

BOOKS BY BARBARA O'CONNOR

***Beethoven in Paradise* (1997)**

A *Family Fun* Magazine
Best Children's Book of the Year
An ALA Popular Paperback for Young Adults

***Me and Rupert Goody* (1999)**

An ALA Notable Children's Book
A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year

***Moonpie and Ivy* (2001)**

A Parents' Choice Gold Award
A *Child Magazine* Best Book of the Year

***Fame and Glory in Freedom, Georgia* (2003)**

A Parents' Choice Gold Award
A Best Children's Book of the Year,
Bank Street College

***Taking Care of Moses* (2004)**

A Parents' Choice Recommended Award

***How to Steal a Dog* (2007)**

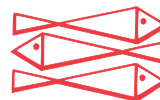


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BARBARA O'CONNOR



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I grew up in the fifties in South Carolina. I love the South. The people down there talk real slow and will eat anything as long as it's fried (including slimy, yucky, icky okra). In the summer, the air is thick and damp and the road gets so hot that it melts right off onto your feet. There are towns with names like Travelers Rest and Pumpkintown. Along the roadside, kudzu vines grow so fast they cover up signs and telephone poles and even whole barns.

As a child, I loved dogs, salamanders, tap dancing, and school. I even liked homework, especially tidy little worksheets, because I was a tidy little girl. I always had a pet turtle in a plastic bowl with a palm tree in the middle. Sadly, my turtles always died, so I had a very large turtle graveyard. In the closet of my bedroom was an ancient television set that you could see only if you turned out all the lights. My father could eat more hot peppers than anyone else in town, my mother made doll cradles from oatmeal boxes, and my sister would play paper dolls with me whenever I asked her. I knew I was lucky.

My favorite day of the week was the day the bookmobile came to my neighborhood. The books were never very good, but it was fun to be inside a library with wheels. You had to crawl around on the floor to find the children's books. I remember finding *The Pink Motel* by Carol Ryrie Brink. It held the position of "My Favorite Book" until I discovered the Trixie Belden mysteries. My second favorite book was *Babar* because that's the only children's book my grandmother had. Luckily, she also had a chicken coop that was filled with sand where my sister and cousins and I played house all day.

My grandfather grew peanuts in his garden,

and my grandmother always kept a big pot of them boiling on the stove. If you've never eaten a boiled peanut, I advise you to try it at least once in your life. You may not like it, but at least you can say you ate it!

On Sundays, my family often drove to the Smoky Mountains. The higher we got, the more the road twisted around and around. Sometimes we stopped the car and gazed out at the view below. I remember one spot where you could see five states (although I could never remember which states they were).

When it was time for me to go to college, it never occurred to me to leave the South. After graduating from the University of South Carolina with a degree in English, I decided it was time to see the rest of the country. I headed west to California, where only a few peculiar people ate boiled peanuts (including me). After that, I went to New England, where nobody ate boiled peanuts (except me). That's where I live now — in Duxbury, Massachusetts, a historic seaside village not far from Plymouth Rock. I have one husband, one son, one cat, and two dogs. I wish I had a turtle.

I love being a writer. I get to sit at my desk and pour my memories of a southern childhood into my stories. Sometimes my characters eat boiled peanuts. Sometimes they go to the Smoky Mountains. Maybe they see kudzu vines covering up barns or listen to church music on the radio inside their trailers. They might catch crawfish in an icy-cold stream or eat pickled okra from a jar. My stories have pieces of me in them — all mixed in with the made-up parts. That's what writers do — mix in the real stuff with the made-up stuff. And they can wear their pajamas all day long if they want to. What could be better than that?