

# • Meet the Author •

## Robin Pulver

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).



Robin grew up in upstate New York and lived in Oregon, Idaho, Ohio, and Zambia (East Africa) with her husband Don, before settling in Pittsford, New York, to raise a family. Her early writing was journalism and adult fiction. Then, reading aloud with her children, Nina and David, inspired her to write for children. When not visiting schools or writing, Robin enjoys playing with her bouncy two-year-old labradoodle (Sadie), hiking, birdwatching, cross-country skiing, swimming, reading, theater, movies, and meeting with her writers' groups. In addition to the Axle Annie books, other Robin Pulver books include *Author Day for Room 3T*, *Punctuation Takes a Vacation*, *Christmas for a Kitten*, *Nouns and Verbs Have a Field Day*, and the popular Mrs. Toggle series.

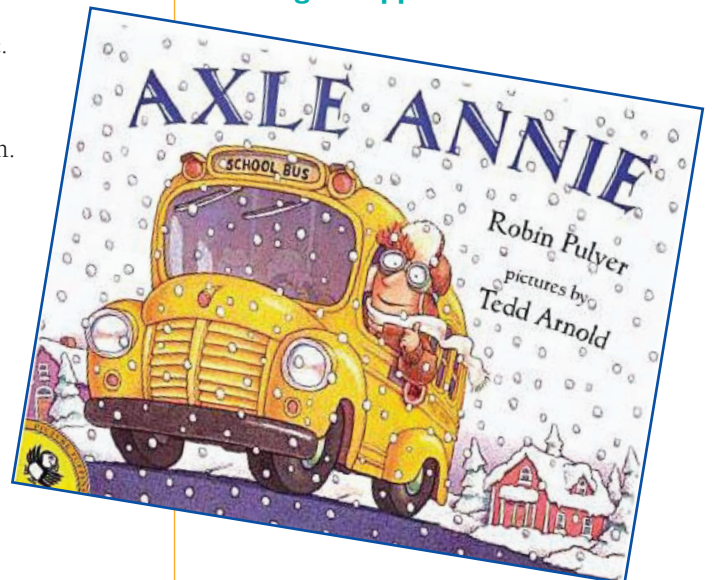
**Where did the character of Axle Annie come from? She seems like such a familiar school character (as is your much-beloved teacher and the wide cast of characters in the Mrs. Toggle books). It's amazing you haven't been a teacher!**

**RP:** I'd been wanting to write a school bus driver story for some time. A picture of rock star Axl Rose on the cover of *Spin* magazine inspired me. Often, it's finding the right name that helps me through the process of bringing a character to life. Axle Rose (note the added "e") seemed like a great name for a woman school bus driver! I called my character Axle Rose, then Rose Axle, then Axle Rosie as I wrote draft after draft after draft. Finally, she became Axle Annie. Of course I needed to give the main character a problem. Winter driving can be a problem for me. I decided to write a story about a character who is much braver about driving in the snow than I am. That was a chal-

lenge I gave myself. And then I gave Axle Annie the much bigger challenge of driving up Tiger Hill in snowstorms! That was the first book, *Axle Annie*.

By the way, I admire teachers and owe a lot to them, but I never considered becoming a schoolteacher, because I was always terrified of speaking in front of people. Funny, isn't it, that now, because of my writing, I find myself driving (often in snow) to schools to speak in front of people!

**Readers who read your earlier book, *Axle Annie*, are familiar with the lovable, optimistic, and determined bus driver. Does she plan to have other adventures? If so, can you speculate what else might happen?**



**RP:** I love Axle Annie. I love sharing her stories with kids. Part of the reason I love her so much is Tedd Arnold's brilliant illustrations, which certainly bring her to life. I'm not sure whether there will be other adventures, though. I sold *Axle Annie and the Speed Grump* **six years** before it was published! Tedd, who is a successful author as well as illustrator, was so booked up with projects it was a few years before he could tackle the illustrations. Meanwhile, I haven't written another Axle Annie. Of course I have thought about other adventures. Maybe I would write about a bully on the bus, or a challenging field trip, or a bus maintenance problem, or some other problem that all school bus drivers find themselves contending with. I'm open to suggestions!

