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# LOVE RUBY LAVENDER

BY

DEBORAH WILES

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|---------------------------|---|
| Summary.....              | 2 |
| About the Author.....     | 3 |
| Book Review.....          | 4 |
| Discussion Questions..... | 5 |
| Author Interview.....     | 6 |
| Further Reading.....      | 8 |





## SUMMARY

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Ruby Lavender and her grandmother, Miss Eula, are best friends. They're partners in fun, and even partners in crime --- when it comes to saving chickens from going to the slaughterhouse. Ruby just knows that she'll be lonely, sad and bored when Miss Eula heads for Hawaii to spend the summer with her new grandbaby. But thanks to the many letters they exchange while Miss Eula is away, Ruby's summer turns out to be a very special one after all.

From KidsReads.com

<http://www.kidsreads.com/reviews/0152023143.asp> - accessed August 3, 2005



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### DEBORAH WILES

Deborah Wiles was born in Alabama into an Air Force family and grew up summers in a small Mississippi town with an extended family full of Southern characters. Today she writes about them and they live on in her stories. She has worked as a journalist, an oral history gatherer, a teacher ... also as a school bus driver, a burger queen, and an underwear salesperson.

Deborah is the first children's book author to be named Writer-in-Residence at Thurber House, James Thurber's boyhood home in Columbus, Ohio. She received the Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award from the New York Public Library and the Keats Foundation in 2002. Last June she moved from her long-time home in Frederick, Maryland to Atlanta, Georgia where she avoids the traffic, grows a garden, and climbs Stone Mountain when she isn't writing for children.

From Deborah Wiles Website  
<http://www.deborahwiles.com/> - accessed August 3, 2005



# BOOK REVIEW

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## **Booklist** 5-01-2001

Gr. 4-6. Ruby Lavender is a nine-year-old charmer, in love with life and her adoring grandmother. She and Miss Eula keep in touch daily by leaving letters for each other in the knothole of a silver maple in Halleluia, Mississippi--that is, until Miss Eula goes to Hawaii to visit her son and his wife and her new granddaughter, Leilani. Ruby is crushed, forced to spend a hot summer on her own, and jealous, too, of a new little girl she fears will steal her grandmother's heart. But the summer is a maturing one as Ruby nurtures hatching chickens, makes a new friend, Dove, and finally comes to terms with her grandfather's death. Wiles has painted a picture of a time long past when communities were small and close-knit, people wrote letters, and chickens escaped only to create havoc at play practice. Yet she has also created a timeless story of life and death, the bond between grandparent and grandchild, and the reality that, regardless, "life does go on."

From BWI Titledales  
<http://www.bwibooks.com/validater.php> - accessed August 3, 2005



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- 1.** Grandpa Garnet told Ruby that people are like lemon drops, sour and sweet together. [p.18] What did he mean? What is sour and sweet about each of the main characters in this book-Ruby, Miss Eula, Melba Jane?
- 2.** Miss Eula is known for the motto "Life does go on." [p.21] What do you think this means?
- 3.** Ruby and Melba Jane each experience the loss of a loved one, but they deal with that loss differently. How does Ruby handle it? Melba Jane? In what ways could they have helped each other? Who can you turn to in your time of need?
- 4.** Miss Mattie comforts Ruby by telling her, "This family is full of strong women who know how to laugh." [p.133] Explain how humor helps Ruby and Miss Eula deal with their sadness. How have you used humor to help you get through tough situations?
- 5.** "We're all different and we're all the same." [p.71] Or at least, that's what Dove says. How are Ruby and Melba Jane different? How are they alike? What can they learn from each other? In what ways did the attack on the chickens change Ruby and Melba Jane?
- 6.** Both Ruby and Melba Jane welcome Dove, who becomes friends with both of them. How can differences in interests and personalities make for good friendships? In what ways can new friends affect old friendships? Do any of the friendships in *Love, Ruby Lavender* make you see your own friendships differently?
- 7.** Both Melba Jane and Ruby hold grudges against each other. Is this fair? What are the dangers of grudges? Have you ever had a conflict with a friend? Would you handle it differently now that time has passed?
- 8.** Ruby looks to Miss Eula for comfort, security, and love. Why does Ruby send Miss Eula updates about the chickens even though she feels like her grandmother abandoned her for some new (smelly) baby? Has Miss Eula really abandoned Ruby?



## AUTHOR INTERVIEW

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An Interview with Deborah Wiles

by Ruby Garnet Lavender

Ruby's school project is to interview someone.

**Mr. Ishee's 4th Grade**

**September Something (I forget, exactly)**

**Author Interview: Deborah Wiles**

**By: Ruby Garnet Lavender (against her will)**

PeeEss: To begin with, I did not find this author particularly interesting (or maybe it is the assignment that is the trouble), but you will see that I tried, anyway. Still, I think she wrote a pretty good book, for a grown up.

**Ruby Lavender (RL):** Hello, Deborah Wiles. I have chosen you for my author interview school project. The problem is, I can't find information about you in the library, so I am wondering if this means you are not too interesting. (You would fit right in, here in Halleluiah, Mississippi.) Maybe I should have chosen someone else...

**Deborah Wiles (DW):** Hi, Ruby! I'm glad you chose me. I'm sorry you haven't been able to find much information. That's because LOVE, RUBY LAVENDER is my first novel. I am a new author, but I have been writing and telling my story for many years. RUBY is part of my story.

