



WHAT'S YOUR STORY, TAMI?

TAMI LEWIS BROWN, Author of *SOAR, ELINOR!*

When I was a kid, we lived on a farm in Prospect, Kentucky. My sister and I rode horses every single day. We had lots of dogs and cats, and a duck named Sweet Feed. What was it like being surrounded by so many animals? Lots of fun but lots of work, too.

We fed the horses before we went to school and as soon as we got home we cleaned their stalls, even before starting our homework. Kentucky is a Southern state but winters were freezing cold. Every morning and every night we hammered through thick ice to make sure the horses had plenty water to drink.

After our farm chores, reading felt like a treat. But learning to read wasn't easy for me. In first grade I struggled to decode words. My mom and I worked with flashcards and she helped me read simple books every night. Finally one day it all made sense. I could read on my own and I never turned back! We went to the public library almost every week where I checked out as many books as I could carry. When I read *From The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* I knew I would live in a big city when I grew up- and I do!

- **What kind of student were you?**

I was curious about everything when I was a kid so most of the time I loved school. I had great teachers (except in third grade. That year my teacher was REALLY MEAN!) Unfortunately my best subject was daydreaming. I imagined all sorts of things, all day long. But I was lucky because most of my teachers (except that mean one in third grade!) knew there was a lot going on inside my head. One of the best things about being a writer is I get paid to daydream. Good thing I had lots of practice when I was a kid!



- **Did you ever do something brave when you were young?**

During summers when I was a kid my mom shooed us outside in the morning and told us not to come back until dinnertime. My sister and I got into lots of adventures on our own.

Our neighborhood had a “haunted house” really an abandoned farmhouse and I got the reputation for being brave by exploring it on my own. That was more foolish than brave because the floors weren’t very strong.



One truly brave thing I did was challenge a bully who had called my sister names. He was WAY bigger than me and beat me to a pulp, but I knew I’d done the right thing. And he didn’t bother me or my sister again. Actually I think he was a little afraid of a scrawny girl who was crazy enough to fight him.

- **Did you play an instrument? Which one(s)?**

My father was a gifted musician who could play almost any instrument so I really wanted to learn to play the piano. I took years of lessons but my dad’s musical gene passed me by. My teacher never even invited me to be in the recital! But my daughter inherited her grandfather’s musical ability though. She’s a great pianist, even when she doesn’t practice.

- **What were your favorite things to do when you were young?**

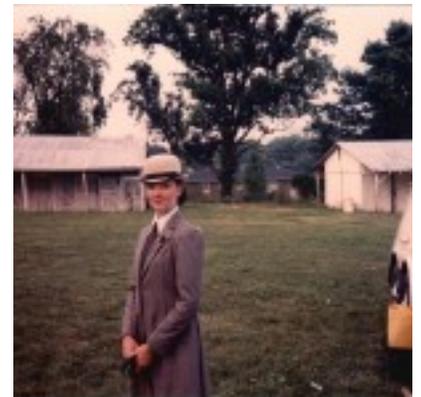
I grew up on a horse farm in Kentucky where my family raised Morgan horses.

Sometimes my dad bought horses with bad habits like bucking or



running away. My sister and I trained them, spending lots of time talking to them and gaining their trust. It was so much fun to ride every single day! And we had a great time competing in horse shows. We won lots of

ribbons. But it was sad, too. As soon as those bad horses “learned their manners” my dad sold them and bought a new “bad” horse or two for us to tame.



- **If you weren't a writer, what would you like to be?**

Before I was a writer I was a lawyer - I don’t want to do that again! But when I was in law school my husband and I explored opening our own ice cream shop. I’d love to invent my own ice cream flavors and try all the samples! My first new flavor would be Caramel Peach. Doesn’t it sound delicious?

- **Do you listen to music while you write, or do you like silence?**

I love listening to music while I write. My friend M. T. Anderson gave me a CD of 1920s music I listened to when I was writing SOAR, ELINOR! It helped put me back in Elinor's place and time. There's a link to a 1920's radio station you can listen to on my website - http://www.tamilewisbrown.com/on_the_fly/

- **How long does it take you to write your books?**

Nobody can believe how long it takes me to write a book! First drafts can be pretty fast - three or four months. But I revised the text for SOAR, ELINOR! for two years, polishing, researching, learning new facts, taking out others, and polishing again. That was nothing compared to THE MAP OF ME, a middle grade novel that will be published next August. I started work on it in 2005 and finished it this spring! I'm a slow writer but that's okay. I'm learning which each new draft and I end up with a story I really want to tell.



- **Do you have any children or pets and have you ever used them in a book?**



I have two children - Julia and Will. Will flew with me in an antique Waco biplane when I researched SOAR, ELINOR! We did loops and spins. It was GREAT. There's a character like Julia in the book I'm just beginning to write now. That character is brave and stubborn and has a tricky right eyebrow she can raise by itself. Just like my daughter. But don't tell her! I have a dog, Murphy, and two cats, Smokey and Marie.

They haven't appeared in any of my books but they keep begging.



Quick Picks:

- **Favorite stationary item?**

I love love love love love stationary. Especially envelopes with my address printed on the back. And fountain pens (does a pen count as a stationary item?) I write with a yellow fountain pen filled with purple ink. It makes me feel quirky.

- **P & J or Mac and Cheese?**

How can I choose between my two FAVORITE foods? In a pinch I choose PB&J- as long as the bread is soft and there's cherry jelly.

- **Favorite or least favorite vegetable?**

I really love vegetables. Especially spinach. When I was in elementary school I ate everyone else's spinach at lunch one day. This was not a wise digestive decision.

- **Love revision or hate it?**

I love revision almost as much as I love PB&J sandwiches. I could revise a manuscript FOREVER. My editor has to pry the final draft out of my hands.

- **Early Bird Writer or Night Owl?**

I don't like waking up early but that's when I do my best writing. When I'm on deadline I get up at 4 am to write. There's something about writing in a silent house in the dark as the sun begins to rise that gets my creative juices flowing.

For more about Tami, visit her website at www.tamilewisbrown.com.