**Many adults assume that children's writers begin a story with a lesson in mind they want to teach their young readers. That, of course, isn't often true. But in *Axle Annie and the Speed Grump*, a story with a strong message about the consequences of being unmannerly as well as ignoring rules and laws, DID you have that lesson in mind when you began?**

**RP:** I wouldn't say that I had a lesson in mind. I usually start a story with a problem and then find a main character to go with it. But in both the Axle Annie

books, I started with the main character. Then I needed to find a problem for her, one that readers could identify with. A universal problem for school bus drivers is reckless, thoughtless drivers like Rush Hotfoot. For Rush Hotfoot, the consequences came naturally as I wrote the story.

**You invented the Grouch and Grump Club in your first Annie book, *Axle Annie*. What role do you feel the club plays (besides being enormously funny) in helping you tell the Annie stories?**

**RP:** The Grouch and Grump Club adds humor and change of pace. It gives the characters a chance to talk out their problems in dialogue. It was also my way, as the author, of offering the illustrator a break from being on the school bus. In picture books, it's important for authors to provide changes of scene for illustrators to work with. I thought it would be fun to bring in some kind of club, because I think kids like the idea of clubs. I know I did.

So—when writing *Axle Anne and the Speed Grump*—I wanted to give the story the same shape as *Axle Annie*. The Grouch and Grump Club brings Axle Annie and Rush Hotfoot face to face in this story.

**You must have had many conversations with young**

**readers about Rush Hotfoot and his behavior throughout the story. How have these readers felt about Axle Annie's response when Rush is in trouble? How have they responded to Annie's caring for her fellow human being, despite his rudeness?**

**RP:** This is a fascinating question. Most kids don't question Annie's caring, at least not to me. But one did recently ask, "Why did Annie help Rush if he's so bad?" I expect he was voicing a question in other young readers' minds. I suppose this gets to the root of my personal value system. I believe in forgiveness and second chances, and that belief creeps into my stories. Some people, like Rush Hotfoot, just need to learn hard lessons. That said, I wanted to be very, very careful in this story that Annie didn't risk her own, or her kids' safety, when she rescued Rush Hotfoot. So I consulted with a number of bus drivers about what she could do.

**Upstate New York, where you grew up and now live is an enormously snowy place in the winter. Do you have interesting snow stories to tell from your life?**

**RP:** Oh, sure! Until I was seven, my family lived in a small country house at the top of a big hill. One storm blew the snow

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in drifts up to our second story window. We were stuck in our house and we couldn't get out the door. In those years, I rode a school bus to school, which was at the top of another huge hill, Tiger Hill in Phelps, New York. The town used to close Tiger Hill to traffic in the winter, so we kids could use it for sledding. Very exciting and scary!

### How can readers learn more about you and your books?

**RP:** Please visit my Web site at [www.robinpulver.com](http://www.robinpulver.com). You'll find a bio, information about my books and school visits, a Q & A for writers, and bookmarks and coloring sheets to print out.

## Books by Robin Pulver

- **Alicia's Tutu.** Dial, 1997.
- **Author Day for Room 3T.** Houghton Mifflin, 2005.
- **Axle Annie.** Dial, 2002.
- **Axle Annie and the Speed Grump.** Penguin, 2005.
- **Christmas for a Kitten.** Albert Whitman, 2003.
- **The Holiday Handwriting School.** Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- **Homer and the House Next Door.** Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- **Mrs. Toggie's Beautiful Blue Shoe.** Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- **Mrs. Toggie's Class Picture Day.** Scholastic, 2000.
- **Mrs. Toggie and the Dinosaur.** Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- **Mrs. Toggie's Zipper.** Simon & Schuster, 1990.
- **Nobody's Mother Is in Second Grade.** Dial, 1992.
- **Nouns and Verbs Have a Field Day.** Holiday House, 2006.
- **Punctuation Takes a Vacation.** Holiday House, 2003.
- **Way To Go, Alex!** Albert Whitman, 1999.

