

FINDING DOROTHY

a novel

ELIZABETH LETTS

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of
THE EIGHTY-DOLLAR CHAMPION



Dear Reader,

YOU MAY KNOW ME AS the writer of true-life horse stories, *The Perfect Horse* and *The Eighty-Dollar Champion*. But I'm so excited to tell you about my new book—a work of historical fiction, and, well . . . a horse of a different color!

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Talk about a story with staying power! Almost one hundred and twenty years after L. Frank Baum wrote the classic tale, countless stories have been set in the Land of Oz that Baum created—new books, films, hit musicals, and, of course, the iconic 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*, which is the most-viewed film of all time. In *Finding Dorothy*, I look behind the story at the lives of the real American family that inspired this famous tale.

A few years ago, I was reading *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* aloud to my youngest son, and I found myself marveling at how inventive, and crazy, and even subversive the text was, especially in the portrayal of female characters. When I realized that Frank Baum dedicated *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* to his wife, Maud, I wanted to know about her. I was intrigued to discover that she was the daughter of one of the nineteenth century's most outspoken suffragettes.

But it wasn't until I saw a photograph of Maud Baum, twenty years a widow, age seventy-eight, sitting with Judy Garland, age fifteen, on the set of *The Wizard of Oz* movie, that I realized I had found my story. What could the meeting of these two singular women have been like?

I approached the story just as I'd done with my nonfiction books—with reams of research. But when I sat down to write, I put on my fiction-writer's hat. I hope what I've come up with is true in the best possible sense of the word—true to the people who lived and breathed and left behind the gift of one of our greatest cultural treasures, the story that has been called America's first homegrown fairy tale. I hope you will read it and be as fascinated as I was, and most of all that it will lead you back to the originals: the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the classic 1939 MGM film. Reacquaint yourself with your old friends Dorothy and Toto, the Wizard and the Witches, the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, and the Lion. I'm sure you'll be glad you did.

Go ahead. Follow the Yellow Brick Road and discover *Finding Dorothy*. And if you enjoy it, I would be eternally grateful if you'd share it with your fellow readers and friends.

Warmly,
Elizabeth Letts





Advanced Praise for **FINDING DOROTHY**

“A breathtaking read that will transport you over the rainbow and into the heart of one of America’s most enduring fairy tales and the hardscrabble life that inspired it. Gripping, fascinating, *Finding Dorothy* is a novel for anyone who ever stared in awe as Oz came to life onscreen, and wondered what other secrets lay hidden behind the curtain. A dream of a book you’ll want to savor and share!”

—LISA WINGATE, author of *Before We Were Yours*

“Old Hollywood is its own kind of Oz in *Finding Dorothy*, complete with false dazzle and complex combinations of threat and allure. But what really satisfies here is the unlikely friendship between L. Frank Baum’s unsinkable widow, Maud, and the young Judy Garland, on the vulnerable cusp of fame. It’s an alliance that seems touched with magic and serendipity and something even more transformative, true understanding between women.”

—PAULA McLAIN, author of *Love and Ruin*

“A woman with a heart, a brain, courage to spare, and a girl’s sense of wonder—this is the heroine of Elizabeth Letts’s sparkling, touching . Maud Baum is the daughter of a suffragette and the wife of a dreamer, but she is also a force to be reckoned with in her own right.”

—MELANIE BENJAMIN, author of *The Swans of Fifth Avenue*

“Beautifully researched and written, *Finding Dorothy* pulls back the curtain on a fascinating relationship behind the making of *The Wizard of Oz*.”

—MARTHA HALL KELLY, author of *Lilac Girls*

“Historical fiction fans will rejoice. With meticulous research and vivid detail, Elizabeth Letts explores both Maud’s life story leading up to the writing of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and her determination to see that the film remained true to her husband’s vision as it was made in 1930’s Hollywood. Letts takes readers on an unflinching journey between hardship and hope, with a catch-your-breath ending.”

