

# • Meet the Author •

## Christine Kole MacLean

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



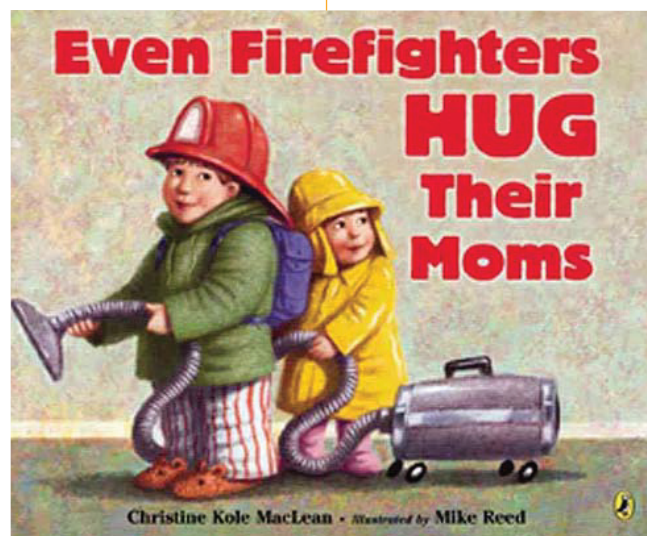
Christine Kole MacLean has been a professional writer and editor for twenty years. Inspired by her children, she began writing juvenile fiction in 2001. Her first picture book, *Even Firefighters Hug Their Moms*, was highlighted in *Time* magazine and *USA Today*. Scholastic recently selected her first novel for children, *Mary Margaret and the Perfect Pet Plan*, for its book fairs and clubs. Two more novels about Mary Margaret and a young adult novel are forthcoming. Christine lives with her husband and two children in West Michigan. Find out more at [www.christinekolemaclean.com](http://www.christinekolemaclean.com).

**What was your inspiration for *Even Firefighters Hug Their Moms*? One can't help but wonder if your personal experience is that of the mom!**

**CKM:** It absolutely is. One morning my then four-year-old son raced through the kitchen wearing his fireman's helmet, rain slicker, and a Tigger backpack, to which he had attached the vacuum cleaner hose. I asked him for a hug. "Too busy fighting fires," he said. And I thought, a little wistfully, "Even firefighters hug their moms." I immediately thought it was a good idea for a picture book and I jotted the phrase down in my journal. That book will always have a special place in my heart because essentially it's a snapshot of the way we spent our days when my children were young.

**Part of the work of writing a story like *Even Firefighters Hug Their Moms* is deciding which careers you will include and which you won't. What were some of the careers you considered but didn't include? Please reflect on the things that helped you make your choices and the role that potential illustration opportunities played.**

**CKM:** To begin with, I simply chose my son's favorites. The firefighter, police officer, and garbage truck driver were his top three. (For about four years, my living room looked like the "garbage truck" scene in the book—and I'm not exaggerating!) After my editor accepted the book, she asked me to add two or three more jobs; she suggested a baseball player and a news reporter,



I think. But I thought one of the appealing elements—to boys like mine, at least—was that each job involved big equipment, flashing lights, and loud noises. So I added the train conductor and astronaut scenes.

**Were any of Mike Reed's illustrations especially surprising or delightful to you? Did he use household items, furnishings, or architecture in ways you hadn't yet imagined?**

**CKM:** When I was writing the story, I envisioned the boy in the story using common household objects, because that's where kids' imaginations—and all the fun!—come in, and I had shared that with my editor. Mike added his own ideas, e.g., the wagon as the police car and cardboard box for the rocket. My favorite was his idea to use the ceiling fan for the helicopter blades. It was inspired!

**What were you like as a child? Were you highly imaginative like the main character of the story, were you a follow-the-leader younger sibling like the little sister, or were you someone else entirely?**

**CKM:** I'm the youngest of six kids, and I think I followed a lot. It was the only way my brother and sisters would let me play with them. There was a big grove of trees—almost a woods, really—and each of my siblings had built their own "house," which they'd patched together

out of leftover lumber. We called the grove "Shanty Town" and, in addition to the houses, we had a general store, a church, and a pet graveyard. We'd play different roles, e.g., store owner or minister.

Usually, I just did what my siblings told me to, a lot like the little girl in the book. Once when I was helping one of my sisters put a roof on her house, she dropped a piece of sheet metal on me, and it cut my head. We had a lot of freedom in Shanty Town, but we also made a lot of trips to the doctor for tetanus shots!

However, I do remember being the star in my own imagination, making up newspaper headlines about myself, such as *Girl Sees Snake, Stifles Scream*. That sort of thing.

**If the young Christine were the main character of the story, what are some of the imaginative careers you might have played at?**

**CKM:** I loved horses and had one of my own. Until I was about twelve, when I wasn't riding a horse, I was pretending to

be one. Other than that? Horse trainer, jockey, or champion rider. I guess you could say my imagination was narrow and deep rather than broad.

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

**CKM:** Visit my site—[www.christinekolemaclean.com](http://www.christinekolemaclean.com). It has all the usual things, including lesson plans. But the best part of the site is a blog written by one of my main characters, Mary Margaret. She's much funnier than I am. Really. Even my mother says so!

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist and member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. She is the author of four picture books, most recently Our Librarian Won't Tell Us ANYTHING! A Mrs. Skorupski Story (UpstartBooks, 2006) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*

## Books by Christine Kole MacLean

- *Even Firefighters Hug Their Moms*. Penguin, 2002.
- *Everybody Makes Mistakes*. Penguin, 2005.
- *Mary Margaret and the Perfect Pet Plan*. Penguin, 2004.
- *Mary Margaret, Center Stage*. Penguin, 2006.