Key West has a fabulous historical archive run by an archivist who literally knows everything. Also, since the book took place in 1935, there were still folks alive who were kids during the time the book takes place, so I was able to interview them.

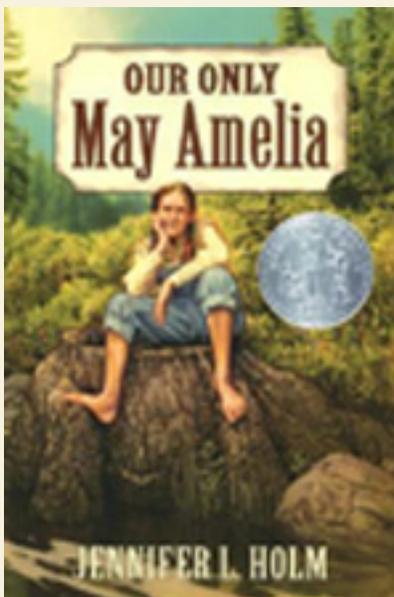
**QUESTION:** Some of your research for *Turtle* involved children's entertainment from the Great Depression Era. Do you have

anything from that time to recommend for kids today?

**ANSWER:**

A great place to start is, of course, my favorite—the funny pages! Check out *Little Orphan Annie* (collections of the daily strip are still in print). Then give your ears a treat by listening to the opening of the classic radio show, *The Shadow*, at <http://www.shadow-sanctum.com/audio.html>. Finally, no trip through the Great Depression would be complete without going to the picture show! Rent some great monster movies of the day—*Dracula*, *The Mummy*, and *King Kong*.

**QUESTION:** Can you talk about storytelling and what place that has in your research and writing process?



**ANSWER:** I think that my constant battle as a writer is to not let the historical ephemera overwhelm the story. It becomes a very fine balance.

**QUESTION:** The settings in your novels play an important role. Do the places like NYC, Oregon, and the Florida Keys have special meanings for you?

**ANSWER:** I think that the locations end up becoming their own character in the end.

**QUESTION:** You have a lot of inventive nicknames in your books. Did you have a nickname as a child?

**ANSWER:** Hmmm .... “Annoying Middle Sister”? (Just kidding, I think.) My brother, Jon, called me “Fern” because when I was little I



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thought my middle name was “Fer” as in “Jenni Fer Holm”. (BTW—it’s not. It’s Jennifer Louise Holm).

**QUESTION:** You received a phone call from Lloyd Alexander as a child. How did that come about?

**ANSWER:** That’s a very funny story, actually. I wrote him a fan letter and didn’t put down a return address, but helpfully included our home phone number. So he was really calling me to get my address so he could write me back. To say it left a big impression on my childhood self is the understatement of the century.

**QUESTION:** Do you have any good fan stories?

**ANSWER:** Our Only May Amelia seems to inspire the most devoted fans. There have been kids who show up at my aunt and uncle’s farm in Naselle, Washington looking for May Amelia!

**QUESTION:** The Babymouse books have paved the way for the early reader graphic novels in America. They have been enormously popular with kids, parents, and educators. Can you talk about the role graphic novels have in literacy promotion?

**ANSWER:** When my brother, Matt (co-creator of the Babymouse series) and I were kids, we read a ton of comic books and it helped make us very confident readers. Graphic novels as a format seem to be much easier for most kids to get through, and it helps to keep them reading. (I still read comics today!)

**QUESTION:** I understand you and Matt are starting a new graphic novel series about a character called Squish. How will the Squish books be different from Babymouse? What kinds of things will you be able to do with Squish that you can’t with Babymouse? What color will the books be?

**ANSWER:** Three words: Green. Slimy. Amoeba.

**QUESTION:** What are you working on now?

**ANSWER:** The sequel to my first novel, *Our Only May Amelia*, will be out in April. It’s called *The Trouble with May Amelia* and it’s been in the works for over ten years.

**QUESTION:** Will you be coming to Utah soon? (I hope!)

**ANSWER:** I hope so! I love Utah! It has always been one of my favorite places to visit.



Jennifer Holm is the author of the popular Babymouse graphic novel series for children. She also writes children’s historical novels, three of which, *Our Only May Amelia*, *Penny from Heaven*, and *Turtle in Paradise*, have been Newbery Honor recipients. She lives with her family in Northern California.

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