—PAM JENOFF, author of *The Orphan’s Tale*

“More than just a behind-the-scenes peek at the making of *The Wizard of Oz*, *Finding Dorothy* is a heartfelt look at the origins of a beloved story told, through the eyes of the woman closest to its creator. From capturing the pioneering spirit of a family settling out West to the fight for women’s suffrage, and the vulnerability of a young Judy Garland on the threshold of stardom, *Finding Dorothy* is filled with pitch-perfect wonderment.”

—RENÉE ROSEN, author of *White Collar Girl*

Lyrics to **OVER THE RAINBOW**

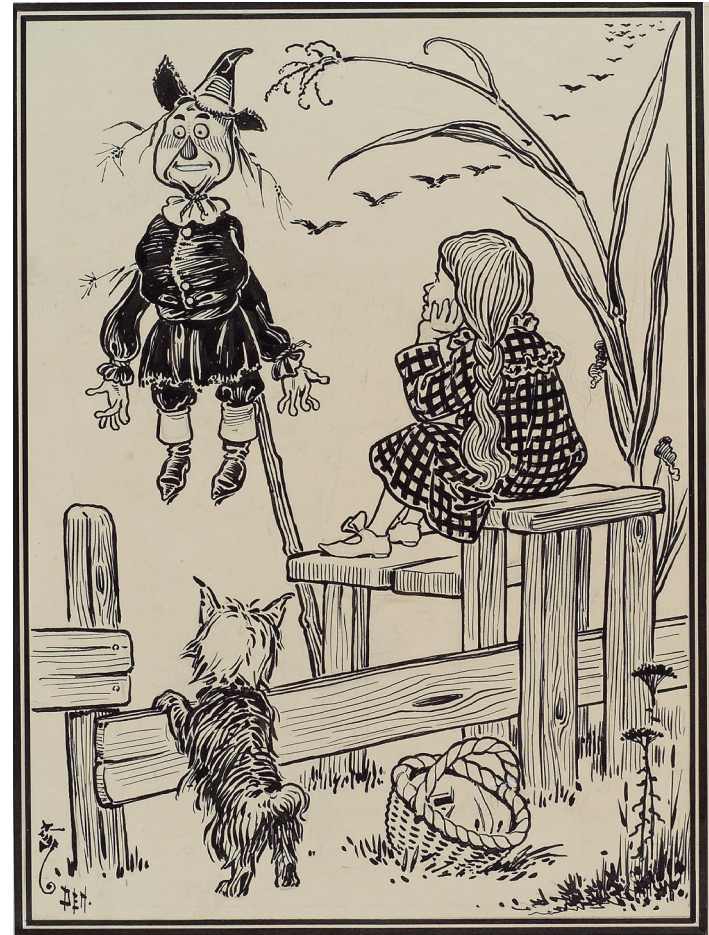
Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby

Somewhere over the rainbow
Skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true

Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far behind me
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops
That's where you'll find me

Somewhere over the rainbow
Blue birds fly
Birds fly over the rainbow
Why then, oh, why can't I?

If happy little blue birds fly
Beyond the rainbow
Why, oh, why can't I?



"Over the Rainbow," 1939. Composed by Harold Arlen. Lyrics by E. Y. "Yip" Harburg
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Image: The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs:
Print Collection, The New York Public Library. (1901).

Discussion Questions

1. Almost everyone remembers watching the iconic 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*. Share your special memories: Did you see it in a theater or on television? Did you watch it every year? What characters and scenes have remained with you? What frightened you the most? Did reading *Finding Dorothy* make you want to watch the film again?
2. “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain.” “Follow the Yellow Brick Road.” “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.” What is your favorite line from *The Wizard of Oz*?
3. Did you ever read *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the book? Before reading *Finding Dorothy*, how much did you know about the author’s life? Do you think it’s surprising that the story is so much better known than its author? How often do you look up an author’s biography to find out more about him or her?
4. In *Finding Dorothy*, we are introduced to Maud Gage Baum as an elderly widow, struggling to preserve her husband’s legacy, and then flashback to meet Maud as a girl. Did young Maud grow into the kind of woman you expected her to be? Do you think it was harder for Maud, as an older woman, to make her voice heard? Do you think women of a certain age are sometimes over-looked or marginalized? Do you think it has improved for women or stayed about the same as it was in Maud’s day?
5. Maud’s forward-thinking mother, Matilda Joslyn Gage, was considered radical by society, and even by her opinionated peers. Do you think it helped or hurt Maud to have such a famous and strong-minded woman as her mother? Were you surprised that Maud left college after her mother fought so hard to get her admitted? How do you think Matilda viewed Maud’s decision? Do you think Maud did the right thing? Were you ever in a position where you had to choose between love and education or career?



