

WHAT'S YOUR STORY, UMA KRISHNASWAMI?



I was born and grew up in India. My father worked for the government so we moved every few years. Now, when people ask me which part of India I'm from, I never know what to say because so many places were a part of my childhood there.

I must have spent a lot of time outdoors because being outside seems to figure in some of my most vivid memories. When I was about four we lived in Delhi, in a house with a big garden. My aunts told me scary stories about a dirt mound at one end of the garden, and I became convinced that goblins lived there.

A few years later, I remember sitting up in the branches of a banyan tree outside another house in a town called Pune. I'd hide away up there and read Winnie the Pooh. For a long time, I was sure that the Hundred Acre Wood had banyan and neem and mango trees in it.

I didn't have any brothers or sisters, so I read a lot, and I was always making up stories. I think I was always a writer, only it took me a long time to find that out.

What kind of student were you?

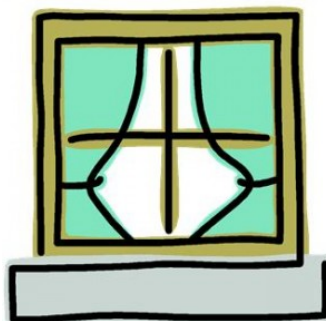
I was a great student in the subjects I loved, and an okay student in those I wasn't so wild about. English was one of my favorite subjects, but also geography and history, which was how we divided up what's called Social Studies in the US. I loved maps. I was always drawing maps of imaginary places.



And I went to pre-school, which was not a thing that was common in those days. They sent me off to pre-school when I was around two years old because I got bored at home and started drawing on the wall. If you are a kid reading this, here's a bit of advice. Stay away from those walls, or your masterpiece will only get painted over!

What were you afraid of?

Lizards. We had geckoes in India and sometimes they'd get into the house, which was really good, because of all the mosquitoes that also got into the house in the rainy season. I was terrified that one of those geckoes would have a heart attack and fall on my head. It never happened.



Did you have any bad or funny habits as a child?

Whenever I was lost in my own thoughts (which was a lot of the time) I'd hum. It wasn't a problem until I got to third grade and the teacher assumed I was doing it on purpose, which I wasn't. She tried talking to me about it several times, but it didn't do any good. Poor Mrs. Martyn—I'm sure I gave her lots of gray hairs. I ended up getting sent to the principal's office quite a lot that year for my disruptive humming. The thing is, I loved the principal's office. She was very kind, and the room had a nice big window. I was there often enough that

sometimes they sort of forgot about me. When I was done with whatever work they gave me to do I could sit there and daydream even more.

That habit never went away. I still sometimes sit and stare out the window and hum when I'm thinking about a story. Only now, I can call it "pre-writing" and count it as work.

What books were favorites as a child?

Winnie-the-Pooh and the House at Pooh Corner by A.A.Milne

Everything that Beatrix Potter wrote

The Famous Five and the Secret Seven series by Enid Blyton

Five Children and It by E. Nesbit

Ballet Shoes by Noel Streatfield

What's the hardest part about writing a book?

Figuring out what it's really about. Not on the surface, not the things that happen in the plot but what's underneath all that. That takes me forever, and I throw away a lot of revision pages in the process. When I finally get to understand what it all means, it's like finding a treasure.

