

• Meet the Author •

Deborah Hopkinson

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit www.tonibuzzeo.com).



Photo courtesy of jacketflap.com

Deborah Hopkinson is the author of picture books, short fiction, and nonfiction. Her award-winning works include *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*, winner of the 1994 International Reading Association award, as well as *Apples to Oregon* and *A Band of Angels*, both winners of the Golden Kite award and ALA Notable books. *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek* was also an ALA Notable. Her 2009 books include *Home on the Range*, *Keep On!*, *Stagecoach Sal*, and a picture book on Michelle Obama. She lives in Oregon and is a vice president at the Pacific Northwest College of Art.

Fannie Farmer is both an interesting and unusual character for a children's picture book. How did you come upon the idea to write a book about her?

DH: I am very much interested in women's history and knew about Fannie Farmer from my childhood in Massachusetts. When I stumbled upon her story in a book of women inventors I got inspired to write about her. In her time, Fannie was as well known as some of our celebrated food writers are today.

Marcia Shaw was an actual child, according to "SEVENTH COURSE (THE NUTS): More about Fannie Farmer." How did you learn more about her?

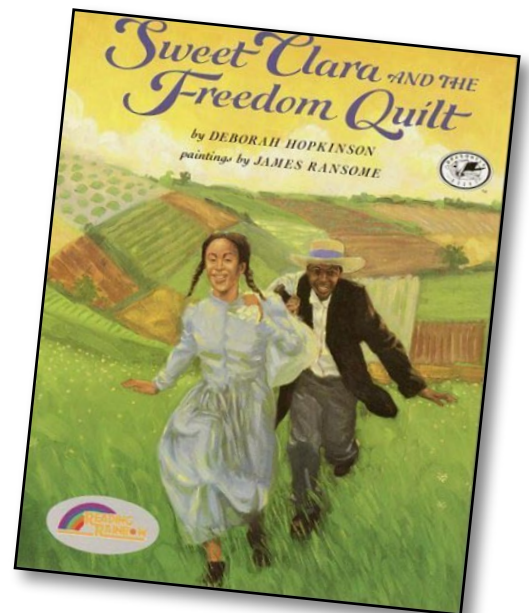
DH: Actually, it was difficult to find very much about her, though I got an intriguing call from a descendent of Marcia after the book came out confirming that Fannie had lived with the family and taught Marcia to cook. The gentleman who called me recollected hearing "Aunt Marcia" talk about Fannie when he was a boy—but the story Marcia told was that she was the one who suggested level measurement to Fannie!

Maine libraries on the MaineCat Statewide Library Catalog and libraries in the Metro-Boston Library Network have inconsistently catalogued Fannie in the

Kitchen as fiction or non-fiction. Which is it, from your author's perspective, and why?

DH: That surprises me, because there should be absolutely NO question that the book is historical fiction. That is the very first thing I tell students when I present in schools: when we put words in people's mouths that they didn't say, we are writing fiction!

What were some of the more challenging aspects of researching this book? Can you share some of the interesting aspects of your research journey?



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DH: This book, unlike some of my other historical fiction works, is definitely a lot more fiction than research-based. It takes one incident—a footnote to history, really, and embellishes it. The author's note is based on biographical information on Fannie Merritt Farmer. And I think Nancy Carpenter's exaggerated and humorous artwork reinforces the fictional aspects of this story, which attempts to play with history in a fun way.

While you are also an accomplished author of novels and longer nonfiction, you are well known for your picture books for older readers. What draws you to this genre in particular and why was Fannie's story perfect for it?

DH: Well, partly I write picture books because I have always pursued a full time career in

philanthropy at the same time as being a writer—and it is just easier to write shorter books. I am personally drawn to the stories of ordinary people and, especially, women's history. In Massachusetts I had heard about the "Fannie Farmer cookbook" or "Fannie Farmer" chocolates, but never realized there was a real person behind the name.

What was your response to the illustrations in the book?

DH: I love Nancy Carpenter's work here, which combines original illustrations with Victorian era "clip art." Her artwork provides wonderful examples of how illustrations can enhance and extend an author's text. I especially love the candles Marcia makes—I never imagined them to be quite that long until I saw Nancy's art.

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

DH: I have a website, www.deborahhopkinson.com. I do my best but with a demanding job, writing deadlines, and speaking engagements, it's not as fancy as I would like. Hopefully people would prefer that I keep writing rather than spend time updating my home page!

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Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of ten picture books, most recently The Great Dewey Hunt (UpstartBooks, 2009) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.

