

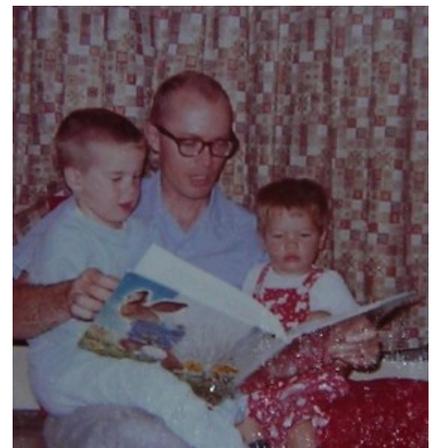
## WHAT'S YOUR STORY, KATE COOMBS?



*I grew up in Camarillo, California, where I spent every minute I could reading. When I was little, my parents read us stacks of bedtime stories every night. Then when my sister and I got old enough, we rode our bikes to the library every Saturday and picked out 10 books—which was the limit. I used to shake my head when I saw kids who only picked out one or two books. Back home, I would hide behind the house reading, avoiding homework and chores. Oh, and I used to get up late at night, supposedly to go to the bathroom, and just stay in the bathroom reading for hours. My mom wondered why I was so tired all the time! After about four days, all the books would be gone. Then I was a pretty normal kid till it was time to go to the library again. Besides all that reading, I started writing poems and stories and plays in grade school. My plays tended to feature me as the Glorious Queen and my sister as the Quiet Servant Girl. She was a pretty good sport!*

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

*When I was in third grade, my teacher called my mom to tell her I was hitting people. My mom asked me to stop, and I explained that I needed to hit people for self-defense. She asked me to please, please stop, and I finally agreed, but then I added, "I'll pinch them instead." I did actually stop, but only to make my mother happy. At the time, it seemed like a bum deal to me!*



**My parents read us bedtime stories every night.**

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

*I read all kinds of books as a child, but three of my favorites were *The Silver Curlew* by Eleanor Farjeon, *The Wicked Enchantment* by Margot Benary-Isbert, and *Taash and the Jesters* by Ellen Kindt McKenzie. I still like those books! Other favorites included the Narnia books, *Harriet the Spy*, *The Secret Garden*, and the Nancy Drew series. Oh, and Noel Streatfeild's *Ballet Shoes*, though I only took ballet classes for about a year. (It was those sisters I liked!) As a sixth grader, I entered a contest to see who could read the most Newbery Award and Honor books and won.*

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

*When I was a baby, my parents thought "Kathryn" was too big a name for me. They tried to think of a nickname, but couldn't settle on anything. Then they came home from a night out and heard the babysitter singing an old song to me, "K-K-K-Katie, b-b-beautiful Katie, you're the only g-g-g-girl that I adore! When the m-moon shines over the cowshed, I'll be waiting by the k-k-k-kitchen door." And that was it. I became Katie. It stuck till I was 12, when I changed it to Kate because my father suggested it would be more grown up.*



**Figure 1** This is everyone in my family except my older brother, who was in the army at the time. All seven of us are adopted.

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

*Read and read and read. All of the books you read will become your secret writing teachers: they will show you how sentences are put together, let alone stories. They'll teach you*

*about setting and character and plot even as they are entertaining you and making life that much more fun. Of course, the other thing you should do is write and write and write. Have fun with words and ideas. If you're ever stuck, try the magic of "what if," tinkering with possibilities till you find something you love and decide to turn it into a story or poem.*

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

*The hardest part is finding the time and moving the project forward. An author named Jane Yolen reminds us that if we want to write a book, we need to practice BIC. That stands for Butt in Chair! I have learned that if I write even for 15-20 minutes several times a week, eventually I will have a book. A lot of people talk about writing books, but you just plain have to get the work done. Of course, story-making is a satisfying kind of work.*

For more about Kate and her books, visit her website at [www.katecoombs.com](http://www.katecoombs.com)