

Writing their own *fairy tale*

Ever dream of becoming a children's book author? So did these three women. Here's how they each found a happy ending

By Ellen Welty

Maybe the idea hits when you're reading *Goodnight Moon* to your child for the 317th time. "Goodnight brush." "Goodnight mush." "Goodnight mush?!" you say to yourself. Gee, I could do this. Or maybe it's your own memories of staying up late to finish *The Secret of the Old Clock*. You think, I'd like to write a modern *Nancy Drew*.

Could you? Just what does it take to be a successful children's book writer? Lots of work, these three authors would say. But they love the rewards: letters and e-mails from kids who exclaim, "This is the best book I've ever read in my entire life!!!!"

KATIE DAVIS

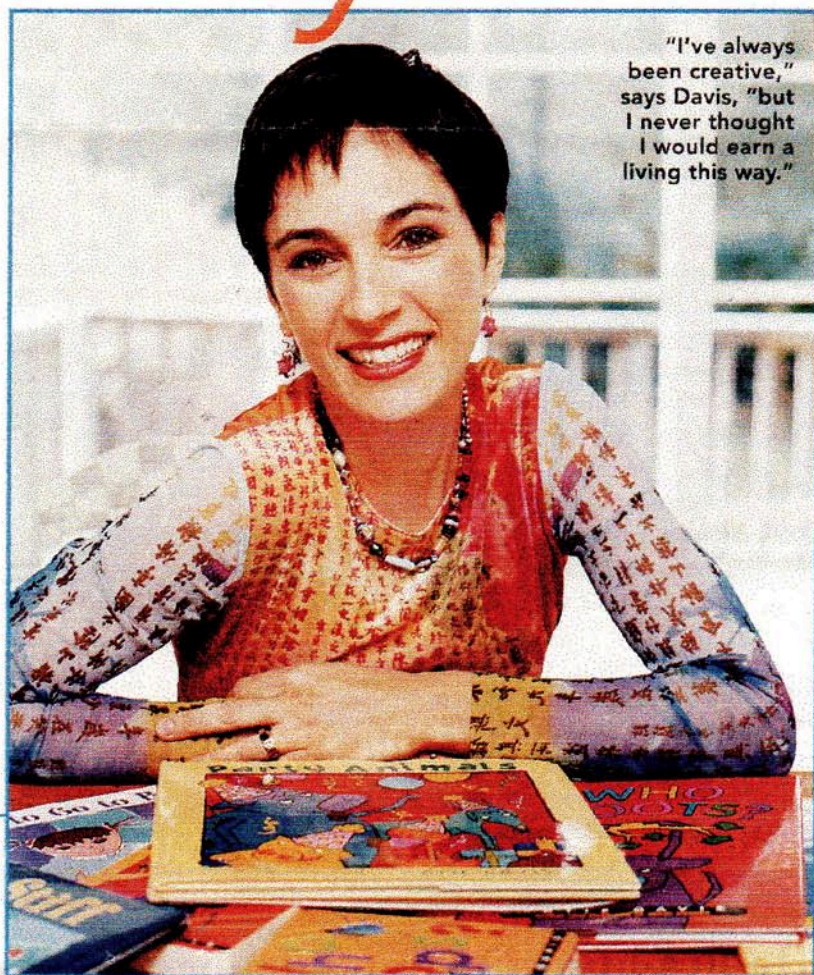
Her specialty Picture books

Credits Davis has published five titles. Her first—*Who Hops?*—has won several awards; plus, Paul Reiser read it to baby Mabel on the TV show *Mad About You*.

Going pro For years, Davis designed picture books for her family but didn't think of turning her talent into a career. That changed in 1996 when her husband, Jerry, a producer of animated features, urged her to attend the annual conference of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. There, Davis learned why none of the books she'd submitted to publishers had been accepted: "There's a format to picture book submissions, like there is with movies, and learning the format was crucial in helping me to come up with good ideas."

Her "are we there yet?" inspiration Struggling to entertain her then-three-year-old son, Benny, and infant daughter, Ruby, Davis created a car game, which she called *Who Hops?* After playing the game a few times, she turned to

"I've always been creative," says Davis, "but I never thought I would earn a living this way."



her husband and said, "This would make a great book." She spent the next six months writing and illustrating the story, which five years later has sold almost 60,000 copies.

Where to find her on a workday In the studio above the garage of her Bedford Hills, New York, home, where she recently finished *Mabel the Toothfairy and How She Got Her Job*, to be published this fall.

So, does she make a living? Yes, but not from her book income alone. Once or twice a month, Davis visits an elementary school, where she does her "one-woman show" for kids, inspiring them to read, write, draw, and dream about someday creating their own books. Her fee: \$750 to \$1,200, depending on the needs and location of the school. *(continued on page 87)*