



# IN CONVERSATION WITH **JEANNE BIRDSALL**

AUTHOR OF *THE LIBRARY OF UNRULY TREASURES*

## **This is your first new middle grade novel since the Penderwicks series ended. Why this book now?**

It took me this long to finish it. First came the research—eagles, steamboats, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mesopotamian deities, home construction, Edinburgh (I went there!), Scottish history, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. In my guise as a harmless little old lady, I also visited the museum, searching for places where the Lahdukan—my eight-inch-high creatures with wings—could hide or fly. No one cared where I went—into massive wooden hearths, under antique tables. A guard did ask if the oatmeal box I carried contained food, but when I showed him the Lahdukan-sized doll inside, he laughed and waved me on.

Then there was the writing itself, with false starts and sidetracks (time-travel—my poor editor). The history and customs of the Lahdukan slowed me down considerably. The more I learned (made up) about them, the more I wanted to know. The humans were easier to write—they arrived fully formed.

## **The Library of Unruly Treasures is set at . . . the library! What is your favorite thing about the library?**

The smell of old books, the whisper of turning pages, and, if you're in the right library, the Lahdukan who live there.

## **Gwen is a completely relatable main character. Is she based on anyone from your real life?**

She has my terror of heights and my freckles. The freckles, by the way, aren't in the text—they're from the pen of Matt Phelan, who illustrated this book. I haven't asked if his intention was to honor me—I'll just assume it was. That flippy haircut of Gwen's appears in my seventh-grade school picture, but I never showed that to Matt, so maybe it was ESP. All of his illustrations are marvelous. I have too many favorites to list, but wait until you see the Lahdukan toddlers crammed into card catalog drawers.

## **Gwen discovers Lahdukan, tiny creatures with wings, at the local library. How did you come up with the idea for the Lahdukan?**

A young friend of mine wanted to know why boy fairies don't wear skirts. I had no answer until a be-kilted boy fairy appeared to me and the Lahdukan were born. The kilt didn't last long—too hard to fly in. Nor did being fairies. The Lahdukan consider themselves far superior to those twinkly creatures.



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