

LOLA'S STORY



I was born and grew up in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The city is surrounded by corn and soybean farms. My family lived out in a small subdivision on the north side. We had an apple orchard on one side and wide open spaces behind the houses.

I was a lucky kid. My parents took time to play games with me, go on picnics and **READ** to me. I didn't have a lot of books that were mine, but the ones I had were precious and I read them again and again.

A bookmobile also visited our neighborhood regularly. This was a long bus that was lined with shelves and the shelves held **BOOKS**. Plus, the librarian (who was also the driver) knew what I liked to read and quite often she saved a few titles under her check-out

counter just for me. The sound of the bookmobile always brought me running with a tall stack of books that I exchanged for another, even taller, stack of books.

I was (and am) an only child. I never liked that part very much. And because I was allergic to animal hair and fur when I was young, I never had a pet either. But I had friends and a bike. So, I never felt lonely.

As I grew older I became the babysitter for the neighborhood. One time, four different families went on vacation at the same time and left me at one of their homes with six children under the age of 8. We had a wonderful time of puppet plays, games in the yard, reading books out loud, painting and playing jump rope.

What kind of student were you?



I always liked going to school. (Well, most of the time.) Every year I was excited to get my new textbooks, learn about famous people and **GO TO THE SCHOOL LIBRARY**. Back then our school library was small compared to the wonderful libraries I see in schools today. My favorite kinds of books were the biographies, adventure stories and books about animals. I would always check out as many as I could. Because I enjoyed reading, I always got good grades in Reading. But we never wrote in school and for years I never wrote at home either. I thought the only kind of writing that I was allowed to do was answer questions at the end of chapters. I was pretty good at that, but didn't care for it at all.



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

I always wanted to be outside, especially if I could ride my bike. I owned a 24" red Schwinn and together we explored the neighborhood. I knew the names of everyone in a four-block radius of my home. My favorite time of day to ride was after our evening meal. If it was warm outside, our neighbors would be sitting in lawn chairs, pruning bushes, or playing badminton. I'd ride by and pretty soon someone

would wave me over and I would talk with someone for a few minutes, or share some homemade ice cream. One time I even stopped and helped an older man mow his grass. I think the neighbors looked forward to seeing me as much as I enjoyed them.

But when I was inside the house, I liked to play with my dolls. Quite often we played school and I was the teacher. My mom made doll clothes and I liked to wash them in my hand-operated washing machine and dry them on the line.

Did you ever get into trouble?

Sure I did. I think every child is curious and has that adventuresome side. Sometimes I did things that weren't exactly naughty, but it would have been better if I had given it some thought before moving ahead. I remember one time when I was nine years old. It was winter and really cold outside. I didn't know how to ice skate, but I wanted to learn. There was no ice-skating rink close to our home, so I decided to make my own. I hooked our garden hose to the faucet in the garage and for more than 30 minutes I flooded our concrete driveway. It was great! It was some of the smoothest ice I had ever seen - so smooth that when my father came home from work he couldn't stop his Oldsmobile on the driveway. His car slid into the garage and hit the lawnmower. Needless to say he was not pleased with his inventive daughter at that moment.

Did you play an instrument?

I took piano lessons from second grade through my sophomore year in high school. At first my piano teacher was a nun at St. Jude School. She would give me lessons in a little room that was attached to the convent. If I arrived early for my lesson, sometime I would see the other nuns scurrying to chapel or into their kitchen to make dinner.

Recitals were always a little scary. I'd practice for weeks preparing, but I would always get nervous right before it was my turn to play. One year, Diane Brown and I were performing a Hayden concerto for two pianos. The music was 21 pages long, but we had memorized our parts. Sometimes Diane played alone. Sometimes I did. But the best parts were when we both played at the same time. We made it through the entire concerto without any large mistakes and boy were we proud.

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

No doubt about it, if I weren't a writer, I would be a landscape artist. Gardening is my passion. Here in Georgia I can finally grow all kinds of flowers like hydrangeas that did not grow well when we lived in northeast Indiana. We also have a large vegetable garden during spring through fall. In the winter, I grow greens in a heated grow box. Yes, even when it's snowing outside, lettuce, cabbage, arugula and mustard thrive in the grow box.



But I guess that writing and gardening have a lot in common. They both require seeds. In writing the ideas are the seeds. They both need cultivation. A writer needs to think long and hard about an idea before writing the first word. Even then, a writer knows that he/she will revise, or rewrite, a great deal of what is first written. After many months of attention and great care, both offer an abundant harvest. The garden produces flowers and vegetables that renew our body and spirit. The writing offers up words of comfort, inspiration and motivation for the soul.

I can't imagine one without the other.