Image: The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. (1901).

Discussion Questions

6. In *Finding Dorothy*, the author reveals the origins of some of L. Frank Baum's ideas for *The Wizard of Oz*. Which was your favorite? What surprised you the most?
7. Frank and Maud had four boys, but they never had a daughter. Why do you think Frank's most famous character is a little girl? After reading *Finding Dorothy*, who do you think was his inspiration for the character of Dorothy? To what extent do you think authors base their stories on their own lives? How would you feel if a close friend or family member wrote a book? Would you worry (or be pleased) that you might recognize yourself in it?
8. Judy Garland suffered abuse at the hands of the studio executives at MGM and struggled throughout her life with addiction until her early death at age forty-seven. What is it about Judy Garland that makes so many people relate to her and gives her such enduring fame? Do you think child actors have it better today, or do you think that overwhelming fame is antithetical to a happy childhood? Was there anything else Maud could have done to help Judy? Considering the #MeToo movement, has the situation improved for young women?
9. Maud's sister Julia refused to give up her daughter Magdalena, even though Frank and Maud were offering the girl a better life. How do you feel about that? Do you think Frank and Maud did the right thing to leave her with her mother? Did Julia do right to keep her daughter on the homestead? And what about today? Should a mother always keep her child, even if her circumstances are not good, when a better home is available? Which is more important, the welfare of the mother or the child?
10. Frank and Maud were a prime example of the adage "opposites attract." Frank was a dreamer who always believed in a better future; Maud was pragmatic and sensible, a master at keeping the family running. What was it like for Maud to be married to such a man? Were you surprised that she was so loyal to him? If Frank and Maud were a couple in the twenty-first century, how do you think their relationship might be different? Or would it be the same?

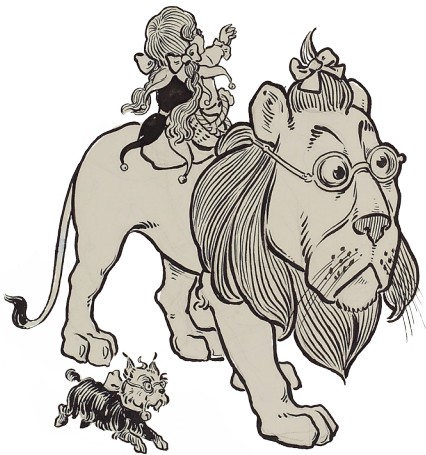


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BEHIND THE CURTAIN: *Fun Facts*

1. The beloved 1939 production was not the first movie about Oz. Frank Baum made several early attempts to film his beloved story.
2. The “horse of a different color” was actually more than one horse. They used powdered Jell-O to create the colors and the most difficult part of filming the scene was that the horses wanted to lick the Jell-O off their coats.
3. Judy Garland’s closest relationship on the set was with Margaret Hamilton—in real life, the Wicked Witch was kind and got along well with children.
4. In the famous scene when the house is sucked up into the vortex of the tornado, the set designers made a miniature scale model of the house and filmed it falling—and then reversed it.
5. The song, “Over the Rainbow,” was almost cut from the film. The reprise, originally sung during a scene in the witch’s castle, was actually cut. Film of that scene has never been found.
6. Roy Bolger was originally cast as the Tin Man, but he begged to be given the role of the Scarecrow. As a young man, he had idolized Fred Stone, a vaudevillian who played the Scarecrow in the Broadway show written by Frank Baum.
7. The witches in *The Wizard of Oz* were not just a coincidence. Frank Baum’s mother-in-law wrote a book called *Women, Church and State*, in which she described at length the history of women being accused of witchcraft.



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