



STORY TALES

LOCAL AUTHOR
**JACKIE
MIMS
HOPKINS**

WRITTEN BY **ALICE HICKS**

“Getting kids excited about books and encouraging them to pursue their dreams is my passion.”

- Jackie Mims Hopkins
Local Author

At first glance, the chapters of Jackie Mims Hopkins’ life seem out of order. Not much of a reader as a child, Hopkins is now a librarian and children’s author. She says her biggest thrill these days is introducing children to literature. “I love reading, but it took me a long, long time,” says Hopkins. “Now I get to do two jobs I love that connect children and books.”

The 30-year Cy-Fair resident has been a librarian at Matzke Elementary for 15 years. Previously, Hopkins was a librarian at Horne Elementary and taught kindergarten through fourth grade in CFISD. Hopkins and her husband, Jeff, have raised two children in Cy-Fair: John, 27, and Katie, 24.

LIBRARIAN BY DAY

Hopkins says she decided to become a librarian after teaching for 15 years because of her love of children’s literature. “I was my happiest teaching when using literature,” says Hopkins. “So what better place to be than the library?” Hopkins participates in a job share program with Leanne Drake. They alternate weeks so that Hopkins can go on school visits, speaking engagements, book readings, and find time to write. “It works well because we have very similar philosophies and personalities,” says Hopkins.

Matzke’s library is a cozy, creative place. “I try to make the library a place that kids want to be,” describes Hopkins. “It’s friendly and inviting. We have a Cat in the Hat reading bathtub and a reading porch.” Hopkins says she feels it’s important to bond with each child in the school. “We have story time and see every kid every week,” says Hopkins. “We have over 900 students, but I think it’s important to connect with each kid.”

ROAD TO SUCCESS

Hopkins has published seven books and is working on her eighth. The inspiration for Hopkins’ first book, *Tumbleweed Tom on the Texas Trail*, came from the kindergarten class she was

teaching at the time. While searching for curriculum to teach her class about Texas, Hopkins realized that there wasn't any age-appropriate material readily available. "There were no picture books on Texas," recalls Hopkins. "So I decided to write one." It was at this moment that Hopkins knew she wanted to be a writer. Donna Frederick, retired director of Building Rainbows, the school where Hopkins taught, says, "She wrote the book for them. She actually brought tumbleweeds to class and the kids chased them."

But getting the book published wasn't easy. Tumbleweed Tom on the Texas Trail took 10 years from its beginning in the classroom to its final destination of the printing press in 1994. That delay didn't discourage Hopkins. "The writing process is hard, but the end result is worth it." When Hopkins travels to schools as a visiting author, she uses her publishing obstacles as a teaching tool. "I got lots of rejection letters," says Hopkins. "I still get rejection letters. I tell kids that you can't let people tell you you're not good enough."

ACHIEVING DREAMS

From Tumbleweed Tom, Hopkins moved to the fractured fairytale genre—taking a familiar tale and putting her own twist on it. Her first book of this type was *The Horned Toad Prince*, a re-telling of the Grimm Brothers' classic *Frog Prince*. Hopkins says the book is her favorite of all she's written. "There weren't any books about horned toads," says Hopkins. "It's now in a textbook called *Reading Street* by Scott Foresman."

The Horned Toad Prince tells the story of Reba Jo, a cowgirl who makes a deal with a horned toad. Featuring a surprise ending, the book garnered rave reviews and many awards, including the 2001 Willa Award for women writing about the West and the 2001 Storytelling World Award: Stories for Young Listeners. After the success of *The Horned Toad Prince*, Hopkins wrote another fractured fairytale, *The Three Armadillos Tuff*, a Texas version of the *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Hopkins' tale was turned into a play and performed at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. in 2004.

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Author Jackie Mims Hopkins and "The Horned Toad Prince"

Photo by Deb Colson

INSPIRING MINDS

Hopkins inspires children wherever she goes. Frederick says Hopkins' influence contributed to a class of kindergartners who still love to learn as adults. "They're so creative and have achieved so much—there are PhDs and lawyers from that class. I attribute part of that to the foundation they got with Jackie."

Hopkins' influence has spread to her own family. Her daughter Katie is now a teacher at Ault Elementary. "Mom was a big part of my learning to love to read," says Katie. "It was the coolest feeling in the world having my mom publish a story when I was in fourth grade. She definitely inspired me to become a teacher and work with children." Granddaughter Addison, 2, is a fan of her grandma's "Shelf Elf" books, which teach library etiquette and book care to kids. "We discuss each page and talk about what's right and wrong," says Hopkins. "I explain why it's wrong to tear a page and things like that."

KEEP DREAMING

Hopkins speaks at schools across the country and reads her books. "Getting kids excited about books and encouraging them to pursue their dreams is my passion," says Hopkins. One way she gets children hooked on books is by stirring their imagination. "I tell them story ideas are everywhere," says Hopkins. "You are living a story—you just have to pay attention." **CFM**

ALICE HICKS is a freelance writer and mother of two. She has written two children's stories and has many librarians in her family.