

The Sound of Stories

By Glenn Plaskin

On many mornings nowadays, instead of reporting to a movie set, Julie Andrews relates that she has quite a different routine.

"First thing," she says, "after stretching and working out, I head upstairs to an attic I've converted into a little office where I feel protected and undisturbed.

"Then there's a great deal of sharpening pencils," she says, laughing. "Finally, I sit down with my notes and outline—and set to work." By work, Andrews is referring to her burgeoning career as a best-selling author of children's books. The woman who enchanted a whole generation with her unforgettable performances in *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* is now touching a new generation with a steady stream of books for kids.

"Who knew?" says the Oscar-winning actress and singer, who has written five books, most recently *Dumpy the Dump Truck* and *Dumpy at School* (Hyperion), both featuring a lovable old dump truck with special gifts.

"I get a lot of pleasure out of writing," said Andrews in a recent interview. "It's something I can do completely on my own, and once I get into it, I find that time just flies unbelievably. Still, I never thought of it as something I would do professionally, but I am taking it a lot more seriously now." In recent years the singer hit a sad note—the tragic loss of her singing voice after disastrous throat surgery in 1997. The operation was meant to remove noncancerous nodules that were triggering recurrent sore throats and laryngitis, but instead it left her unable to sing at all.

"Unfortunately, a great deal went wrong that should not have," says the 65-year-old, who continues to vocalize for about half an hour in the morning and again each night, though her voice tires easily and gets raspy. She remains optimistic about a cure: "You never know, I'm

not giving up. There are lots of discoveries still to be made about what could be done."

In the meantime Andrews has taken speaking roles in movies—most recently a live TV performance of *On Golden Pond* and a Disney feature, *The Princess Diaries*—while also maintaining a daily writing schedule. "How grateful I am to have something to fall back on. Writing,

Contributing editor Glenn Plaskin frequently reports on celebrity and human interest issues.

“ Writing is therapeutic—keeping a diary, writing to friends and family—anytime you have strong feelings. ”

The “Dumpy” books were inspired by Emma’s 4½-year-old son, Sam, a dump truck lover.



Writing together brings Julie Andrews and daughter Emma closer.

Photos: David Rodgers/Disney Publishing (top); Michael Kraus (bottom).