

# Margaret Hodges

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Margaret Hodges was born Sarah Margaret Moore on July 26 1911 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Her father, Arthur Carlisle was a businessman. Her mother, Anna Marie Moore, died six months after Margaret was born (Peacock 75). An older cousin, Margaret Carlisle, moved in with the family to care for the household which included Margaret, her brother, father and grandfather (Hodges 183). Cousin Margaret was one of the first to introduce Margaret to books. She always gave books as gifts to the child. She read Robert Louis Stevenson, Beatrix Potter, Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, and Louisa Alcott. Mr. Carlisle also often read aloud to his children. He would recite long poems at the fireplace, and Margaret learned this talent from her father (Hodges 185).

Margaret was also introduced the art of storytelling at the Second Presbyterian Church Sunday school. Eleanor Kirby's superb storytelling had a lasting effect on the young girl (Hodges 184). It was at an early age, too, that Margaret began to write her own stories. At the Number 60 Public School in Indianapolis, she had a story published in a little school magazine. The story was called "Miss Matty's Library, and in it Margaret described a small, cozy neighborhood library where children are helped by a friendly librarian. She also sent a poem to *St. Nicholas Magazine*, a popular children's magazine at the time (Hodges 186).

Later, Margaret was enrolled at Tudor Hall, a prep school for girls. During her sophomore year, she was introduced to Fletcher Hodges. He was the brother of her best friend. She has said of him, "He was in his senior year at Harvard and therefore the most exciting male creature I had as yet encountered" (Hodges 188). They were engaged on December 31, 1928, but they would not marry until 1932, because she still had to work on her college degree (Hodges 188). She attended Vassar College, where she studied English and participated in theater. It was at Vassar that she studied the Stanislavsky method of acting in which an actor empathizes with the character being portrayed. She would later use this method in her storytelling (Peacock 76). In September of 1929 the stock market crashed, and Arthur told Margaret that he could not afford to send her back to Vassar. Determined to finish her degree, Margaret applied for and received a scholarship (Hodges 188). She graduated with honors in 1932 (Peacock 73).

Margaret Moore became Mrs. Fletcher Hodges on September 10, 1932. During the depression, Fletcher Hodges was able to get a job working on the private collections of materials relating to the composer Stephen Collins Foster. The job would last fifty years. In 1937, it brought the couple to Pittsburgh, where Fletcher was the curator of the University of Pittsburgh's Stephen Foster Memorial. They lived in Shadyside, and eventually had three sons: Fletcher III, Arthur Carlisle, and John Andrews (Hodges 188-189).

After her children had grown some, Mrs. Hodges began to volunteer at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. She felt honored when she was asked to adapt and tell Arthurian Legends to children in the library. She also wrote scripts for a radio program called "The Children's Bookshelf" (Peacock 76). In 1953, she was asked to take a paid position as a storyteller for a radio program called "Let's Tell a Story." Later, in 1964, the radio program became "Tell Me a Story", a

nationally broadcast television program on Pittsburgh's WQED-TV. Mrs. Hodges says of her experience, "The art of storytelling thrilled me because I saw it as a way to lead children to good literature, to leap the boundaries between literacy and illiteracy, and to bring the marvelous old tales to listeners of all ages" (Hodges 191).

Two years after working at Carnegie Library, Mrs. Hodges decided to apply for a scholarship that would enable her to earn a Master's degree in Library Science. She attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology, which is now known as Carnegie Mellon University, and in 1958 she earned her M.L.S. (Commire 96). This program eventually became the Library and Information Science Program at the University of Pittsburgh.

Around the same time, Margaret Hodges began her career as a children's author. Her first book, *One Little Drum*, was published by Follett Publishing Company in 1958. From then until 1974, she wrote many other stories about boys, based upon her own experiences and upon those of her sons (Hodges 190).

Mrs. Hodges continued to work at the Carnegie Library until 1964, when she left to join the Head Start program as Story Specialist for Pittsburgh Public Schools. At the same time, Dr. Harold Lancour, the Dean of the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Library and Information Science, asked Mrs. Hodges to teach a course in storytelling. She eventually taught all the courses in children's services. In 1978, she retired as professor emeritus from the University of Pittsburgh (Hodges 192).

