



Julie Andrews Edwards & Emma Walton Hamilton

TeachingBooks Original Movie Transcript

Julie Andrews Edwards and Emma Walton Hamilton, interviewed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 5 and 6, 2008.

This is a transcript of the movie available on TeachingBooks.net. It is offered here to give you a quick assessment of the program topics, as well as to enable people with auditory disabilities access to the words.

Because this is a transcript of an edited movie, it should not be used as an assessment of Ms. Edwards's and Ms. Hamilton's writing. Many of the sentences found here were edited, and all editing decisions are the sole responsibility of TeachingBooks.net.

Julie: My father was a teacher and he instilled in me the love of reading. It is so important that when children are growing up that they are read to ... to sit them on your lap, to trace the lines of the story with your finger, and to talk about the illustrations.

On *Simeon's Gift* and the Performing Arts

Julie: When I read a book, I see it in my mind's eye and I see it as if it's on a stage. [Reading from the opening of *Simeon's Gift*] *"A long time ago, when castles and monasteries dotted the land and knights went forth to do brave deeds, when women wove beautiful tapestries and minstrels played for pauper and prince alike, there lived a humble musician named Simeon. Though uneducated and penniless, he was a gentle, nature-loving man, and music was his passion."*

In the case of *Simeon's Gift*, that little book has had the most amazing journey. I wrote it with my daughter Emma.

Emma: We wrote a story about a young musician in medieval times, trying to find himself. We've always thought that integrating reading with the arts was a natural because they seemed so—in fact, they are so—synergistic: the arts and reading.

Julie: It was suggested that we might do *Simeon's Gift* as a play for children, and I was delighted because that's exactly where my heart is. How wonderful it is if I can make one of my stories come alive and children can see it and imagine it for themselves. And the next thing I knew somebody suggested, "Why don't you write it with a symphony orchestra in mind? Why don't you have a big orchestra behind you that illustrates the book in a different way?"

On *Simeon's Gift* and Reader's Theater

Emma: One of the best opportunities for teachers to work with books like this I think is the concept of Reader's Theater – taking a scene from a book or the whole story and adapting it with kids. There are a whole bunch of different ways to do that. There is a structured approach to Reader's Theater where there are scripts available with formats and templates online. Or you can just go very organic with it and work with the students to adapt the script, to break it into

scenes, and to assign characters to the individual students. I suggest just start improvising; just start talking and let's see what happens, and then begin to grow that into a scene. These activities give students an opportunity to actually put themselves in the shoes of the characters.

On Writing

Emma: When Mom and I started writing together, it felt natural to bring our experience with the performing arts to what we do with children's books. We both think very visually; we think very dramatically.

Julie: Because I come from the theater, I think I use the images of the theater and of movies a great deal. I see it in my head. I can't help but think visually that way.

Emma: When we write, we think in terms of an opening sequence and then scene changes: then sort of "an 11 o'clock number," as they say, moving towards the climax. We think very dramatically, and we've tried to focus our passion for the arts in much of what we write.

Julie: When Emma and I write together, I think she's the nuts and bolts of the story and I think my contribution is more the flights of fancy and the bits of imagination. The very first book I ever wrote was a book called *Mandy*. When I finished *Mandy*, I so enjoyed the writing process that I felt a little bit lonely, and I sort of wanted to write some more. I so enjoyed the characters that I was living with.

The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles is all about using your imagination. I was looking for a word in a thesaurus one day and I suddenly stumbled across the word "whangdoodle." I found a description of a whangdoodle, and it was a humorous, mythical creature of fanciful and undefined nature, and I thought, "heavens if it's undefined maybe I could be the one to define it."

My daughter Emma and I wrote a story about the theater called *The Great American Mousical*. I was in a show, on Broadway, and it was discovered that there was a little mouse in our wardrobe department. There's an awful lot of mice below the stage you know, way way way down in the bowels of the theater, and a light bulb went off in my head and I thought, "Oh my gosh, that would be a wonderful way to bring the theater to children of a young age."

If you can instill a love of reading in your children, you are so far ahead of the curve at school, in your life in general, and your imagination is so much more lively and it stimulates so much. I thank heavens for the father that gave me that to begin with.

Books by JULIE ANDREWS EDWARDS AND EMMA WALTON HAMILTON

- THANKS TO YOU: WISDOM FROM MOTHER & CHILD, HarperCollins Children's Books, 2010
- VERY FAIRY PRINCESS, THE, Little, Brown, 2010
- JULIE ANDREWS: A COLLECTION OF SONGS, POEMS, AND LULLABIES (illustrated by James McMullan), Little, Brown, 2009
- THE GREAT AMERICAN MOUSICAL (illustrated by Tony Walton), HarperCollins Children's Books, 2007
- DUMPY'S EXTRA-BUSY DAY (illustrated by Tony Walton and Katherine H. Boyd), HarperCollins Children's Books, 2006

- DUMPY'S VALENTINE (illustrated by Tony Walton and Ruby Randig), HarperCollins Children's Books, 2006
- DRAGON: HOUND OF HONOR, HarperCollins Children's Books, 2005
- DUMPY'S APPLE SHOP (illustrated by Tony Walton and Cassandra Boyd), HarperCollins Children's Books, 2004
- DUMPY'S HAPPY HOLIDAY (illustrated by Tony Walton), HarperCollins Children's Books, 2004
- DUMPY TO THE RESCUE! (illustrated by Tony Walton and Cassandra Boyd), HarperCollins Children's Books, 2004
- DUMPY AND THE FIREFIGHTERS (illustrated by Tony Walton), HarperCollins Children's Books, 2003
- SIMEON'S GIFT (illustrated by Gennady Spirin), HarperCollins Children's Books, 2003
- DUMPY AND THE BIG STORM (illustrated by Tony Walton), Hyperion Books for Children, 2002
- LITTLE BO IN FRANCE, (illustrated by Henry Cole), Hyperion Books for Children, 2002
- DUMPY AND HIS FRIENDS ON THE FARM (illustrated by Tony Walton), Hyperion Books for Children, 2001
- DUMPY AND HIS PALS (illustrated by Tony Walton), Hyperion Books for Children, 2001
- DUMPY SAVES CHRISTMAS (illustrated by Tony Walton), Hyperion Books for Children, 2001
- DUMPY AT SCHOOL (illustrated by Tony Walton), Hyperion Books for Children, 2000
- DUMPY THE DUMP TRUCK (illustrated by Tony Walton), Hyperion Books for Children, 2000
- LITTLE BO, (illustrated by Henry Cole), Hyperion Books for Children, 1999

Additional Books by Julie Andrews Edwards

- HOME: A MEMOIR OF MY EARLY YEARS, Hyperion, 2008
- LAST OF THE REALLY GREAT WHANGDOODLES, THE, HarperCollins Children's Books, 1974
- MANDY, HarperCollins Children's Books, 1971

Additional Books by Emma Walton Hamilton

- RAISING BOOKWORMS: GETTING KIDS READING FOR PLEASURE AND EMPOWERMENT, Beach Tree Books, 2009

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The reader's theater footage of *Simeon's Gift* was filmed by and used with permission from the Bay Street Theatre and the First Presbyterian Old Whaler's Church, Sag Harbor, New York

production. The production featured Everett Bradley, Brynn O'Malley, Liz Pearce, Josh Walden and Max Von Essen, staged by Marcia Milgrom Dodge, Music Director - David Krane.

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