

Writing From Her Roots

CHILDREN'S AUTHOR HEATHER HENSON CELEBRATES KENTUCKY'S HERITAGE

It's no accident that author Heather Henson is working on a new children's book about a young Kentucky girl growing up in a small summer-stock theater run by her dynamic father.

A native of Danville, Henson practically grew up at the Pioneer Playhouse – opened and operated by her parents, Eben and Charlotte Henson, since 1950. Surrounded by actors, directors and artists, those formative years were magical but demanding for Henson and her three siblings, who did just about every chore imaginable – from ticket sales and sweeping floors to pulling weeds in the courtyard area.

Today at age 40, the accomplished editor-turned-author has two books published under her name and two more in the pipeline. Another children's book – *Junebug* – is especially “near and dear to my heart,” says Henson, because it is based on her own childhood experiences at the pioneering outdoor theatre.

Growing up at the Pioneer Playhouse had a huge impact on Henson, her sister and two brothers, who all have pursued artistic careers. “My dad followed his dream and built the playhouse, and it showed all of us that we could follow our dreams as well,” says Henson.

A 1984 graduate of Danville High School, she moved to New York City to pursue a career in filmmaking like her older brother Robby. But while attending The New School University, she found herself taking more courses in writing than film and earned a degree in creative writing and literature.

Starting at HarperCollins Publishers, Henson worked her way up over 10 years from administrative assistant to editor. “But even though I loved editing, I really always considered myself a writer and decided in 1998 to leave my job and pursue that dream,” she says.

In 2002, HarperCollins published *Making the Run*, a fictional book for teens. Then Atheneum/Simon and Schuster published *Angel Coming*, a children's picture book, in 2005. Two more children's books are scheduled to come out in 2008 and 2009. All of her

stories are set in Kentucky, and Henson left New York in 2003 to get back to those roots.

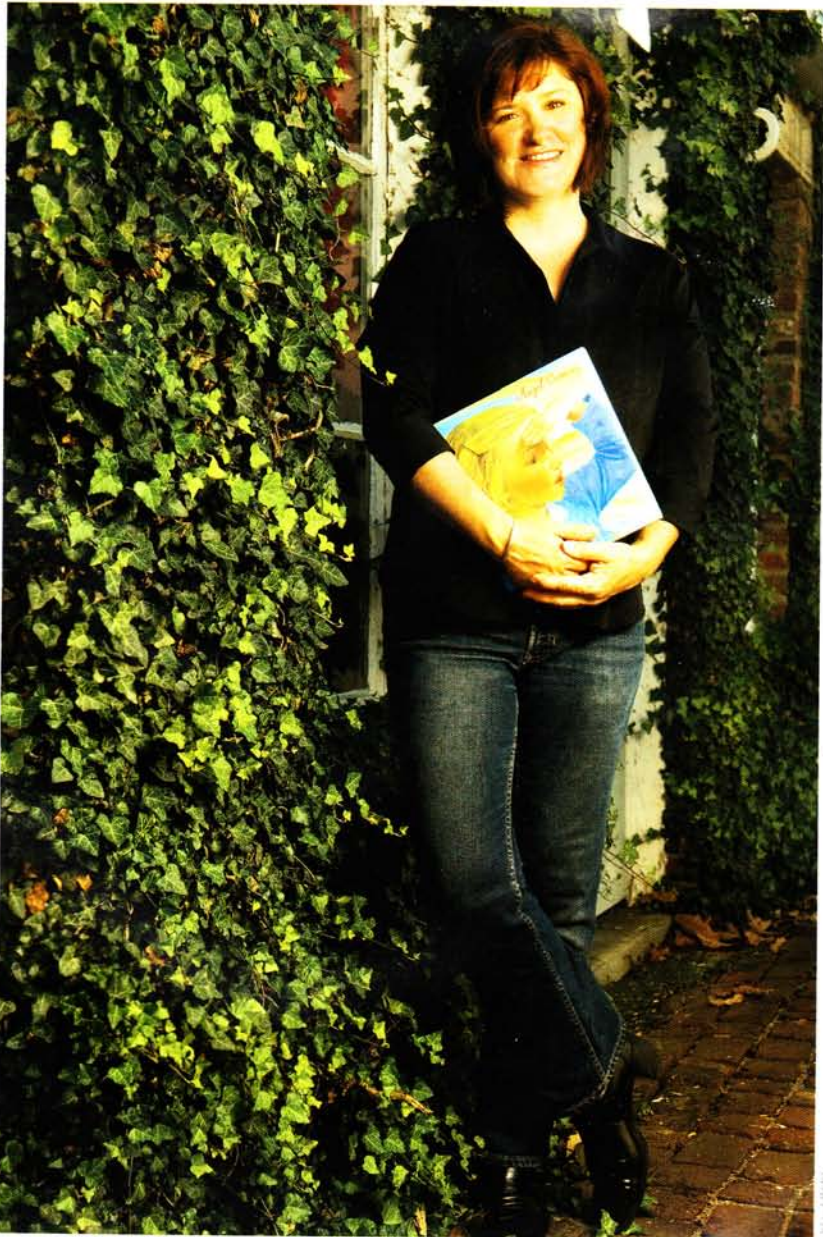
“Heather is very respectful about the people and the landscape and the towns and farms she writes about,” says Caitlyn Dlouhy, her editor at Atheneum/Simon and Schuster.

Henson and her husband, Tim Unga, live on the family farm with their three

young children. She still helps out when she can at the Pioneer Playhouse, though her mother and sister, Holly, have been primary caretakers of the theatre since her father's death in 2004.

“Heather has always made good choices,” says her mom, Charlotte. “Now that she's back home and freelancing, I think she has the best of all worlds.”

– Marta W. Aldrich



Most of Heather Henson's stories are set in her home state of Kentucky.