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## Cindy Lovell Oliver makes up for lost time



Write On by Marge Clauser

Have you ever read a book and felt a flashback to an earlier time in your life? That's the reaction some adults have when they read *Rachel Mason Hears the Sound* (NL Associates Inc., 2005).

Talking in first person is easy. We do it every day: "I went to the store, and ran into Janet, so we decided to go to lunch." Writing in first person, with natural-sounding dialogue, is hard; ask any writer. Writing in the voice of a child can be a daunting task.

Cindy Lovell Oliver masterfully combines a good story with elements that keep a reader wanting more. Oliver was the writer, but it's Rachel who tells her story. The story flows through dialogue and prose.

Rachel Mason is in the fifth grade. She is talented and smart, and loves to read and write. Her favorite time at school is DEAR time. That's when it's time to Drop Everything And Read. As you read this book, you'll wish you or your children had had a teacher like Rachel's Mrs. Juarez.

Rachel has a special talent: being able to keep a secret. Children can learn to keep secrets, especially if the secrets are about their family and life at home. Those secrets can hurt a child and carry over into adulthood, unless someone is able to recognize a child who is hiding a problem.

Cindy Lovell Oliver has an amazing story of her own. She was a high-school dropout. At age 35, she was a wife, mother and business owner. But she had left behind her dream of becoming a teacher because of her lack of education. She did free classroom programs devoted to Mark Twain, a passion she has had from childhood. A friend suggested she check out Daytona Beach Community College.

Oliver found that DBCC had classes she could take before and after work. In her first semester, she took 17 semester hours. By the end of the year, she had 58 credit hours, and transferred to Stetson University. Oliver earned her bachelor's degree, with honors. Then she became a fifth-grade teacher, and continued with her education.

Oliver went on to earn a master's degree at Stetson in 1996. She then completed a doctorate at the University of Iowa and joined the Stetson faculty. After that, she went "full steam ahead," putting her education and her love of learning to good use.

To say she is an expert on Mark Twain is not an exaggeration. She has just finished a week in Hannibal, Mo., where she helped teach the first-ever teachers workshop on Twain.

At Stetson, Oliver teaches undergraduate and graduate students how to become teachers of gifted students. She challenges them to become passionate about teaching and to take that passion into the classroom so their students will develop the desire to learn. She also teaches them to recognize students with hidden problems, such as Rachel Mason has.

Oliver also directs the HATS program at Stetson. HATS stands for High Achieving Talented Students. She is the founder and director of this program, which she started in 1996. HATS has summer classes for gifted and high-achieving fourth- through ninth-graders at various Florida sites, and is generous in offering scholarships.

Oliver's next book, *Not This Sunday*, is the second in the series set in Mrs. Juarez's classroom. The book, which will be out this fall, deals with a boy in Rachel's class whose father has recently been incarcerated.

For more fun and information about Rachel Mason, check out her Web site:  
[www.rachelmason.com](http://www.rachelmason.com).

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