Winter address: Dunedin, Fla.
Box 507
Home address: Greenacres R7D2
Torrington, Conn.
Jan. 17, 1948

Dear Miss Montgomery:

Your letter of Jan. 7th was forwarded from my home in Conn. to me here, where I am spending the winter months. I had to leave my typewriter behind in the snow drifts, so hope you can bear with my handwriting.

I like your story of "The Big Mr. Small" very much. Strangely, you describe it almost exactly as it did happen — the inception of the idea. Actually I was in the living room, and Stephen and his friends were in the yard just outside the door, playing "auto". One thing you've missed — my vexation, for I said to myself: "Goodness! Don't they ever play anything else? Girls play dozens of games, but boys only one — auto, auto, auto all the time!" The fact that their play was so "incessant" made me conclude: "Since they never play anything else, this must be a major interest of the modern small boy. So why not put it into a book?" (Incidentally also, I noticed that they never personalized their cars or vehicles — that is entirely an adult fancy.)

Another point I wish you could make is regarding "the secret of his popularity". Various people have tried to account for it, but have missed the point entirely. Could you add this; (or rewrite in your own words)

"Due to the fact that Mr. Small is a boy dressed like a man, the child reader can more easily identify himself with the hero. The immediate reaction of every small boy is a desire to be Mr. Small, and to do the things he does."

I have marked a few other small changes in your text.

I like your outline and choice of books.

I shall want a number of copies of ~~the~~ your book, when it is ready, to distribute among individual children, schools and libraries - I am sure it will be delightful.

When you type "The Big Mr. Small" in its final form, would it be asking too much to type a copy ff for me to keep in my Mr. Small file? Thanks ever so much!

All good wishes for the success of the new book -

Sincerely,

Lois Lenski

Thanks for returning outline and clipping.

I am a little sorry it couldn't have been "Strawberry Girl" as I feel my regional books will be my most permanent.

LOIS LENSKI GREENACRES, R. F. D. No. 2 TORRINGTON, CONN.

Nov. 12, 1947

Elizabeth Rider Montgomery
3209 Alki Ave.
Seattle 6, Washington

Dear Miss Montgomery:

Your letter and questionnaire came the other day, and I am much interested in your proposed book. It should be a labor of love to compile it - I must say I really envy you! Children seem to be so interested in the authors behind their books, and so many schools do "author projects." For these reasons, I feel sure that such a book will fill a real need and become very popular.

I have filled out your questionnaire as well as I could in the limited space at my disposal. Of course, the methods used in my picture books are different from my older books where there is more of a story; and a good many of your questions apply to the latter type of book rather than to a picture book. However, I have done the best I can.

The articles which were published about me and my work last year in connection with the Newbery medal for STRAWBERRY GIRL (and which I have listed for you) will give you a pretty good idea of the personal side. In addition, I am sending you a clipping from a Hartford paper, which gives some idea of the way I combine professional work and domestic. I am also enclosing an outline which I made out for the use of Mrs. Lovelace for the background of her HORN BOOK article. This has an elaboration of the facts behind the evolution of the "Mr. Small" books, which will interest you; the rest about my historical and regional books for older children you may disregard, but I would like to keep it all together. These two items I must ask you to return as soon as you have finished with them. The folders you may keep. I am sure you could get the use of some of the Mr. Small "cuts" from Oxford, if your article is to be illustrated.

I have, for a long time, wished to do a complete story about "Mr. Small" whom Frederick Melcher has nicknamed "That Famous American," or have wished that Eunice Blake of the Oxford Press would do it. There is a whole anthology of stories about Mr. Small and his devoted fans that needs to be written. Since the war, the books are going into foreign countries, too - The Scandinavian, Spanish, and other languages. Before the war, they were in English, South African and Arabic editions. So little Mr. Small is riding all over the world!

With best wishes for the success of your book, and do let me know if I can help further in any way. Sincerely,

Lois Lenski

TORRINGTON, CONN.
JUL 1
1:30 PM
1949

THIS SIDE OF CARD IS FOR ADDRESS

Elizabeth R. Montgomery
4801 Beach Drive,
Seattle, 6,
Wash.

Lois Lenski
R. F. D. No. 2, Torrington, Conn.

