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# CASTLE IN THE ATTIC

BY

ELIZABETH WINTHROP

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## SUMMARY

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The old toy castle was magnificent! It had tall towers, a working draw bridge, and even a silver knight. It had been in William's nanny's family for many, many years. Now she was giving it to him as a farewell gift. When he picked up the knight for the first time, he felt it come alive in his hand. That was the beginning of his wonderfully magical adventure. At first, William uses the magic in a selfish way. When he realizes what he has done, he has to summon up all of his courage to right the wrong.

*Reviewed by [Mary Jane, South County Regional Library](#)*

From The Book Hive – Public Library of  
Charlotte & Mecklenburg County  
<http://www.bookhive.org> - accessed August 5, 2005



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### ELIZABETH WINTHROP

**ELIZABETH WINTHROP** grew up in Washington, D.C. She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College. Ms. Winthrop worked for a number of years as an editor in the children's book department of a major publisher. In 1972, she published her first book, *BUNK BEDS*.

Ms. Winthrop has written more than fifty books for children of all ages. Her children's novel, *THE CASTLE IN THE ATTIC*, has been nominated for twenty-three state book awards and won the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award in Vermont and the Young Readers Award in California. It has sold over a million copies and is included in elementary school curriculums all over the country. Movie rights for this book have also been sold. *THE BATTLE FOR THE CASTLE*, a sequel to *THE CASTLE IN THE ATTIC* recently published by Bantam in paperback, has been nominated for four state book awards. *BELINDA'S HURRICANE* was nominated for the prestigious Texas Bluebonnet Award in 1986. Her books have been translated into many languages and five of her books have been selections of the Junior Library Guild.

Winthrop is the daughter of the late Stewart Alsop, the political journalist. She lectures at schools and universities around the country and has taught at a number of writers conferences. *DOG SHOW* with illustrations by award winning New Yorker artist, Mark Ulriksen, is her latest picture book release. She has several new books for children under production with Random House, Henry Holt and Marshall Cavendish.

Adapted From the Elizabeth Winthrop Website  
<http://www.elizabethwinthrop.com/bio.html>- accessed August 5, 2005



## BOOK REVIEW

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School Library Journal Review: Gr 4-6 A satisfying quest fantasy with a strong element of modern realism which will appeal to a wide range of readers. Ten-year-old William is so distraught at the idea of his beloved housekeeper/nanny Mrs. Phillips returning to England that, with the aid of a magic token, he shrinks her into the size of the toy knight which inhabits a wooden castle that has been passed down in her family for generations. To undo his rash deed, William must be miniaturized himself and accompany the silver knight, Sir Simon, on a quest to overthrow Alastor, a wicked magician who long ago usurped the throne of what should have been Sir Simon's kingdom. William's pure and gentle heart enables him to triumph over both the magician and his own childish yearning to possess Mrs. Phillips. The plot is carefully constructed. William's real-life situation is a strong component of the story rather than a device whereby he can enter the fantasy world. His too-busy parents and his struggle to be mature enough to let Mrs. Phillips go are juxtaposed with his quest and struggle to defeat Alastor. Both William and Mrs. Phillips are sympathetic, well-developed characters. In contrast, William's pediatrician mother and architect father are sketchy, both in William's emotional life and in the author's realization of them. Adults may find the theme that a pure heart can triumph over evil is a bit overstated, and fantasy buffs may desire a more fully developed fantasy world, but for young readers new to fantasy this will be successful. Louise L. Sherman, Anna C. Scott School, Leonia, N.J.

From Novelist K-8- accessed August 5, 2005



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What has happened to make William upset?
2. Who is the Silver Knight and why did he arrive at William's house? What objects are passed on in your family? What meaning do these items have to you and/or your family members?
3. What did Mrs. Phillips mean when she told William "You have the kind of gentle soul that accepts the rules of chivalry?" Did this prove to be true?
4. Who said "I'm still going to find out a way to make you stay"? What way was tried? Did it work?
5. What does Mrs. Phillips mean when she says "Don't you see, if I go now, your mother and father will spend time with you. You and I, we're almost too close. It leaves other people out."
6. What are William's parents like? Describe their relationship with William. Which parent is he closer to? What is William's relationship to Mrs. Phillips?
7. Does friendship require trust? At what point in the book does William think he can trust Jason with his secret? Mrs. Phillips tells William "Believe in yourself and be your own spotter". How does being your own spotter require trust in **oneself**?
8. Does Mrs. Phillips know whether the castle will give William courage? Why doesn't Mrs. Phillips' touch bring the knight to life.

