



# Kate Waters

## Biography

I grew up in a large family. My three younger brothers and two younger sisters and I were, and are, very close. The two most important things in my life were books and our dress-up box. Books gave me privacy. The first time I heard my mother say, "Shh, leave Katie alone. She's reading," I realized that reading would not only take me to other worlds and into other lives, it would also give me some peace and quiet for a few minutes!

Our dress-up box was filled with lacy dresses, fancy hats, old ties and coats, and pieces of cloth that we made into turbans and masks and capes. We had enough children in our family to put on plays with many characters. The six Waters children spent a lot of time making up stories about people who lived in other times and places.

My mother read to us every day. She made the magical world of Narnia and The Borrowers come alive. We were also often packed up for outings to New England – mountains or the ocean. I learned about storytelling from my father who explained the constellations, the causes of fog, how sap changes into maple syrup, and what a starfish is.

I started writing stories and poems and keeping a diary in second grade. I think that it helps all writers to keep track of the questions and the wonderings they have, and to experiment with words.

In high school, I acted in quite a few plays and played field hockey. In college, I studied the medieval world, especially early poetry about knights and ladies and monsters. After college, I decided to go to library school. I was following the example of my great-aunt Esther who worked at the New York Public Library.

I was a children's and young adult librarian at the Boston Public Library for ten years. I learned what books people liked to read and what kinds of pictures people liked to look at in books. I loved acting out books with children during story hours and giving book talks to get children excited about my favorite books.

Eventually, I moved to New York City. While I was working on a children's magazine, I began thinking about a new way to celebrate Thanksgiving. I remembered visiting Plimoth Plantation when I lived in Boston and suggesting that we take photographs there. That was how my first book, *Sarah Morton's Day*, began. The photographs let people see what life was like for those first Europeans who settled in New England.

Making books involves many people. I have an editor who shares my belief that telling stories in the first person and using photographs helps people understand history. People at the museums where the photographs for my books have been taken are extremely helpful. They even make special clothes for the actors who play the parts of the children!

My writing process involves about six months of research and two months of writing a first draft. I read all the primary source material I can find. I try to answer the questions: What was life like then? What were this child's hopes and dreams? How was this child like children today? When the story is finished, I make a list of the photographs we need to take. Then the photographer and I spend about one week at the museum working with the actors.

For *The Story of the White House*, I collected photographs of the White House that had already been taken. And for *Lion Dancer*, the family was a real family, not actors.

I love writing. It combines the things that were so important to me growing up — storytelling and immersing myself in another time and place. I learn about writing from reading, reading, reading and practice, practice, practice.