While attending the Carnegie M.L.S. program, Margaret Hodges had the opportunity of studying under Elizabeth Nesbitt. She took two of Nesbitt's courses, Folklore and Storytelling, and they were to influence Mrs. Hodges throughout her life (Hodges 190-191). While teaching in the same program at the University of Pittsburgh, she was able to pay tribute to her influential teacher. In 1976 she began developing the Elizabeth Nesbitt Room, which now houses much of her own work (Hodges 192). Later, during her many travels, Mrs. Hodges became interested in old and rare children's books. While in England, she purchased a rare copy of Beatrix Potter's *Tailor of Gloucester* to be placed in the Elizabeth Nesbitt Room (Hodges 195).

Travel would become very special and important to Mrs. Hodges, and many of her later books have been influenced by her experiences abroad. She and Fletcher took their first trip to England in April of 1968 (Hodges 192). This was the first of many trips, and the couple often spent summers in small English villages. Many books came of these adventures including: *The Gorgon's Head*, *Persephone and the Springtime*, *The Avenger*, *Lady Queen Anne*, *Hopkins of the Mayflower*, *The High riders*, and *Knight Prisoner: The Story of Sir Thomas Malory and His King Arthur*. A trip into Ireland, Scotland, the Orkney Island, Wales, and Southern England inspired *The Other World*, *Myths of the Celts*. A journey into the lands of the Vikings sparked the writing of *Baldur and the Mistletoe*. A 1974 trip to Leningrad stirred her interest in *The Little Humpbacked Horse*, a *Russian Tale*. She later adapted the tale, and it was published in 1980 (Hodges 193).

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The 1974 trip also allowed Mrs. Hodges the opportunity to meet Katherine Briggs, an eminent British storyteller and folklorist. The two women quickly became friends, and Katherine Briggs visited Margaret Hodges in Pittsburgh many times. Mrs. Hodges dedicated her retelling of an English folk tale, *Buried Moon* to Katherine Briggs. Also, the cap and gown worn by Katherine Briggs upon receiving an honorary degree from Oxford University is now on display in the Elizabeth Nesbitt Room (Hodges 193).

Another individual she met during her travels was Joseph Campbell, a man who has been prolific on the subject of mythology. Mrs. Hodges held an interview with him after the publication of his *The Mythic Image*. The conversation inspired her to write the collection, *If You Had a Horse, Steeds of Myth and Legend* (Hodges 196).

In 1980, Margaret Hodges, together with Susan Steinfirst, published a revised and enlarged edition of Elva S. Smith's *The History of Children's Literature: A Syllabus with Selective Bibliographies*. The original, published in 1937 by the American Library Association, had been very popular with educators, librarians, and students. Margaret Hodges and Susan Steinfirst updated the older version and added chapters on "Folklore in the History of Children's Literature" and "Illustrators of Books for Children" (Hodges 196).

After retiring in 1978, Margaret Hodges attended seminars in the Graduate English Department of the University of Pittsburgh. These courses resulted in the retelling of *St. George and the Dragon*. The picture book was superbly illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman, and in 1984 it received the distinguished honor of the Caldecott Award for best picture book (Hodges 197).

Inquiries, ideas, and journeys often became research projects for Mrs. Hodges. These would then become creative works of children's literature. She has said of her work, "I don't see myself as a creator, but rather as a sort of midwife, simply bringing out life that existed in itself before I ever took pen in hand (Hodges 200). In 1980, she began to trace the life of author Merriam Sherwood, who had translated *La Chanson de Roland*. She wanted to rescue the author's work from obscurity. Mrs. Hodges finally discovered that Sherwood had also been a Vassar graduate. Finally, after many inquiries, she contacted the family lawyer and discovered a great deal about the fascinating Sherwood family. The lawyer gave Margaret Hodges a copy of an autobiography written by Sherwood's mother. She had raised not one, but five accomplished children. Mrs. Hodges told the story of this unique family in *Making a Difference, the Story of an American Family* (Hodges 197-198).

Margaret Hodges continued to travel and to be inspired by her journeys. In 1985, an opportunity to travel to Asia befell the couple, and they jumped at this chance. The trip took them to Japan, Hong Kong, China, and Hawaii. On this particular journey, Mrs. Hodges traced the life and work of Lafcadio Hearn, and eventually wrote *The Voice of the Great Bell* (Hodges 198-199).

She knew exactly how to reach into the minds and hearts of children, to know what it is that they enjoy, and to be able to really speak to them. Perhaps it was the richness of her own life, the journeys that she had taken, and the work she accomplished, that enabled her to see the world with the wonderment of a child's eye. She has said, "I had been a child who could 'believe three impossible things before breakfast.' A sense of wonder is still alive in me" (Hodges 194).

Margaret Hodges died on December 13, 2005.