**RL:** YOUR story? I thought it was MY story!

**DW:** It's your story, of course, and what happens to you and Miss Eula and Melba Jane and Dove is made up. But the details are real. They come from my life and are part of my story.

**RL:** How is that? I mean, you don't live in The Pink Palace, and you don't have a chicken named Bemmie.... Do you? If you do, check for blue feet Bemmie is always running off, I'll bet you've got my chicken! Wait, let me go check the chicken house....

**DW:** No, no, I don't have a chicken, but I had a wacky grandmother named Eula, and she lived in a little Mississippi town, and I visited her there every summer. There was a town store, owned by Mr. Jeff, who always gave me lemon drops. My Aunt Mitt had a beautiful flower garden, and my great-grandmother, Nanny, had the world's best vegetable garden. The postmistress really was named Dot. And... I had great-great aunts named Bess and Bemmie!

**RL:** You turned your AUNTS into CHICKENS?

**DW:** Yes! They were very old when I knew them and I thought they looked like chickens! You can take any detail of your life and put it into your stories.

**RL:** I wonder if Miss Mattie would make a good chicken. What other details of your life did you put into LOVE, RUBY LAVENDER? Did your Miss Eula really go to Hawaii?

**DW:** Yes, she did. I lived in Hawaii when my dad was stationed there, in the Air Force, and my grandmother came to visit us when my baby sister was born. The black sand beach and the volcano that Miss Eula talks about in her letters I remember them well. I also remember laughing a lot with my grandmother, so I write about that, too.

**RL:** I love how Miss Eula and Ruby (that's me) laugh together and love each other so much.

**DW:** Me, too. My grandmother loved me just like Miss Eula loves you, so I know what that love feels like. I know what it feels like to love someone fiercely, the way you love Miss Eula. I write about feelings a lot; they are important to me. I know what it feels like to be sad, angry, jealous, mean-spirited, and also what it feels like to forgive somebody when they are mean to you, so I write about those things.

**RL:** I'd rather read about root beer floats! Mr. Ishee makes the best root beer floats fizzy and smooth and cold—just right. I want one right now!

**DW:** Mmmmm... me, too. Remember how hot it was the day Mr. Ishee made those floats? And remember that rain storm that swirled the dust everywhere? I try to use all my senses when I write. I ask myself what did my world taste like, smell like, feel like, look like, sound like? All the food in LOVE, RUBY LAVENDER is food I loved as a child, all the....

**RL:** Zucchini? You loved zucchini? Excuse me, but you were a strange child.

**DW:** (laughs) Probably. It made me interesting! The details of anyone's life are interesting, to me. The black-eyed Susans, the zucchini, the beans in Miss Mattie's store, the way the bees buzz around the honeysuckle... I remember vividly all the details of growing up in a small, southern town, and I wanted to capture those details on paper. Details make your story special.

**RL:** Well, I don't think there is anything special about zucchini, or the dusty floor in Miss Mattie's store—the floor I have to sweep, by the way. I do like writing letters, though. There are lots of letters in LOVE, RUBY LAVENDER.

**DW:** I think you can tell your story in letters, too. It's another way to let someone know about you. Ruby (that's you) reveals a lot about her world through her letters, don't you think?

**RL:** I sure do. I am not called a blabbermouth for nuthin'.

**DW:** I didn't know you were called a blabbermouth! This is news to me.

**RL:** I can also tell you the name of Bemmie's new chick, if you want to know it.

**DW:** I would love to know! Tell me.

**RL:** The new chick is a HE. A rooster, named Elvis.

**DW:** Elvis! What a great name!

**RL:** I have good naming skills. And good free advice. Like right now I can tell you that if I were you, I would have made sure that Ruby didn't have to do an author interview for a school project. I would have her go fishing instead.

**DW:** Would you rather be fishing right now?

**RL:** I'd rather be doing just about anything else right now

**DW:** Well, I'm ready to go, if you've got all the information you need for your project. It's been fun visiting with you for a few minutes. It has been INTERESTING! I hope we can do it again some time.

**RL:** Well, come to The Pink Palace after work, you can sing with Elvis. He doesn't like me reading the dictionary, but he loves to sing. He sings all day and all night! Miss Eula says he's got to stop all this screeching or she's gonna have to think about eating chicken again.

**DW:** (laughs) She's kidding, right?

**RL:** Right. But it's a good STORY, isn't it? (laughs) Good garden of peas! Did you see that?

**DW:** What?

**RL:** That was Bemmie! And Herman! Look at them, running off! I've got to go! Thanks for the interview! I'll let you read my paper when I'm done!

From Deborah Wiles Website

<http://www.deborahwiles.com/rubyreadinggd.htm> - accessed August 3, 15, 2005



If You Like...

*LOVE RUBY LAVENDER*

by Deborah Wiles,

*you might like the following books, too!!*

*GRANNY TORRELLI MAKES SOUP* by Sharon Creech

*BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE* by Kate DiCamillo

*EVERYTHING ON A WAFFLE* by Polly Horvath

*REGARDING THE FOUNTAIN: A TALE, IN LETTERS, OF LIARS, AND  
LEAKS* by Kate Klise

*ANASTASIA KRUPNIK* by Lois Lowry

*THE SISTERS CLUB* by Megan McDonald

*FAME AND GLORY IN FREEDOM, GEORGIA* by O'Connor, Barbara

*A LONG WAY FROM CHICAGO* by Richard Peck

*LOVE FROM YOUR FRIEND, HANNAH* by Mindy Warshaw Skolsky

*BUTTERMILK HILL* by Ruth White

From Novelist K-8