

Empowering Young Minds

Messages of Resilience and Self-Belief in Children's Literature

VICKIE L. GARDNER

"Children often face challenges as they are growing up. Stories provide a way to escape from those challenges or find a way to work through them."

In this exclusive interview with Vickie L. Gardner, author of the enchanting *The Adventures of Darby* series and the mesmerizing *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch*, we delve into the inspiration behind her stories and the passion that drives her creativity. From her childhood literary influences to her aspirations for young readers, Gardner shares her journey into the world of storytelling.

Discover how her real-life experiences, including family adventures in the Rocky Mountains, sparked the imaginative landscapes of her tales. Uncover the heartfelt motives driving her focus on children's literature, where she aims to empower young minds and instill a sense of belonging and self-assurance through her characters' journeys.

Gardner's dedication to crafting relatable characters facing personal challenges resonates profoundly in her works. Through her stories, she hopes to inspire resilience and self-belief, offering young readers a guiding light through life's trials.

From her early inspirations like Nancy Drew to her love for classic literature, Gardner invites us into her literary world and reveals the diverse influences shaping her storytelling.

Join us as we explore the creative mind behind these beloved children's stories, delving into Gardner's motivations, aspirations, and the exciting projects she has in store for her readers. Her passion for fostering confidence, dreams, and resilience in young hearts shines brightly through the pages of her captivating tales.

Vickie L. Gardner is the author

of the delightful *The Adventures of Darby* series for early readers, *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch*, a middle-grade novel, "A Hunter's Dream" and "Love on the Wild Frontier", both short stories.

Vickie was born in Utah, but has spent most of her life in Littleton, Colorado, where she lives with her husband and their two cats. A proposal manager by day, Vickie spends much of her off-time writing her stories and creating new adventures for children of all ages.

Vickie is a three-time graduate of the Institute of Children's Literature which helped springboard her into the world of writing and where *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch* story was born.

Vickie recently won a "Hindi's Libraries' 2022 Females of Fiction Contest

Silver Award" in the chapter book category for *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch*. She also won honorable mention in 2010 for "Love on the Wild Frontier." Vickie won second place in the 2015 Sportsman's News contest for "A Hunter's Dream", based on one of her son's elk hunting adventures.

Vickie loves spending time with her husband, her two children, and four grandchildren from whom she captures wonderful, and at times crazy, tidbits from their times together to help create her stories. She loves to travel, enjoys music and playing her piano. Vickie also enjoys being an amateur photographer, making jewelry, and spending time in the beautiful Rocky Mountains.

Are there any classic novels that you only recently read for the first time?

I am a big fan of

Jane Austen's stories and have just recently started reading her novels, though I've seen the movies many times. *Pride and Prejudice* is the classic novel I am reading now as I love that storyline and the characters from this great story are my all-time favorite of all of her characters.

What do you read when you're working on a book? And what kind of reading do you avoid while writing?

Though I love reading adult classics, romance, thrillers, suspense, and crime dramas, these are set aside while writing my children's books. I focus on other early-readers, young readers, and middle-grade books while I am writing my own children's books. I find that when I focus more on the same age and genre of the books I am writing, I feel inspired and glean great ideas on how I can approach my stories to develop them into a story a young child would love to read.

What moves you most in a work of literature?

When I read a story, I am moved most when I feel the passion of the author in their characters and in their storylines. That passion, more vividly, brings those characters to life and provides a bond or connection through the story clear to the end.

What kind of reader were you as a child?

I was an avid reader as a child. I had a large collection of books that varied in pre-teen and young-adult genre books. I could often be found sitting in the old gold swivel



PHOTO: Hindi's Libraries' 2022 Females of Fiction Award – *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch* won Finalist in the Chapter Book Category

Vickie L. Gardner, author of *The Adventures of Darby* series and *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch*, discusses her inspirations, childhood influences, and aspirations for young readers. Her tales, sparked by real-life experiences, aim to empower and instill resilience in children.

chair reading away, escaping into fantasy, and dreaming of being an author someday. I read as often as I could, but after I finished my homework, of course.

What do you plan to read next?

Next on my list of books to read is *Sense and Sensibility*, another one of my favorite Jane Austen stories. I've watched the movie many times and continue to enjoy the storyline and how the characters interact. Now I'd like to see how Jane saw the story unfold.

Why did you choose to write early-reader and middle-grade fiction?

My life growing up in the real world didn't often produce happy memories. I wasn't popular, I occasionally felt bullied, and I never felt that I really fit in with the in-crowds. I chose to write children's books in hopes that I could help youth to feel that each of them is important. The characters' struggles in my stories reflect, in some ways, my own struggles. I hope those who read my stories may feel a kinship to the characters and the difficulties they are experiencing. I want my readers to know they are not alone in the challenges they face. I hope that the happy endings in my stories help the readers with their self-confidence, know they are important, and have good things to look forward to in their life.

What inspired the plot of *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch*?

It all started many years before the first word of *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch* was written. My husband's parents own a 200-acre parcel in the Colorado mountains, where the story is set. When my two eldest grandchildren were growing up, they loved spending time at the property. They also loved treasure hunting, especially for gemstones. We took them out a few times to pick at the rocks to find their treasures. Family stories of ghosts came into play and over the years, these and many other experiences came together as I wrote stories for my literature courses. Though it wasn't the original plan, after completing my courses, I wasn't ready to end the journey. After several years of refining, my middle-grade novel *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch* was published.

What inspired the plot of *The Adventures of Darby* series?

The inspiration all started with a visit to Dolberry Hollow (or Holler as they say) near Scottsboro, Alabama. My husband relayed to me the story he had heard from the residents in the area about robbers that used a cave in the Holler to hide their stolen loot. I started writing the story about the cave and as I wrote down ideas and started developing my outline, the creativity took a turn I wasn't expecting. The cave remained, but the characters turned from robbers to furry little m'ites who look like tiny rabbits, who live in Dollberry Hollow.

There is no stolen loot in the series, but Darby, the main character, along with new-found friends, has wonderful adventures throughout the three-book series.

What are you currently working on?

I am currently working on the sequel to *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch*. I have titled it *Shadows on the Gulch*. I am anxious to continue the saga of the ghostly adventures on the Morgan Ranch. I am also working on a children's series about a young boy and his best friend, a magical mouse, and their Zip! Zap! Zoom! adventures through time and around the world.

What messages or lessons would you like your readers to take away from reading your books?

My characters in *The Ghost of Morgan Gulch* and in *The Adventures of Darby* series, are characters that struggle with something. They might struggle with self-confidence, feeling bullied, or struggling with feeling left out and not accepted by family or society. I hope my readers come away feeling that there is a good path in front of them to help overcome their own personal struggles, and they can accomplish their goals and gain confidence in themselves no matter who they are or what their circumstances are. The most important message is that no matter who they are, they are important to someone, especially to themselves.

What developed your passion for writing at a young age?

I had a collection of *The Nancy Drew Mysteries* written by Carolyn Keene, of which I read religiously and often. I had a great desire to be just like her in my writing and in my storytelling. I loved the mystery in her stories and how Nancy always solved the mystery. I also wanted to share my stories with others who loved to read, just as Carolyn had shared her stories with the world.

What do you love the most about writing children's stories?

I love being able to write my stories for young children and pre-teens in hopes that I can encourage them to have dreams, to believe that they can do anything they desire in life by having confidence in themselves, and to believe they can overcome the obstacles they encounter throughout their life.