Dear friend:

I have been seeing some nice reviews of your book. It should fill a much needed place in schools and libraries. Are the publishers not sending complimentary copies to the contributors? I am anxious to see a copy; hope to buy others to present to schools that cannot buy it – With best wishes for the book's success –

Sincerely,
Lois Lenski

"Little Auto"

Published by Oxford University Press Year 1934

Real name Lois Lenski Covey Mrs. Arthur Covey Pen name Lois Lenski (maidenname)

What do your family and friends call you? Lois

A. YOUR BACKGROUND

Date of birth Oct. 14, 1893 Place of birth Springfield, Ohio

Father's occupation Clergyman Number of brothers 2 and sisters 2

Father's nationality American Mother's nationality American

Kind of home during childhood (farm, small town, city apt. etc.) Small town

Where Anna, Ohio

Amount of schooling (high school, college, etc.) Sidney O. High School - grad. 1911 Ohio State Univ. B.S. in Ed. 1915 Art Students League N.Y. Westminster School of Art, London

Economic status during childhood (poor, middle class, wealthy) "Poor preacher" Father had $700 a yr. salary + sent us all five to college!

Special interests as a child (sports, books, games, etc.) Usual small-town games + sports. We always had books for Christmas; " " "Youth's Companion."

Childhood ambitions to sew; to draw; to teach; to write.

When did you begin to write? In 1926 when I wrote my first book: SKIPPING VILLAGE pub'd in 1927

Why? To accompany a set of pictures I had drawn reminiscent of my childhood.

Who encouraged you? Helen Dean Fish, then Children's Editor of Frederick A. Stokes Co. to whom I showed the drawings.

What and when was your first success or recognition? From 1922-1927 I had illustrated a number of books for other publishers.

How did you happen to write for children? All my work has always been for children. I have never had any desire or inclination to ~~write~~ work for adults.

Anything else about your background which has a bearing on your writing.

My urge to draw in childhood took the form of copying other pictures, often ~~colors~~ cover designs of magazines; I once got a 3.00 prize for copy of a cover on the "Woman's Home Companion." A fresco artist, decorating the interior of the "new church" which my father built, while staying in our home, suggested that I be given a real box of Windsor Newton water colors. My father sent away for them, and it was a big thrill when they came — 20 different colors instead of only three! I had no instruction in drawing or painting until after I went to College. There I took all the art I could get.

?

B. THE WRITING OF THIS BOOK

First Book, publ'd 1934
13th printing 1944-

Where did you get the idea for the book? From my son, Stephen, age 4, and his playmates. When playing with wagon, tricycle or kiddie car, it was always an imaginary automobile - they were always pumping up tires, getting stuck in mud, etc. Playing "auto" seemed to be a major interest of the modern small boy, so why not put it in a book?

When? (Season as well as year) Year before publication - 1933 -

Were the characters real people, or based on real people? I made Mr. Small the size & proportions of 4 yr. old Stephen; to be not a man, but a little boy pretending to be a man, and doing the things a man does to an automobile.

Where were you living at the time? At my present home "Greenacres", in Harwinton Conn.

What was your major occupation? Author-artist; also housewife taking care of my family.

Names (also nicknames) and identities of members of your household at the time. (If children, give ages.) My husband, Arthur Covey, mural painter, with his studio also on the place - my step-daughter, Margaret, & step-son, David, were away in school at the time -

Did you talk the book idea over with any of them? I worked it out with Stephen himself - to his whole-hearted approval.

Did you discuss it with an editor? Yes - Grace Hogarth (former editor at Oxford) told me years later, she considered the little book very revolutionary at the time, and herself very daring to accept it. She says it was "ahead of its time", because authors did not write about ordinary things like automobiles in children's stories then.

~~Where and how did you get the material? (library research, travel, personal experience, etc.)~~

When did you begin to write the book? Drawings & text the done together in a small dummy - which was tried out on groups of children - few changes being made, because it satisfied them.

Where?

How much had you had published when you began it? (Give names of books) 15 books written & illustrated; others by other artists, illustrated. Can give list if necessary. (See over →)

What was your purpose in writing this book? To get away from the over-worked idea of "personalizing" a vehicle and making it think and talk. To show what the man does to make a vehicle go - which is the small child's first and lasting interest. A child in his play never personalizes a vehicle. He plays he is the man who makes it go.

