

MARYCELESTE CLEMENT

Maryceleste Clement lives an interesting and slightly madcap life. She splits her professional time between the management of the family's oilfield business, The Clement Companies, and her personal computer where she enjoys writing a series of books for children that follow the adventures of Mr. Tootles and his teatime frolics.

Maryceleste is definitely a Louisiana girl. She was born in New Iberia and she graduated from the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette. And Tootling around the countryside, seems to be what Maryceleste likes best—especially if she is with her family: her husband Tim and her two children, Tyler and Sarah-Ashley.

For Maryceleste the passion to write began early—just about the same age as the audience for her books. When she was four or five, she starting creating books for her family, using paper, scissors and tape—all in bright colors with lots of fruit and simply the words, 'I Love You.' She soon realized how much pleasure the books gave, but it took more than thirty-five years for her to start writing again.

Mr. Tootles shares a special bond with both his creator and illustrator. The author has often thought that is it not just seeing the glass of life as either half empty or half full, it is important to consider what is in the glass. For her, the glass is not full of trials and tribulations, but rather of amusements and adventures. Mr. Tootles shares this philosophy, reminding us that we simply can't take everything so very seriously. Maryceleste would like to think that she took a special part of herself and created him.

And, as she was talking to the Paul Schexnayder, the illustrator, brainstorming about the character of Mr. Tootles over a drawing pad and a cup of tea, his sketches more and more began to resemble the artist himself. When she created Mr. Tootles, she knew he was an English gentleman who had silly adventures during tea-time with his friends. She had a good visual picture of this kooky character. She knew he wore an English hat, a dark suit, and glasses and had a long, slim face.

For Maryceleste, a writer to whom lots of silly and unusual things always seem to happen in the midst of being a hard working grown-up with lots of responsibilities, she reminds us it is okay to be kooky and different.

It never failed. Something funny, silly, different and yes, crazy always happened. She knew it, her kids knew it, and Tim knew it. Whether it was something funny like milk in your nose, silly like dancing potholders in the kitchen, or even an accident on a hayride at 1 a.m., something unusual and not normal was par for the tootling Clement course. I guess for them, it was just about living life, trying to laugh and not taking yourself so seriously.

At the end of the day—when teatime is over, Maryceleste can reflect on the lessons of her books. What if adults like Mr. Tootles and Ms Bea can have fun just like kids do? What if parents and kids can just cut up, play together and enjoy each other's company? And, what if books really do influence the life of a child so that reading becomes the one gift no one can take away.

T.F.N.

Tootles for Now