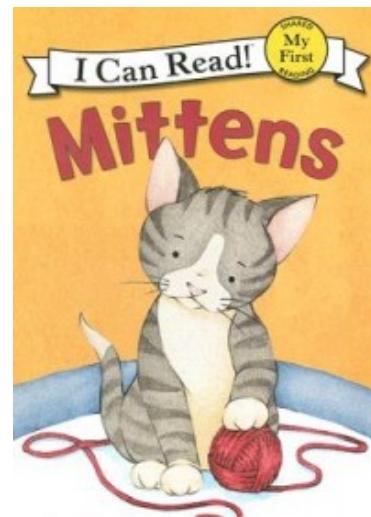
Where do you get your ideas?

All writers, whether 8 or 80 years old, get their ideas from the same places. I remember experiences and the people of my life. These can be great fuel for writing. Sometimes I mine an important event or question from a dream. Other times one book leads me to another book idea. I often am surprised when wonderful ideas just pop into my head. Once while I was a teacher, I heard these words on my lunch break, "This is the sunflower, tall and bright, that stands in my garden day and night." I immediately turned around to my computer and the rest of that cumulative tale poured out of me and onto the page. What a gift! That doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it's wonderful.



All because I had a cat that was unique and fun.

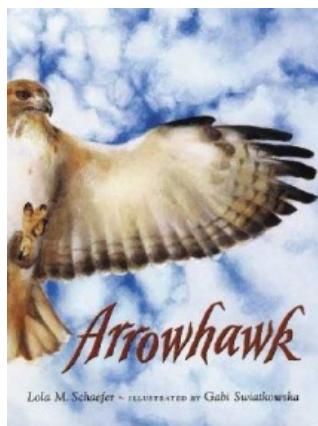
We once had an amazing cat named Dickens. He had so much personality. He taught himself to ring our doorbell when he wanted to come inside the house. When he was outside he would find a mole and bring it near our front door and talk to it for an hour or more, but never eat it. Sometimes when I was cleaning the house, he would jump up as if to scare me, then run away. One day he had an unfortunate accident and died. Both my husband and I were sad for a few weeks. At that time I spoke to one of my editors and told her that if she ever wanted a group of cat stories I would like to write them in honor of Dickens. Within that year I wrote the first three MITTENS stories. Each year a new MITTENS (I Can Read, HPC) story comes



by Lola M. Schaefer • pictures by Susan Kathleen Hartung

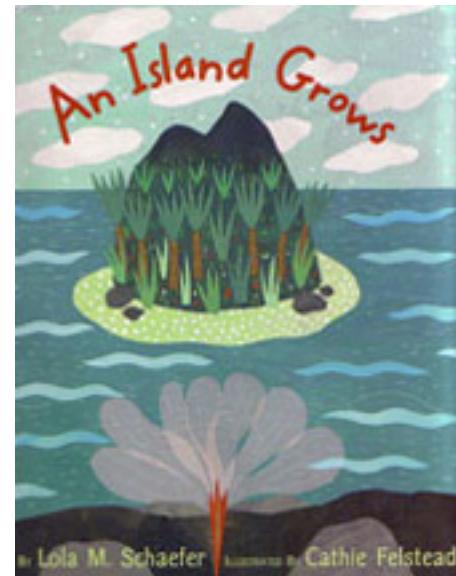
What's the hardest part about writing a book?

For me, it's remembering to be patient. Good writing takes time. I write a draft and want that draft to magically become the final manuscript, but it doesn't work that way. After the first draft, I need to let it sit for a few weeks and then return with new eyes to the writing. It's always apparent to me what I need to do next. But even then, I need to let that second draft sit and simmer for a few weeks. After the third revisit, I can get serious with line-editing, pacing and word choice. From there on out, I work non-stop on that manuscript until I am pleased. Sometimes that process takes 3-4 months for a picture book, but in the case of AN ISLAND GROWS, it took more than 2 ½ years before it all came together. Patience. Every writer needs a boatload.



What's your favorite book that you wrote?

Many children ask me that question during author visits to their schools. In truth, all of my books are my favorites, but for different reasons. Hundreds of students who have read ARROWHAWK have sent me hand-written letters. I love that kind of personal response. AN ISLAND GROWS was like a puzzle and when I finished it, I was quite satisfied. Many of my small nonfiction



by Lola M. Schaefer • illustrations by Cathie Feistead

books were great to write because I was able to revisit biographies or information books that I had not read since I was a child. Every book has its appeal. If I didn't care for each one, I wouldn't do a very good job with the writing.



Quick Picks

- **Favorite stationery item?** *Beautiful paper for handwritten notes.*
- **Favorite or least favorite vegetable?** *Favorite vegetable is Chinese cabbage. Least favorite is okra.*
- **Sourdough, whole wheat, white or rye?** *Stoned ground whole wheat bread, please.*
- **Love revision or hate it?** *Love revision – it's where a writer lives.*
- **Early Bird or Night Owl Writer?** *Neither. My best writing time is between 10 am and 8 pm.*

For more about Lola, visit her website [HERE](#).