

• Meet the Author •

Maxine Trottier

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit www.tonibuzzeo.com).

Grades
K–2, 3–5



Photo courtesy of execulink.com

Maxine Trottier is a prolific writer of books for young people. Born in Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan, on May 3, 1950, she moved to Windsor, Ontario, in Canada with her family ten years later. Now a Canadian citizen, she is a graduate of the University of Western Ontario.

Maxine spent 31 years as an educator in elementary classrooms, guiding children toward literacy. The students in her class saw each step in the creation of a new work.

She now lives with her husband, William, and their Yorkie, Moon, at Newman's Cove, Newfoundland. Her

studio overlooks the Atlantic Ocean; it is a wonderful place to write.

Your author note in *Migrant* reveals the story behind Anna's story. How did you first become aware of the Mennonite migrant workers? Have you known groups of them personally?

MT: My husband and I used to keep a sailboat at the marina in Leamington, Ontario. It was there that I first saw Low German Mennonites living and working in the community. They tended to keep to themselves; I had only one brief conversation with a Mennonite woman in some twenty-five years. She asked if her children might pet my dogs, but other than that, she stood shyly by.

Tell us more about the Canadian farms that these Mennonite migrants come to work on. What do they harvest besides tomatoes? How long is the harvesting season on the farms?

MT: I believe harvest runs until September or October, depending on the crop. They pick anything that might be sold as table produce: tomatoes, peppers, onions, let-

tuce. Leamington calls itself the tomato capital of the world, and I suspect it is. There are hundreds of greenhouses there, but the Mennonites work in the open fields.

The metaphors and similes in this book are so apt. Please discuss the development process for this book. How did you decide to use natural world metaphors, especially animals, to portray Anna's current life and the life she might lead if she weren't part of a migrant family?

MT: Leamington is very close to Point Pelee National Park, which is a wildlife preserve. The entire area is part of the flyway of which migrating birds make use. It's also the path that migrating monarch butterflies take. It was a logical thing to use the natural metaphors, as it's what that part of the country has always meant to me.

You've written many novels as well as picture books for children. How does writing one genre differ from another? What is especially appealing about each?

MT: With a novel, you have the possibility of detail and description. Picture book texts must be more tight and concise. Each has

Meet the Author

its appeal driven by the story I want to tell; it is the story, after all, that moves the writing. In the case of *Migrant*, the appeal was in telling a story without being heavy-handed. I let the imagery carry the tale, certain that children would be able to relate to the creatures that Anna imagines. Unlike a novel, where your description is painted on the inside of a reader's mind, the illustrator takes over, providing all the small details implied by your words. And I must say that Isabelle Arsenault did a lovely job of bringing the text to life.

In what ways does your former career as an elementary school teacher inform your writing?

MT: I began writing for children some twenty years into my teaching career. I had always admired picture books, and thought that I might be good at writing them. It was far more difficult than I imagined. It didn't take long for me

to understand that hard work, discipline, and practice—all the things I'd always stressed with my students—were going to be just as important for me as a writer. I had inspiration and hundreds of role models in the books that filled my classroom, but it was the hard work that mattered in finding my author's voice. It wasn't until I wrote "The Tiny Kite of Eddie Wing" that my writing style emerged. I learned to tell a story on several levels so that the youngest child would enjoy it, while an older audience could see other messages beyond the simplicity. But then teaching means meeting the needs of dozens of different children.

What ideas are you working on right now? Any other stories that are bubbling on the back burner and not quite ready to make it to the page yet?

MT: I am working on an adventure novel for Scholastic Canada, which is in the editing stage. I am also working on a novel set in Ireland and Newfoundland. There are always ideas percolating.

How can readers learn more about you?

MT: Visit my webpage at <http://www.maxinetrottier.com>. I do answer all emails.



*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of seventeen picture books, most recently *Inside the Books* (Upstart, 2012) and *Stay Close to Mama* (Hyperion, 2012) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.*