

## Catherine Gilbert Murdock A Biographical Essay

I grew up in small-town Connecticut, on a tiny farm with honeybees, two adventurous goats, and a mess of Christmas trees. My sister claims we didn't have a television, but we did — only it was ancient, received exactly two channels, and had to be turned off after forty-five minutes to cool down or else the screen would go all fuzzy. Watching Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* was quite the experience, because it's hard to tell vicious crows from a field of static; this might be why I still can't stand horror movies, to this day.

My sister Liz, who is now a Very Famous Writer (she wrote *Eat Pray Love*), was my primary companion, even though she wouldn't even *try* to jump off the garage roof; not once. Now she travels all over the world collecting stories and diseases, while I stay at home scowling over paint chips, and trying to keep my kids off our garage. So the cycle continues.

For the record, I did not play football or basketball in high school. I ran cross-country and track, badly, but I have absolutely no skill whatsoever with ball sports. Nor did I write much — Liz was the anointed writer — but I read my little eyeballs out. I was the empress of our library's four-shelf YA section. I still read YA and middle-grade fiction far more than any other genre. When someone recommends a book, I immediately ask, "Is it for grownups? Because I don't read those." This followed by "Does it have dragons?"

*Dairy Queen* was my first stab at creative writing since high school, not counting several years as a struggling screenwriter. I unabashedly recommend screenwriting for mastering the art of storytelling; just don't pin any hopes on seeing your work on the big screen. But you'll learn so much in the process that this won't matter. I also recommend, you know, *living*. I've been passionate about food pretty much my whole life — first eating it, now preparing and then eating it. And so it plays a pretty big role in my writing, and adds so much flavor . . . not literally, of course, but the more you can add that's *true*, whether it's emotion or geography or cuisine, then the stronger that story is.

**Catherine Gilbert Murdock** is the author of *Dairy Queen*, *The Off Season*, *Princess Ben*, and *Front and Center* (October 2009). She lives outside of Philadelphia with her family.