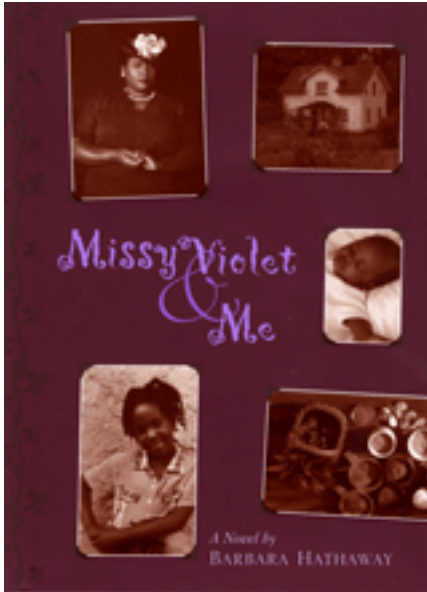


Press Release

Missy Violet and Me

by Barbara Hathaway

- [About the Book](#)
- [About the Author](#)
- [Praise for *Missy Violet and Me*](#)



Winner of the 2005 Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award

About the Book

I could hardly wait for school to be out. Missy Violet was one of the most looked-up-to ladies in Richmond County. She knew how to bring babies into the world! "Baby catchin'" was her speciality. All of a sudden, I felt real important. "Gonna work for Missy Violet, work for Missy Violet!" I sang softly under my breath. "Gonna catch a baby, gonna catch a baby!"

With a warm and cozy narrative and a sure sense of place, first-time author Barbara Hathaway transports readers to summertime in Richmond County during the 1930s. With her father in debt to the local midwife, who delivered his seven children, eleven-year-old Viney spends the summer under the wing of Missy Violet, whose wise and warm ways help teach Viney about the business of "catchin' babies." Viney must learn about roots and herbs and their medicinal purposes, understand the contents of a "birthin' bag," and contend with a snotty peer and irrepressible cousin — Charles Elister Paxton Nehemiah Windbush. And all this before she actually helps deliver a single baby!

The quirky local characters in this tight-knit African-American community are lovingly portrayed, yet Hathaway steers away from sentimentality in this tale of a young girl learning to trust her instincts. By turns scary, funny, and exhilarating, the story of Viney's rural life in the South quickens as she embraces her apprenticeship and finds her own special place as Missy Violet's "best helper girl."

About the Author

Barbara Hathaway was born in Harlem, New York. *Missy Violet and Me* is based on the recollections of her mother, who often spoke glowingly of a relative who served as a midwife in her southern community in the 1930s. Ms. Hathaway, a retired healthcare worker, was also inspired by the nurse-midwives at the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, with whom she was privileged to work for several years. Ms. Hathaway lives in Westchester County, New York, with her family. This is her first book.

Missy Violet and Me originally came to Houghton Mifflin Children's Books as a picture book in 2000. Editor Kate O'Sullivan liked the voice, which rang true and told a unique story, but felt it might work better as a longer narrative. O'Sullivan sent Hathaway a letter suggesting that she expand the manuscript. It was a year and a half later that a package arrived containing a fairly well-polished chapter book.

Missy Violet and Me is the story of a young African-American girl living in the rural South in the 1930s. Her father, in debt to the local midwife, sends Viney to be Missy Violet's helper. This warm, candid narrative relates the story of a summer readers will never forget — a summer of birth, death, and "catchin' babies."

Barbara Hathaway didn't nurture lifelong dreams of being published. She worked in the healthcare industry for many years, and it was only when she was home on disability that she turned to writing. Her mother suggested she write about the real-life midwife, Mammy Violet, who had played a large yet often unappreciated role in her own community. "In writing *Missy Violet and Me*, I have tried to shine a spotlight on a unique but seldom recognized group of women who provided a most valuable service to their communities," says the author. Ms. Hathaway, who will be sixty next year, has a high school diploma and has taken college-level creative writing classes and attended writing workshops.

Praise for *Missy Violet and Me*

"Unspooled as leisurely as a summer afternoon spent on the front porch, this appealingly nostalgic tale conveys the tenor of the time as well as the affable narrator's growth during one momentous summer." — *Publishers Weekly*

"Readers will find a trickster tale and a ghostly "haint" horror story, told in folklore style with lots of mischief . . . Great for reading aloud, especially with grandparents." — *Booklist*