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Greeting

Falling Into Place

September, not January, begins *my* calendar year.

And it always has, since that long-ago September day in faraway Philadelphia when I first set foot in Miss Patton's kindergarten classroom, newly shoed, my black bangs cut and even, eager to start what I'd been playing at for years.



Proudly, I could already read, pronouncing my treasured books' titles as I finger-pointed to each word. *Little Red Riding Hood. Come Play House. The Poky Little Puppy.*

And I could write my first name inside each book's cover, after the words "This Little Golden Book belongs to."

How delicious, that our Chapter's first 2008-2009 event, the **Sept. 12 Aurora Public Art Commission's Exhibition Opening Reception**, reunites me with my beloved Little Golden Books.

The free exhibit "Golden Legacy" (running Sept. 5 through Oct. 12) features many of the original Little Golden Book illustrations as well as a conversation and tour with Leonard Marcus, noted children's book historian, scholar and author of *Golden Legacy* (Random House, 2007).

The bold Little Golden Books experiment produced quality books at an affordable price, during World War II when illiteracy was high.

And that experiment continues to do so 66 years later. In fact, Golden Books Editorial Director Diane Muldrow, speaking at this August's SCBWI Conference in Los Angeles, invited writers and illustrators to submit mass market-appealing stories and images with universal themes similar to those of the first published Golden Books.

Presenting at the same LA SCBWI Conference, Leonard Marcus shared advice from the legendary Harper editor Ursula Nordstrom on how to create great children's books today. Nordstrom edited writers and illustrators from 1940 through 1973, and Marcus gathered and published

much of her editorial correspondence in his 2000 book, *Dear Genius* (HarperCollins).

*Everyone starts as a beginner, he reminded us.
You never know what may become a masterpiece.
The time to write or illustrate your next book might be now.*

I began writing in the late 1970s, driven by my kindergarten wish to see my first and last names on the front cover of a children's book, golden or otherwise. In his most recent book, *Minders of Make-Believe* (Houghton Mifflin, 2008), an overview of American children's book publishing and literature, Marcus titles this decade "Change and More Change."

I read my way through Marcus' book, from the colonial times of "Providence and Purpose" to "Suits and Wizards at the Millennium's Gate." And all the while, I heard the quickening tempo of today's children's book world beat-beat-beating as I turned the pages. *More books! More imprints! More creators! More and different formats!*

Still, One Truth evinced itself forever unchanged, no matter the ever-changing decades and practices: smarts and craft reign supreme.

Smarts: about our industry, our community, our literature, ourselves.
Craft: as in the very best telling of our stories.

Fortunately, as always, both our comprehensive *Prairie Wind* newsletter and our Chapter's coming year's innovative programming offer each of us opportunities to sharpen our minds and hone our craft.

Maybe that age-old adage is true? The more things change, the more they stay the same.

There's so much to glean from this bountiful newsletter, from our Chapter's thoughtful programming, from our rich and varied membership. May our paths cross often this coming year, beginning Sept. 12th at the Golden Legacy exhibit.

Esther Hershenhorn
Regional Advisor
SCBWI-Illinois

Getting Back to It

September First may be the official start of fall, but for many of us, it's the return of some productive writing time.

On Sept. 1, the summer sand that drifted into the house on towels and flip-flops gets swept away. The smell of sunblock gets replaced by the scent of freshly sharpened No. 2 pencils. And the dream of getting back into a writing groove becomes that much closer to reality.

September means school is starting. And while I love having "together time" with my kids during the summer, I can't help but dance a little jig when Sept. 1 rolls around.

I need the structure that their school day allows. I crave the solitude of a few quiet hours, the chance to be alone with my characters over a cup of tea before the bell rings and chaos ensues once again.

Sure, I'll miss summer and all its insane fun. But after three months away from my laptop, I think *we* need some quality "together time."

With this Fall 2008 issue, it's clear a few Illinois writers and illustrators have had a chance to get down to work already. **Jenny Meyerhoff** wins the MVP award, graciously writing about her debut book's journey from idea to book store with **Tales From the Front**, as well as contributing her regular column on the **Writer's Bookshelf**.

Kristin Walker steps up with an interview for our **Someone You Should Know** feature, introducing us to the Newberry Library's Jenny Schwartzberg and her upcoming exhibit, "700 Years of Children's Books."

Stephanie Kuehnert generously shares her promotion ideas for her red-hot new book, *I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone*, in the **Promote That Book!** column. Now all of us will try to figure out how we can make good use of guitar picks.

Big thanks go out to **Margo L. Dill** for interviewing no less than Elizabeth Bird of Fuse #8 for the **Kidslitosphere** column. Margo, along with the

other half of that tag-teaming duo, **Dawn Malone**, is making that column a must-read.

Be sure to click on the **Don't Miss** feature and check out the details of this year's **Prairie Writer's Day** event, to be held Nov. 15th at the Priory in River Forest.

