



WHAT'S YOUR STORY, TONY ABBOTT?

To begin with, I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in a small house on a hill (everyone else had small houses, too). I've just written about those early days in a new book for older readers to come out later this year, but one of the most important things I carry with me from those years, is the Bookmobile that used to come to my neighborhood, park down the street, and open its doors to my brother and me. That was my first real introduction to books of my own (well, my own until they were due!). Before that, I had seen lots of books, in our house, because both of my parents were teachers. My mother began reading stories to me at a very early age and, though I was not a very quick or early reader, I guess I learned to love stories. The kind I loved best were adventure stories. My favorite of all was a book called [*The Wind in the Willows*](#), about four characters: Rat, Mole, Badger, and Toad. I always talk about this story when I visit schools, because it was so important for me. Because I loved that book so much, I was tempted to try to write my own stories. First, I started out writing stories with the same four characters from that book, but most of all Ratty and Moley, who I thought were the best of friends and would be nice friends of mine. After a while, I started writing little things about new characters, ones I made up myself. I drew pictures, too, but I was never very good at that. My father could actually draw pretty well, but I don't think I picked up anything of his talent. When I was eight years old, we moved from Ohio to Connecticut. I have lived in the same part of Connecticut, in three different towns, since then. In fact, I own my mother's house now, and one of my daughters lives there now. But that's another story.



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

Thanks to my mom, who saved everything, I have some of my old report cards. I was not especially good in reading, though I was all right in spelling. I liked history (maybe

because my father was a history teacher). I was just an okay student. I'm sure no one would remember me. I was pretty shy and didn't make myself known too much.

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



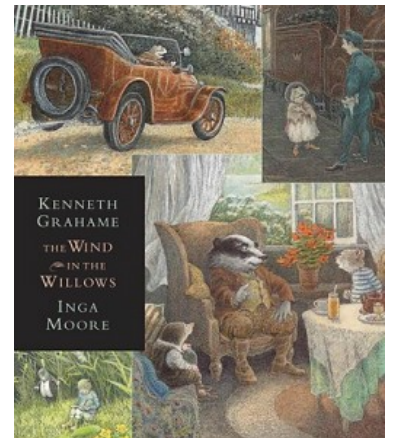
I liked to bike around and play baseball. I was a slow reader, but my mom always helped me find things to read, so I did that, too. When I was about ten, I started playing guitar, and that was a good thing. It turned into a life-long interest of mine, and I now have four guitars and a ukulele that I strum from time to time.

- **What were you afraid of?**

In Cleveland, I shared a bedroom with my brother. It had narrow windows high in the wall that you could only see out of if you stood on a bed and looked out. I was always afraid of giant toads coming into my room from those high windows. I don't know why it was toads, but that's what frightened me most. Also, getting lost. I still fear getting lost.

- **Did you ever get into trouble at home or school?**

Yes. My brother and I were never supposed to make noise while my father was working, but sometimes we did. Also, I wrote in a library book. This was a bad thing.



- **What books were favorites as a child?**

The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame. Oh, I loved that book, and I still do.

- **Did you have a nickname and if so what is it? Is there a story behind your nickname?**

My grandmother called me Bobchicka. It's a Hungarian nickname, I think.

- **What did you want to be when you grew up?**

A fireman or a farmer. This was because of very nice plastic trucks that I had, a firetruck and a farmer's pickup truck with a chicken coop on the back. Fireman. Farmer. I was working through the Fs, I think.

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

Maybe an archaeologist. The idea of brushing the sand away from a legendary artifact is very cool. It goes back to the Arabian Nights, I think. Plus Indiana Jones. Also, I would like the job of professional reader. Just read all day long.

- **What advice do you have for aspiring young readers and writers?**

Read everything you can get your hands on. Do everything, all different kinds of things (but nothing risky, of course), because readers like to be told a story from someone who knows a thing or two. Ask questions of everyone. Listen to everyone. Walk by yourself. Find a place that is very quiet, so you can think alone there. You will have ideas that you want to write down. And your reading will show you how the best writers have done that.

- **Where do you get your ideas?**



Everywhere. I read a lot: newspapers, magazines, books. Ideas come to me from all of these places, but they need to collide, one idea joining with another and another, before I begin to see a story that might work. It takes time. Often ideas for characters and stories come from voices. I either hear a voice in real life or imagine one in my mind, and the look and feel and shape of the character forms in my imagination, and I begin to sketch out a story. It grows from there.

- **Do you write everyday? If so, for how long?**

Oh, yes. Most of my days are long, from 8am to about 5pm. Other days, like on weekends, I don't have as much time to spend. But whenever I have a free moment, I am in my room (where I am right now), and all my work is here, so there is always something to push ahead on.

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

Absolute silence. I cannot listen to anything while I write. I do find much inspiration in music, but then I have to shut it off to be able to form my thoughts and words.

- **What's the hardest part about writing a book?**

The ending. At the beginning, it is a very free time for me. I envision the story as being enormous with all kinds of ideas working through it. By the end, I am not as free, for everything about the story has to make sense. And I have, obviously, to find the absolutely correct words and phrases to tell me story. So this is where the hard mind work comes in. It's wonderful to finish a story, a kind of relief. But before that is the very hardest part of writing . . . for me.



- **How many times do you have to revise? Do you love revision or hate it?**

I love revision. All of my best work comes out when I revise, and I revise many, many times. For my Droon stories, there are at least five or six drafts before the story goes to the editor. After there, there are another three or four. Again, the idea is that you end up with the best book you can possibly write, so revisions are very important for me. I don't — I never — write a good story the first time through.

- **What your favorite book you wrote?**

One of the novels, I think. Firegirl. Or The Postcard. I also like the one that's coming out later this year, called Lunch-Box Dream. That's the story about the road trip when I was young.

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

I have two daughters and used to have two dogs, one of whom, Comet, became the character called Batamogi in the Droon stories. But he passed away, and we have one dog left. His name is Kip.



Quick Picks:

- **Favorite stationary item?** *Varsity fountain pens. They are lovely and disposable ink pens. I sign all my books with these pens now.*
- **Soup or salad?** *Salad.*
- **P & J or Mac and Cheese?** *I grew up on Peanut Butter, but now . . . macaroni and cheese.*
- **Dog, Cat, Bird, or Fish?** *Dog*
- **Favorite or least favorite vegetable?** *Favorite: carrot*
- **Favorite or most hated subject?** *Favorite: literature*
- **Sourdough, whole wheat, white or rye?** *Rye*
- **Love revision or hate it?** *LOVE!*
- **Longhand or computer?** *I start with longhand, always. Then go to a computer, then revised longhand on the printouts.*
- **Early Bird Writer or Night Owl?** *Early bird.*

