

Audrey Penn

Audrey Penn is an award-winning author of several books for children, including the highly acclaimed *New York Times* bestseller **The Kissing Hand**. She grew up outside Washington, DC, in Silver Spring, Maryland, but also spent a great deal of time in North Carolina. As a child, Audrey was quite a storyteller – gathering the neighborhood kids to entertain them with her imaginative tales. Her teachers told her she had a gift and encouraged her to write.

During the 1970s, Audrey was a ballet dancer, performing with such groups as the New York City Ballet, the National Ballet, and the Stuttgart Ballet in Europe. She began working with athletes in 1972, initially with the Pittsburgh Steelers, and continuing on to work with baseball players, ice skaters, and gymnasts. She has served as the dance coach to the US Figure Skating Team in preparation for the Pan American Games (1973), and was the US Gymnastic Team's dance coach in both 1974 and 1975.

Audrey's first book was **Happy Apple Told Me**, published in 1976. In 1979, however, she was confined to her bed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis – a debilitating disease that ended her dance career (and prevented her from walking). For the next 15 years, she endured many surgeries, including hip and shoulder replacements, and walked with crutches. During this period of restricted mobility, Audrey increasingly channeled her artistic talents toward writing stories and books for children. She went on to write her second book, **Blue Out of Season**, winner of a Very Special Arts Recognition Award, and has written many more books since.

Her most popular book to date, **The Kissing Hand**, published in 1993, was inspired by a real-life occurrence that happened in a park near her home. While riding a small train through a park, the train suddenly came to a stop. A raccoon mother and her tiny cub were on the tracks, and the mother was opening the cub's paw and appeared to be kissing it and putting it on the cub's face. Coincidentally, at the time, her own daughter was going through separation anxiety, so she used the concept of giving her a kiss to save for when she needed it – and it worked. Even today, wherever Audrey travels, she encounters people who continue to enjoy the book and tell her how they are using its reassuring message. **The Kissing Hand** continues to sell around 100,000 copies each year and has been followed by the highly successful sequels, **Pocket Full of Kisses**, released in 2004, and **A Kiss Goodbye**, released in 2007.

Mystery at Blackbeard's Cove, published in October 2004, is the first book in a four-part series. It is the culmination of a twenty-year project. Intending to write a novel about Blackbeard and the pirates who sailed with him and frequented the Outer Banks of North Carolina, Ms. Penn spent the better part of that time getting to know the pirate descendents who still reside on Ocracoke Island, NC, and researching the letters, journals, and diaries passed down through family and friends. She also spent many years with children from the island, who helped her bring to life the many adventures facing the story's characters. The book sold out of its first 10,000 copy print run in the first 10 weeks of its release, and was recommended by **Booklist**, the review journal published by the American Library Association. The second and third books in the series, **Blackbeard and the Sandstone Pillar: When Lightning Strikes** and **Blackbeard and the Gift of Silence**, released in 2007.

In addition to her writing, Audrey takes her educational program, the Writing Penn, into schools, libraries, and children's hospitals where she often shapes and refines her story ideas in partnership with kids. She is a much sought-after conference speaker for groups of teachers and other professionals who work with children.

Ms. Penn lives with her husband in Olney, Maryland, near Washington, DC. She has three children, all of whom excel at writing.