And to all of the terrific columnists who contributed to this season's newsletter, a big hat's off in thanks for all you do to make the *Prairie Wind* so informative, interesting and exciting.

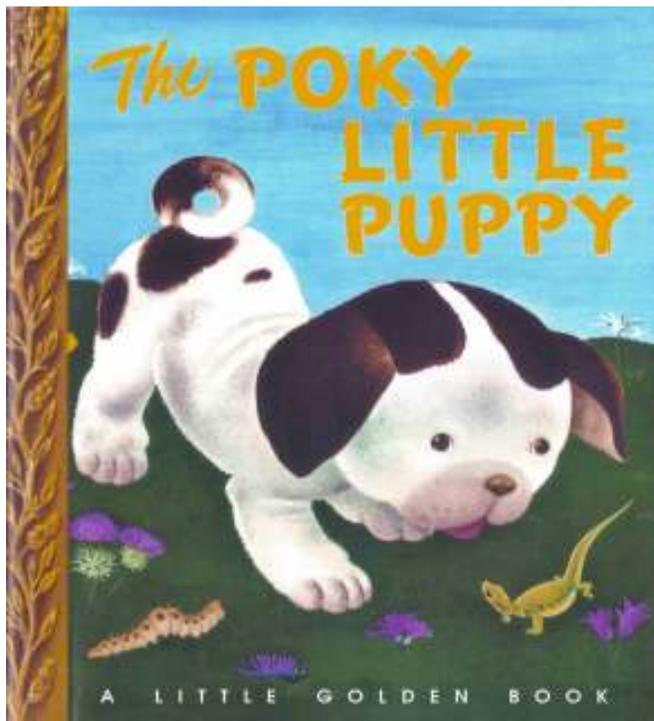
To you, as well as **Chris Vasilakis** and **Cheryl Bardoe** for their fab tech skills and editing savvy, we all owe a hearty cheer.

But not too loud, of course. Some of us might be writing.

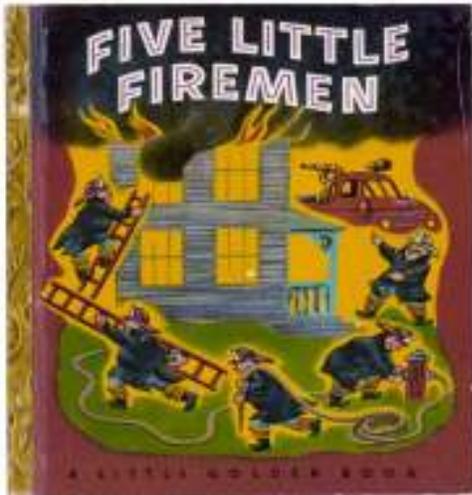
Kate Hannigan
Editor

Illustrator in the Spotlight

Autumn's Golden Moments



No, it's not just the golden light of fall that's making you feel nostalgic. It's *The Poky Little Puppy*, *Scuffy the Tugboat*, *The Saggy Baggy Elephant* and plenty of others. Let yourself take that walk down memory lane with other SCBWI-Illinois members at "Golden Legacy: Original Art from 65 Years of Golden Books," a traveling exhibition of 60 pieces of artwork from classic Golden Books.



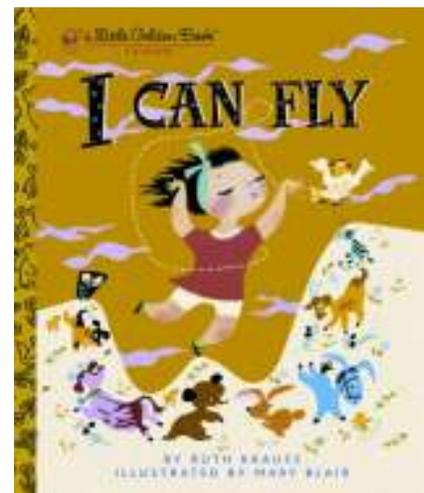
Mark your calendars for the free wine and cheese reception from 5 to 8:30 p.m. Sept. 12 featuring Leonard Marcus, author of *Golden Legacy: How Golden Books Won Children's Hearts, Changed Publishing Forever, and Became an American Icon Along the Way*. The exhibit will be on display until Oct. 12.

The opening reception will be held at the Aurora Public Art Commission Gallery at 20 East Downer Place. Contact Rena J. Church of the Aurora Public Art Commission at (630) 906-0654 or e-mail rchurch@aurora-il.org. Visit the [website](#) for more information.

The exhibit features original illustrations by legendary artists from the beloved picture-book line. Check out the original paintings and drawings from cherished childhood books, including works by Tibor Gergely (*The Great Big Fire Engine Book*), Garth Williams (*Mister Dog*), Richard Scarry (*I Am A Bunny*) and Feodor Rojankovsky (*The Three Bears*).

