

Anne Ylvisaker, author of **LITTLE KLEIN**



"Little," as featured in the name of the title character in Anne Ylvisaker's new novel, **LITTLE KLEIN**, came about in part from the stories her uncle told her about being called Little Ylvisaker growing up. He was, until her mother was born, the youngest of the Ylvisaker clan and a diminutive guy besides. "The family lived near a campus in St. Paul where each spring melting snows left a large pond in a depression on the lawn," the author says. "There was in the neighborhood a family of bullies called the Klein boys who drove around in a big blue pick up. One spring they built a raft to float out on that pond. They invited Little Ylvisaker to board, then once in the middle of the pond, they pushed him off into the cold water. So I had Little Ylvisaker on my mind, a raft, and a family of big boy bullies."

In **LITTLE KLEIN**, readers will also discover all these elements, as well as a cast of colorful characters in a rural river town circa 1949, where boys wrestle and fish, swipe pies, -- and sometimes quietly become heroes. The story of a boy and his loyal dog who roam freely and make mischief is a compelling portrait of a spirited family in bygone America.

The inspiration for Anne Ylvisaker's previous book, the novel-in-letters **DEAR PAPA**, also arose from a family trip down memory lane -- and a humbling moment in writing class when her teacher fell asleep as she read. Too discouraged to go back to the "bad novel" she'd been working on, the author brought to class instead three fictional letters she'd composed. They were written in the voice of a spunky girl of the 1940s, based loosely on her aunt, who had penned a similar letter to her beloved father before he died. After hearing only one of these letters read aloud, her teacher, the late children's writer Judy Delton, shouted, "Drop everything and write that book."

"I wrote as fast as I could to find out what would happen," Anne Ylvisaker says of the writing adventure that followed. "I loved getting to know the characters. I talked about them like they were real people. When their next-door neighbor Jimmy said, 'Wanna hop some scotch?' I laughed out loud." One of her biggest challenges, she says, was telling the story entirely through one-way communications--the letters of nine-year-old protagonist, Isabelle, to her late father and to living relatives and friends--a device that meant "everything had to go through Isabelle's filter." By imagining the letters her narrator might be responding to, the author was able to insert subtle, and often humorous, clues about the other characters as well.

When she's not writing, reading voraciously, or adventuring around her new hometown, Anne Ylvisaker "homeschools" herself in subjects such as drawing and photography, loves to cook, travel and go to art museums, and has recently taken up golf. She and her family live in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.