

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Stacey J. Miller
Telephone: 781/986-0732
or Email: sjmillier@bookpr.com

February 29, 2004: A Leap Forward for Young Adult Readers

Is every day in the average teenager's life filled with such dramatic events as taking her driving test, discovering her father has a secret life, sneaking her first sip of wine, going on a scavenger hunt through Disney World and auditioning for the school play? Not usually, but then again, "Josie Taylor isn't exactly a typical teenager," says Wendy Mass, the New Jersey-based novelist who wrote **Leap Day** (Little, Brown and Company). "She's a Leaper."

A Leaper, Mass points out, is anyone who was born on a leap day. "Leapers celebrate their birthdays only once every four years, so they have to make every February 29th count." Her novel all takes place on this one unique day, which unfolds from Josie's perspective and packs enough adventure to make up for the three "missing" birthdays between leap years. But this is no ordinary coming-of-age story. With an innovative technique, Mass re-tells each of Josie's chapters from the various perspectives of the people around her. Readers get to see beyond Josie's point of view and find out

--continued--

the motivations of the people around her. Readers get to see beyond Josie's point of view and find out the motivations and inner thoughts of her friends, rivals, relatives, acquaintances, teachers, and even passing strangers.

“Every event – whether it’s the birth of a classmate’s baby, the breakup of a relationship, or the uncovering of a secret – becomes a group happening as it unfolds from different angles,” Mass explains. “The reader gets to ‘leap’ in and out of characters’ minds, and in the process, learns more about Josie than she knows about herself. We also realize that we are always affecting the lives of those around us—sometimes in surprising and life-altering ways.” Mass is also the author of *A Mango-Shaped Space* (Little, Brown and Company, 2003), winner of the Schneider Family Book Award from the American Library Association.

LEAP DAY

By Wendy Mass

Pub Date: February 2004

Price: \$16.95

ISBN: 0-316-53728-4

Ages: 12 & up

#

Suggested Interview Questions

1. What is a “leaper?”
2. Why did you decide to deal with the subject of leap years?
3. Do you know any “leapers,” or are you one yourself?
4. You explain that Josie, the main characters in your novel, is celebrating her fourth birthday as she turns sixteen. How does this affect her?
5. Why did you decide to use such an unusual format to tell Josie’s story? Why switch points of view?
6. You say that Josie is a typical teenager with a typical teenager’s problems. What are some examples of her trials and tribulations?
7. In what ways – beyond the coincidence of having been born on a leap day – is Josie extraordinary?
8. What do you mean when you say, “The real you is who you are when no one’s watching?”
9. One of your characters is obsessed with the Olsen twins, Mary-Kate and Ashley. Why are so many people fascinated by these twins?
10. Your characters live in Orlando and are deeply affected by Disney World. Have you ever lived in the area? If not, how did you research the subject for your book?
11. Competition plays a key role in the story. Characters compete for coveted roles in a school play, for prizes in a scavenger hunt, and so forth. How big a part did competition play in your life, when you were a teenager?
12. What are your plans for leap day, 2004?
13. Your first novel for teenagers, “A Mango-Shaped Space,” was well received. Does “Leap Day” have anything in common with it?
14. How is “Leap Day” different from “A Mango-Shaped Space?”

Story Ideas

Secrets: What's the most important secret with which you've ever been entrusted, and how did it affect your life?

Holiday Birthdays: What happens to teenagers (and others) who were born on leap day or on other significant holidays? What are the positive and negative effects?

Special Places. Imagine living in Orlando and getting unlimited free passes to the Disney amusement park . . . or living in DC and being able to visit the Smithsonian five days a week . . . Where do you fantasize about living, and what would you do if you lived there?

Competition: When have you ever "played to win" against friends, and how did it affect your friendship?

Anticipation: When you look forward to your leap day birthday, a full moon, or other rare events, how can you be sure you're not disappointed once the day has come and gone?

Wendy Mass

Wendy Mass grew up in Livingston, New Jersey, about 45 minutes from New York City. She was always a big reader; the flashlight-under-the-covers type of kid. In fourth grade, she and her best friend competed to see who could read more books. For every book they read, they got to add a segment to the larger-than-life construction-paper inchworm that their teacher had cleverly coined a "bookworm." Their friendly competition turned them both into life-long readers, and Mass into a writer. Her first story was co-written with her two younger sisters. It starred her cat, Muffin, who magically transformed into a goat and then terrorized the neighborhood dogs. In junior high her mother took to calling her Harriet the Spy because she was always taking notes and listening in on the phone extensions. By high school she was working at the town public library, the local bookstore, editing the literary magazine, and taking creative writing classes at universities over the summer. She was also writing the essays for her friends' college applications!

As an English major at Tufts University, Mass knew she wanted to write, but she wasn't sure if it would be books, magazines, or television. After graduation she moved to Los Angeles and tried her hand at different aspects of the entertainment industry. She worked for a literary agent, a television casting company, and became a script reader for a film producer. But it just didn't seem like the right fit at the time. She decided to go to graduate school to focus. Once she was there, she quickly realized that what she really wanted to do was to write for children and young adults. Those were the books that she loved growing up, the ones that she read over and over.

She moved back East and, while writing on the side, began a career in publishing as a book editor at various houses in New York City and Connecticut. She cofounded a teenage literary journal and continued filling notebooks with story ideas. The opportunity presented itself for her to write nonfiction, and she took it. Over the next six years Mass published ten books for teenagers on different educational topics. While this was rewarding, it was still fiction that made her heart beat the fastest. In April 2003, Little, Brown and Company published her first book for middle-graders, *A Mango-Shaped Space*, followed by *Leap Day* for young adults in February 2004.

Her favorite childhood books include: *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret*, all the books by Edward Eager and Beverly Cleary, the *Encyclopedia Brown* and Danny Dunn books, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, and *A Bridge to Terabithia*, which was the first book to make her cry. *Charlotte's Web* was the second. As she got a little older: *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, books by Paul Zindel, and her favorite—a novel called *Allegra Maud Goldman* by Edith Konezky about a young girl who always knew exactly who she was. Now: Anything by Alice Hoffman, Robert Jordan, Ray Bradbury, Francesca Lia Block. Recent favorites: *Bee Season*, *Middlesex*, *Hotel World*, and *Carter Beats the Devil*.

Mass has a Doctor of Letters degree from Drew University. She lives in Sparta, NJ with her husband Mike, a high school English teacher.