Adapted from [Teachers@Random](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/catalog) Catalog  
<http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/catalog>- accessed August 5, 2005



## AUTHOR INTERVIEW

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### **You grew up in a writing family didn't you?**

Yes, my father was a journalist. Stewart Alsop. He wrote a syndicated column with my uncle Joseph Alsop for the Herald Tribune. In their prime in the 50's, they had a readership of 25 million. In the days before television. But the writing goes back farther than that. My great grandmother, Corinne Douglas Robinson was a poet. And her brother, my great great uncle, Theodore Roosevelt, wrote thirty eight books. Of course, he was also the president of the United States, but it's the writing I like to focus on.

### **So you were related to Alice Longworth and Eleanor Roosevelt also?**

Yes, they were my grandmother's first cousins. Alice and I were good friends. I spent a lot of time at her house near Dupont Circle. She loved to gossip with me about the people who were coming to our house for dinner. And she had a needlepoint pillow on her couch which read "If you have something nasty to say about someone, come sit by me." I never met Eleanor which was too bad. I realized the other day that I was fourteen years old when Eleanor died and nobody had bothered to introduce me to her. That gives you an idea of how the Roosevelt connection was taken for granted when I was growing up. They were simply another branch of my father's family.

### **What was it like growing up in Washington, D.C. as the daughter of a world famous journalist?**

Strange and exciting. My father's best friends all worked for the news media or for the CIA. Information is power in Washington and my parents entertained the people they were trying to get information from. My father had gone to Groton and Yale with ambassadors and spies and writers and government officials. They were his good friends. They were always playing this cat and mouse game.

### **How did that affect you as children?**

I have five brothers. The three oldest ones and I became a kind of loose knit gang of marauders. We spied on the adults. We dug a bomb shelter in the front yard, we ran a private telephone system through the sewers of Washington into the house of the CIA man responsible for the Bay of Pigs, we took secret tape recordings of my father's dinner parties. The adults spied on each other. We spied on them. In the end my brother was kicked out of Groton School for bugging the headmaster's study and taking tape

recordings of the faculty meetings. He was famous in boarding school circles. I'm told at Groton, he's still a legend.

**You wrote somewhere that writing novels requires a great deal of research. Can you give us some examples?**

I wrote two popular books for children called *THE CASTLE IN THE ATTIC* and *THE BATTLE FOR THE CASTLE* in which a boy leaves this world and travels back in time to England in the middle ages. *IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE* spanned the years 1886 to 1971 and it took place in New York City and the tobacco growing fields in Connecticut. For those two books alone, I researched castle construction, medieval weapons, rats, the plague, healing herbs, high society in New York City at the turn of the century, the Spanish influenza outbreak, small newspaper ownership, the various methods of growing cigar wrapping tobacco, stretching canvases, the suffragism movement in Connecticut etc. etc. etc. The list was endless.

**You've written over forty books for children including *THE CASTLE IN THE ATTIC* which has won many awards and has sold over a million copies. How do you explain its popularity?**

*CASTLE* is a fantasy book. Ten year old William goes back to medieval England to undo a wrong he has committed against someone. There are wizards and dragons and swords in the book, but it is very grounded in today's reality. And without being didactic or moralistic, there is a strong sense of right and wrong in the book. William hurts someone through his own selfishness and he has to put himself in danger to clean up the mess he's made. I think kids (and adults) are looking for that.

Also with the whole language movement, teachers are using the book in their classes to teach the Middle Ages. I certainly wasn't thinking about the fourth and fifth grade curriculum when I wrote the book, but lots of kids come to it for that reason. I get letters that say, "Gee, I didn't think I'd like your book because we had to read it in my class but

**What are you working on now?**

I've just finished a new historical novel for children set in Vermont in 1910 to be published by Random House in 2006. Ideas for the next book are stirring in my head.

**Can you talk about the subject of that book?**

Not yet. If I talk about a book too much, I find there's no good reason to write it because I've gone and talked it away.

Adapated From the Elizabeth Winthrop Website  
<http://www.elizabethwinthrop.com/interview.html>- accessed August 5, 2005



If You Like...

*CASTLE IN THE ATTIC*

by Elizabeth Winthrop,  
*you might like the following books, too!!*

*CRISPIN* by Avi

*THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD* by Lynn Reid Banks

*JEREMY THATCHER, DRAGON HATCHER* by Bruce Coville

*CATHERINE CALLED BIRDY* by Karen Cushman

*THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX* by Kate DiCamillo

*THE PUPPETEER'S APPRENTICE* by D. Anne Love

*ROWAN OF RIN* by Emily Rodda

*BATTLE IN THE CASTLE* by Elizabeth Winthrop