How do you write? (typewriter, long-hand, dictate) Long stories for older children are written first in long-hand, then revised & typed once or twice. Picture books have trial hand-printed text in dummy, often corrected & altered many times. Later a typed copy is sent to pub'r.

Where? (study, office, etc.) I have a studio - a separate building a stories away from our home.

Do you keep regular office hours? yes If so, what are they? From 9 to 5 usually.

Do you revise much? One or two revisions on older books. Write easily or laboriously? I work harder over my writing than over my drawing.

Do you let your family or friends read your work, or try it out on children? I try my stories out on children (of age for whom the book is intended) myself. I have them read and checked by technical experts, if the subject covers something that is new to me.

Books written & publd prior to 1934:

Skipping Village 1927
Jack Horner's Pie (nursery rhymes, illustrated) 1927
Alphabet People 1928
A Little Girl of 1900, 1928
The Wonder City 1929
Two Brothers & their Animal Friends 1929
" " " " Baby Sister 1930
Spinach Boy 1930
Benny & His Penny 1931
Grandmother Tippytoe 1931
Arabella & Her Aunts 1932
Johnny Goes to the Fair 1932
The Little Family 1932
Gooseberry Garden 1934
The Little Auto 1934

"Mr. Small" books:

The Little Auto	"Mr." Small
The Little Sail Boat	"Capt." "
The Little Airplane	"Pilot" "
The Little Train	"Engineer" "
The Little Farm	"Farmer" "
The Little Fire Engine	"Fireman" "

Who makes your final copies? (yourself, private secretary, public typist, etc.) I make all copies -

Did you make an outline before writing the book? For my older books, yes.

Did you decide on the title first or last? Whenever it happens to suggest itself, either first or last -

How long did it take you to write the book?

Did you work on it steadily?

Did it go fairly smoothly or did you hit rough spots? (Details of any particular difficulty and its solution would be appreciated.)

Was your book accepted immediately by a publisher?

Was it immediately popular on publication? It had a reasonably good sale the first year; the demand for it (& the other Mr. Small books) has steadily increased.

Anything else about your writing that might be of interest, especially anything that concerns this book.

C. ILLUSTRATIONS

How much did you have to do with the illustrations of your book?

I made them all first. The text was written to accompany the pictures.

If you did them yourself, which came first, the pictures or the text?

Pictures first usually - then a text to go with them -

What medium did you work in? Wash drawings in tones of gray & black, with one flat color printing. This method to make the book as inexpensive as possible.

How much experience had you had in illustrating? 12 years of illustrating experience, sometime more than 1 book per yr.

D. WHAT SORT OF PERSON YOU ARE

What did you look like when you wrote this book? Dark or fair? Much as I do now, except my hair is whiter —

Tall or short? tall Thin or plump? medium

Color of eyes? blue Wore glasses? None in 1934. Reading glasses now for reading, & close work

Color of hair? blond-now gray Kind of hair--long or short? Bun on neck then - now a short bob

Curly or straight? curly How did you wear it?

Any special features of your appearance (square jaw, dimples, stoop, etc.)

Are you quiet or talkative? Friendly or reserved?

Do you laugh a great deal or are you usually grave?

Are you quick-tempered or calm and placid?

What sort of clothes do you wear most when writing? (sports, suits, slacks, etc.)

Favorite occupations and hobbies? Formerly gardening - now given up because of poor health

What is your normal speech like? (Meticulously correct, colloquial, slangy, abrupt, rambling, etc.) Plain - ordinary

What are some of your pet expressions and exclamations?

If strongly religious, give denomination.

Any other details about yourself, no matter how trivial, which might help me to picture you in my own mind.

Can you direct me to any articles or books which have been written about you? Junior Books of Authors - Nelson Co - & other biographical books

Horn Book July 1946 Article by Maud Hart Lovelace

Publishers Weekly June 22, 1946 " " R.W.G. Vail

Library Journal July 1946 " " Helen Dean Fish

Chap. IV in "Bequest of Wings" by Annis Duff - Viking Press 1944

If you have a photograph or snapshot of yourself of about the vintage of your book, I would appreciate it. Of course I would return it promptly.