



Meet Melissa!

Melissa Pilgrim, author of *Sergeant Stubby in the Great War*, now available in the Zoozil library, is not new to the writing game. In fact, she has been writing in some capacity for over fifteen years, working not only as a successful author, but also as a television and film script writer and editor, theater playwright, director, and producer, web developer, PR consultant, and even lyricist. Melissa studied at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, as well as at The Institute of Children's Literature in West Redding, CT, before becoming a writer in all mediums in places like Chicago and Los Angeles. She currently resides in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, where the breathtaking scenery inspires her to write and create. Because of her ample experience, impressive qualifications, and ability to write in a heartfelt, relatable way, Zoozil is proud to have teamed up with Ms. Pilgrim in bringing you *Sergeant Stubby in the Great War*, the story of a stray puppy who befriends a soldier-in-training during World War I. In an interview with Melissa, I set out to discover where she draws inspiration from, what drives her to practice her art, and what genre of music helped inspire *Sergeant Stubby in the Great War*!

What inspired you to be a writer?

All the great stories I read and saw growing up. I loved how they could make me feel different emotions at different times just by using my imagination while reading or watching them, and I knew early on I wanted to one day create stories that would do the same for other people.

What is a book you read as a child that made an impact on you?

Lassie Come-Home by Eric Knight. I remember loving it so much I read it over and over (and I also got my own collie named Lady for my twelfth birthday!). It inspired me to want to write a story some day about a dog as brave and adventurous as Lassie was, and when I learned about Stubby I knew this was my chance. I'm hoping readers will also find Stubby just as brave, adventurous, and inspiring as Lassie was.

Do you have any pets?

Yes, a cat named Zoey. She's also my office manager!

Where is your favorite place to write?

Anywhere where I can look out and see nature. Whether that's mountains, the ocean, or woods, it all inspires me to create.

What is the most challenging thing about writing a book?

Finding the time to focus on it for long periods of time without being interrupted.

Do you have any crazy techniques or rituals that help you get in writing mode?

Music. I listen to all kinds, and what I listen to before (and often during) each project I'm working on depends completely on how it makes me feel as I focus on that particular project. It's almost as if I'm letting the characters of the story/project choose what I hear to help set the mood! For *Sergeant Stubby in the Great War* I listened to a lot of classic rock, one of my favorite genres.

What is your favorite Popsicle flavor?

Raspberry.

What is one summer memory you will never forget?

Going away to Camp Huckins (an overnight summer camp in New Hampshire) for two weeks and having a lot of fun there riding horses, doing arts and crafts, playing tennis, and swimming every day. I meet a lot of wonderful friends and found out then (while still in grade school) that I wasn't afraid to venture out into the world alone!

Do you have any advice for young people aspiring to be authors one day?

Yes—you can do it! And don't think your story has to come out "perfect" the first time you try to write it with flawless grammar and spelling either. That's part of revising and editing it as you work on it over time. In the beginning the most important thing is telling an interesting "what" storyline that is happening to a captivating "who" that people will truly care about reading or watching to find out what happens as the story unfolds. So at first, just write by focusing on the "overall story idea" from beginning to end. Then revise it over and over until you're happy with it, which not only involves creativity but also patience. So learn to be patient and do all the drafts necessary to create something great, no matter how long or how many drafts it takes. (I personally never count drafts of projects I work on. I only focus on making it better and tighter with each one.) Happy writing!

Learn more about Melissa and her various creative projects at www.YourWritingMuse.com and follow her Twitter handle at @Animal_Motions. And don't forget to read *Sergeant Stubby in the Great War*, now available in the Zoozil library (zoozil.com/start-reading/).

**Interview conducted by Mackenzie Roark and posted on Wednesday, May 25, 2016.
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