

News from Houghton Mifflin Books for Children
Contact: Children's_Books@hmco.com
For Immediate Release

THE LUCK OF THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

A Tale of Picky Eating

Written by A. W. Flaherty
Illustrated by Scott Magoon

The Luck of the Loch Ness Monster: A Tale of Picky Eating (Houghton Mifflin; September 2007) takes us on a journey over the murky waters of Scotland, where young Katerina-Elizabeth is traveling via ocean liner to visit her grandmother. Unfortunately, Katerina-Elizabeth's parents have preordered her breakfast for every morning of her trip, and its oatmeal . . . gray, gooey, lumpy, yucky oatmeal. Her least favorite food in the world. And even though her parents threaten that without oatmeal she's sure to grow up stunted, she promptly tosses the nasty stuff out the porthole.

Little does she know that someone else is benefiting from her discarded breakfast; a tiny little worm who thinks that oatmeal is just lovely. He follows the boat to its Scottish destination, every day eating up the hated oatmeal and every day growing bigger and stronger, until . . . well, you'll have to read the book.

Highlighted with beautiful illustrations by Scott Magoon, the author and illustrator of *Hugo and Miles in I've Painted Everything!*, *The Luck of the Loch Ness Monster* is a witty, wonderful take on the myth of the Loch Ness monster and the equally pervasive myth of picky eating.

Young readers and parents alike will love this all-too-relatable and enchanting tale of picky eating. And don't forget to take the test at the back of the book to find out if you are a supertaster!

A. W. Flaherty is a neurologist at Massachusetts General Hospital who also teaches at Harvard Medical School, and she is the author of *The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain*. Flaherty lives with her husband and twin daughters near Boston. She had peanut butter and grape jelly on white bread every day for lunch from age three to eighteen.

Scott Magoon is an illustrator and art director who lives outside of Boston with his wife and two sons. He is also the author and illustrator of *Hugo and Miles in I've Painted Everything!* Scott never ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as a kid, and he hates them to this day. Learn more about Scott at his website: www.scottmagoon.com.

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Dear Editors, Writers, and Producers,

Picky eating . . .

The bane of all parents' existence. The downfall of otherwise well-behaved tots everywhere. The cause of many a tableside tantrum and restaurant meltdown. But what if it isn't just a matter of being finicky and fussy? What if your taste buds are really to blame?

***The Luck of the Loch Ness Monster: A Tale of Picky Eating* (Houghton Mifflin Children's Books; September 2007)**, a picture book by A. W. Flaherty, the acclaimed neurologist and author of *The Midnight Disease*, illustrates the role of the "supertaster gene" in a particularly delightful fashion.

Katerina-Elizabeth is traveling via ocean liner to visit her grandmother, and her breakfast every morning is oatmeal: her least favorite food. She tosses the nasty stuff out the porthole. But a tiny little worm has taken to following the ship for Katerina-Elizabeth's discards, and he's very much enjoying her hated oatmeal. He follows the boat to its Scottish destination, and he's growing bigger every day. Before long, he's not such a tiny little worm anymore. He's something altogether larger, and more notorious.

A. W. Flaherty grew up hearing a version of this story, as told to her by her father, who desperately wanted her to eat her oatmeal. As she grew and entered into her prestigious career as a neurologist and teacher at Harvard Medical School, she learned about a wonderful new science that had uncovered the supertaster gene, which accounts for much of the behavior we call "picky eating." Take the test at the back of the book to find out if you are a supertaster!

A. W. Flaherty is available this fall to discuss both the book and the science behind the supertaster gene. Please contact us for more information or to set up an interview.

And eat your oatmeal!

A Conversation with the Author

A. W. Flaherty

You are both a practicing neurologist and a writer. How did you become interested in both professions and how do you balance these two very different passions/jobs?

My book *The Midnight Disease* is actually a really, really long answer—I had a postpartum manic episode during which I got hypergraphic, and it has never really resolved. The G-rated version of this story is that after my twins were born I got very interested in writing. I've published three books since then, a revised second edition of the first book, collaborated on an oratorio libretto, written a deliberately un-publishable book (on the religious significance of cold breakfast cereal), and am at work on my fourth publishable (I hope) book. My daughters were born premature, so they were small enough to both fit in a bureau drawer on my desk. Later, they sat on my knee as I wrote.

Your book makes an argument for the supertaster gene, which identifies a genetic component to picky eating. Should the discovery of this gene change the way parents handle their own picky eaters?

Parents should use the teaching method that best produces relaxed healthy eaters. They don't need to know about genetics to do that. But for some anxious parents, it's calming to hear an explanation of what kids eat that doesn't blame either the parents or the kids. I don't mean to act *too* superior about anxious parents. There's something about having small children that suddenly makes even the most relaxed adults see food as this emotionally charged stuff. Maybe we still believe in our bones that if kids don't eat everything edible in sight, they'll starve to death. That gets us into the epidemic of childhood obesity, etc.

Is it safe to assume that your daughters aren't forced to clear their plates at dinnertime?

If my husband is home, he tries to get them to eat a good chunk of everything. He's from a family of intermediate tasters; they get such pleasure from food. If it's just me, I usually have my supertaster twin take one bite of her least favorite thing. I don't tell her it's good for her, I tell her to do it as a dare. Swallowing really gross things is a skill that is very useful in later life, especially office jobs. We have a friend who is an explorer, so I make up horrific tales about how he nearly starved to death and survived only because he ate grubs he found. Then he regained his strength and found the Missing Link and the Lost Ark. So it was good that he had practiced eating even worse things, like string beans, when he was a kid.

Have you heard any tales of the supertaster test being used in schools?

Supertaster projects are common in classrooms now. The kids predict whether they are supertasters or not, then take various tests, which involve counting taste buds on each other's tongues, or using test strips that are already very available through schoolroom suppliers. But there is no media tie-in thing such as my book that the teacher can use to engage the kids with. And my book raises questions that most of those classroom protocols don't address. For example, are the supertaster kids on average shorter than the nontasters?

Do you believe in the Loch Ness Monster?

Oh, yes! But don't tell my academic colleagues.

Are you still a picky eater?

My husband spent about ten years training me in a very successful reeducation program he invented. I can eat tomatoes, and eggplant, with pleasure. Well, if they have a lot of stuff on them. Not celery. Never celery.