

■ Addresses

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■ Career

Christian Science Monitor, writer and radio producer, 1976-80; Massachusetts Public School system, teacher of English, drama, and public speaking, 1982-94; Sara Hunter Productions, Inc. (producer of children's videos, books, and music), South Natick, MA, founder and president, 1994—.

■ Awards, Honors

Spur Award finalist, Western Writers of America; Gold Award, Charleston Film Festival, and Bronze Award, Houston Film Festival, both for *Born Journey*, a video documentary; Notable Books for Children citation, *Smithsonian*, 1996, for *The Unbreakable Code*.

■ Writings

Miss Piggy's Night Out, illustrated by Tom Leigh, Viking/Puffin, 1995.

Rondo's Stuff, illustrated by Nate Evans, ("Allegra's Window" series), Aladdin, 1996.
The Good, the Bad, and the Tweety, Landoll, 1996.
Beauty and the Feast, Landoll, 1996.
The Unbreakable Code, illustrated by Julia Miner, Northland (Flagstaff, AZ), 1996.
Chocolate Yak-A-Lot, Landoll, 1997.

Lyricist for *Born to Sing*, Volumes 1 and 2, Kid Rhino Records/Warner Bros., 1996. Created videos "A Symphony of Voices" and "Born Journey."

■ Sidelights

"When I was in second grade," wrote Sara Hoagland Hunter, the author of the award-winning *Unbreakable Code*, "my grandmother brought me to the home of Louisa May Alcott in Concord, Massachusetts. She knew I loved reading and writing and thought it would be good for me to visit the home of a famous author. What I remember most, besides the fact that my



Hunter's story concerns the little-known historical fact of the use of Navajo language as a basis for communication codes during World War II. (From *The Unbreakable Code*, illustrated by Julia Miner.)

grandmother had made me feel so important, was seeing Louisa May Alcott's writing desk in the window. Writing children's books while looking out over Walden Pond seemed to me the most wonderful existence one could hope for. From then on, no matter where we lived, I always had a desk facing a window. Even today, my office looks out over the Charles River where I can look and think and write (in that order!)"

Hunter has written a number of light, humorous tales based on familiar characters. In her first book, *Miss Piggy's Night Out*, published in 1995, Miss Piggy is too wrapped up in her own dreams of stardom to pay attention to her loyal friend Kermit. Kermit takes her to a restaurant where she can meet the rich and famous, but despite Kermit's attempts to warn her, Miss Piggy makes a fool of herself in front of a big-time movie director. Writing in *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, Heather McCammond-Watts noted that Hunter "puts a secure and comfortable face on the everyday worries of smaller children" who will be able to relate to Miss Piggy's plight. "Readers will find the story predictable but humorous," Mary Ann Bursk commented in *School Library Journal*.

The following year Hunter author published *The Unbreakable Code*, which she calls "my favorite of the books I have written so far. Like any project we love the most," she told *SATA*, "it also took the most out of me to write and to research.

"The book began as a conversation with a close friend who was a Nez Perce Indian," the author explained. "This college friend was so creative and full of ideas, she was always telling me stories I couldn't wait to write down. When she told me about a code invented by the Navajos and used during World War II, I told her she should write it as a children's book, but she wanted me to do it. So I did."

The Unbreakable Code tells of a little-known historical fact by embedding it in a work of fiction set in the present. When a young Navajo boy's family is moving away from the Reservation for the first time, he expresses his anxiety about living in the outside world to his grandfather. His grandfather tells him the story of the time he, too, once had to leave the reservation. He had served in the Marine Corps during World War II, and, along with other Navajo Marines, was given the special assignment of creating a code that the Japanese would not be able to penetrate.

The Navajo language was selected as a basis for this code because it was an oral language. It had never been written down and was known by very few outside the tribe. The Japanese were not able to unscramble American radio messages transmitted using the Navajo code, and countless American lives were saved. The older man tells his grandson that the boy carries with him this heritage, this unbreakable code, and that it will protect him as he goes out into the world. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer stated, "Hunter's lengthy but absorbing story ... casts a well-deserved spotlight on these skilled

soldiers and on a wartime role that is almost guaranteed to interest readers."

Hunter commented, "I learned so much from the inventors of the code whom I interviewed on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona and New Mexico. Their kindness, modesty, and generosity knew no bounds. They wanted a book to share with their grandchildren, and that became my motivation. My desire to accurately convey their sacrifices and achievements and to capture some of their phrases, images, and rhythms of speech formed the basis of the text.

"To have the illustrator be a close friend involved in the process from the first day of research is a phenomenon. Julia Miner and I set off together to our first meeting of the Navajo Code Talkers Association. On the way we gasped at the scenery of the Canyon de Chelly and worked in a third grade classroom on the Reservation. While I interviewed, Julia drew and interjected questions. Artistic collaboration, when it works, is the most satisfying experience there can be."

■ Works Cited

- Bursk, Mary Ann, review of *Miss Piggy's Night Out*, *School Library Journal*, March, 1996, p. 176.
 McCammond-Watts, Heather, review of *Miss Piggy's Night Out*, *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, October, 1995, p. 58.
 Review of *The Unbreakable Code*, *Publishers Weekly*, April 8, 1996, pp. 68-69.

■ For More Information See

PERIODICALS

- School Library Journal*, August, 1996, p. 123.
Smithsonian, November, 1996.

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