

The True Story Behind Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler and Her Mixed-Up Files **Art/Bks/Film**

Posted by:

Posted on : 2018/1/2 18:41:24

Fifty years ago, author E.L. Konigsburg wrote her children's literature classic that highlighted the wonder of museums

By [Patrick Sauer](#) for Smithsonian.com A half-century ago, a girl and brother ran away to New York City from their suburban Connecticut home. And the Metropolitan Museum of Art hasn't been the same since. If visions of Claudia and Jamie bathing—and collecting lunch money—in the Met's Fountain of Muses bring up fond childhood memories of your own, you're among the legions of readers who grew up loving E.L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. The classic children's book turns 50 in 2017, and the tale of the Kincaid siblings spending their days wandering about the paintings, sculptures and antiquities, and their nights sleeping in antique beds handcrafted for royalty, is as popular as ever. The 1968 Newbery Medal winner has never been out of print. (The same year, her debut novel *Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth* [received the Newbery runner-up honor](#); Konigsburg is the only author to ever achieve the dual literary feat.) Elaine Lobl (E.L.) was born in Manhattan in 1930, but grew up in small-town Pennsylvania. She earned a degree in chemistry from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, and married industrial psychologist David Konigsburg in 1952. But a career in science wasn't to be. She had trouble with the lab work; her son Paul says more than once, she blew the sink up—and lost her eyebrows—mixing the wrong elements. So Elaine became a stay-at-home mother of three, and while living in Port Chester, New York, decided to start writing. “When we were in grade school, Mom would write in the morning. When the three of us kids would come home for lunch, she would read what she wrote,” says Paul Konigsburg, 62. “If we laughed she kept it in. If not, she rewrote it.” The Konigsburgs never lived in New York City, but the metropolis always provided a cultural respite. One institution in particular served as both babysitter and source of inspiration. “Mom took art lessons in [the city] on Saturdays, so she would drop all three of us kids off at the Metropolitan,” says Paul. “I was the oldest, so I was in charge, and I had three rules: One, we had to see the mummy. Two, we had to see the knights in armor. And three, I didn't care what we saw. Mom would meet up with us in the museum, take us to study Impressionist or Modern art. It always made me want to puke, but we did it every weekend for over a year.” Access the complete article at the link below:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history ... assic-was-born-180963325/>