

WHEN I GROW UP

Essay by author Laura Aimee Garn

I wrote an essay in fourth grade that is now framed on my wall at home. Titled "When I Grow Up," written in pencil on lined paper, it begins: "I'm going to be an Author when I grow up because I love books... The kind of books I'm going to write are going to be myteries (sic.) And they're going to be very exiting (sic.)" I had other precocious ambitions: I was going to be a tap dancer, have a mink coat and lots of jewels, marry a millionaire and move to Beverly Hills to meet some movie stars. (I had just seen the movie musical *Les Girls*, starring Gene Kelly and Mitzi Gaynor, which undoubtedly inspired the references to dancing, jewels and Hollywood.)



Laura Aimee Garn

When I discovered that little essay, I was around thirty years old. I was not the author of exciting mysteries, and mink coats, jewels, and millionaires were on a distant horizon. I had been the editor of my college newspaper, and I had once submitted a couple of children's book manuscripts to an editor. But I had gravitated to graphic design, completed a degree, and was working as an art director.

Just before I re-read the essay, by coincidence or design, I had started to write again. Without giving up my other activities, to which I eventually added becoming the mother of two wonderful girls, I wrote magazine articles, short stories, two attempts at a first novel, an improved first novel, a screenplay, and several children's books. Along the way, I completed an MFA in writing.

As the years went on I continued to write, but something was missing: readers! Except for my magazine pieces, I couldn't find a publisher for my work. I read books that recommended writing for *The Process*, not for the *Goal of Publication*. After two decades of *Process*, I thought they were full of it. I wrote a humorous piece about my experiences, entitled "Not For Publication." I couldn't get that published, either. "Editors hate pieces about writing. Give up," said a journalist friend. I didn't give up, but I turned my attention elsewhere for a while. I found opportunities in the nonprofit world, working in communications and then as president of a New York-based nonprofit involved in substance abuse prevention.

Years passed. I was occupied with other things. I had received enough positive reactions to feel that my work had some merit, but I felt stuck, until I founded Pretty Please Press. My approach to writing children's stories was exactly right for the Pretty Please mission—to entertain and educate through stories that are fun to read aloud. As the stories are humorous, they are ideal for parents who enjoy dramatic reading. Their text is full of vivid words and concepts to enhance a young child's language arts learning. They also contain messages about qualities that are important to character development, and can be used as a starting point for talks about values and ideals. I developed one of the books, *Bella Basset Ballerina*, into a musical play, which is ideal for performance by fifth graders. And now I am doing exactly what I planned to do *When I Grow Up*.