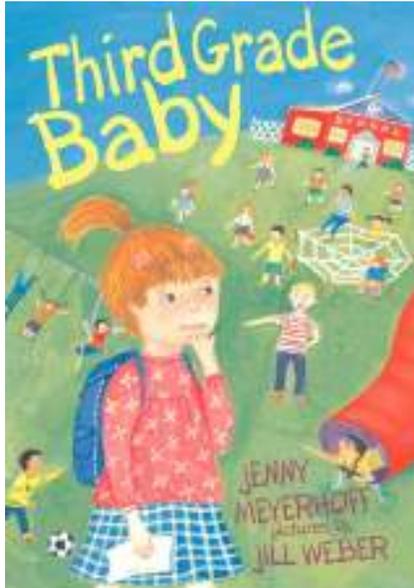
Golden Legacy was organized and premiered by the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature in Abilene, Texas, and co-curated by Diane Muldrow, editorial director for Golden Books, and Leonard Marcus. It was previously in Manhattan and will hit other spots around the country.

Visit the ListServ to hook up with other members commuting from your area by car, train or bus.



From Fantasy to Reality

By Jenny Meyerhoff



I began writing my first book because of a title: *The Top Secret Files of the Tooth Fairy*. It came to me in a flash, and even though I had never written anything longer than a short story, I was certain it would be the best chapter book of all time. How could I go wrong with a title that good? Kids love to read about the tooth fairy. So, I wrote the story of a girl who loses her first tooth and must track the tooth fairy down to retrieve her tooth money. A few other things happen along the way, and, well. . .

It wasn't such a good book.

Undaunted, I revised it, removing all the fantasy elements (including the tooth fairy) and turning it into the realistic tale of a late-blooming third-grader. A third-grader who still has all her baby teeth. In this version, Polly Peterson again loses a tooth, and the “tooth fairy” forgets to take it, but for very different reasons. With the focus turning from the tooth fairy to Polly, I reluctantly let go of the title that had inspired my adventure and found a new one: *Third Grade Baby*.

This theme of starting in fantasyland and then returning to reality isn't just one that happened in my manuscript. It's one that I keep circling back to over and over on my journey as an author.

The first fantasy I had to deal with was titled “An Agent Likes Your Manuscript, You Can Quit Your Day Job.” As I wrote *Third Grade Baby*, I'd tell anyone who would listen that I wasn't actually writing for publication. This was a practice book. I was writing to learn *how* to write. If I could finish this book, I told myself, then I knew that I could write another, better, book next. I had never planned to submit *Third Grade Baby* until an uncle insisted that I send the book to his agency. Two days later, I received the most exciting phone call of my life. An agent loved my manuscript.

Unfortunately, he was the last person to have that reaction for a year and a half. Reality: Agents don't sell every manuscript they love.

And so, I happened upon the second fantasy. "You've Revised the Dang Thing into the Ground. It's As Good As It's Gonna Get." Ha! I know better now. A manuscript is never done. Reality: You can always make it better.

Guided by insights and suggestions from my kids, my critique group, Darcy Pattison's revision workshop and countless books on structure, voice and the writing process, I had already revised my manuscript many times before I set it free in the world. The *fifth* draft was the one that went to the agent. But after the comments I received with the first rejections, it was clear I needed to take another pass through it. So I revised again, and again. And then I began to send it out for the second time.

It was at Prairie Writer's Day 2006 that an editor told me she was interested in the manuscript. My brain quivered with the fantasies. *Wow! A multi-book deal? A six-figure advance? What would it be?* Well, not quite. She invited me to. . .

Revise.

That November, I revised like I'd never revised before. For an entire month, I was a fevered writing machine. This revision did the trick, and Farrar, Straus, and Giroux offered a contract for the book. Of course, after the contract, the first thing I had to do was revise again. A small one, but still. Then we moved onto line editing and copy editing, and, finally, the book was done.

Then one day a package arrived on my doorstep. I opened it and *wham!* Fantasy number three smacked me right in the face — a fantasy I hadn't even realized I'd been having for the past year. "Your Book is Your Own Special Private Thing. Just For You, and Maybe a Few Select Others." I don't know how I made it this far through the process without realizing I'd have to let people other than my critique group and my editor read my book, but even weeks from its release date, the story still seemed so personal. Friends were asking to



read it and, like always, I had the I-don't-really-let-people-read-my-writing reaction.

Suddenly my brain was crowded with thoughts of friends, relatives, unknown children, parents, teachers and browsers in bookstores all with my book in their hands. Would they like it? Would they get what I'd been trying to do? Would they see things in the book that I'd never thought of?

Reality: Once it is published, your book is no longer yours; it belongs to readers. And remembering all the books that have been "mine" over the years, I know this is a very good thing.

I think this is why I haven't read my book in its hardcover form. I'd be too tempted to change it, to take it back from the readers. Instead I'll focus on my next book, the one I can still see through the fantasy lenses of "I Can Make it Perfect." But here's the reality: I've written a book. The dream of being a published children's book author that began when I was 12 years old has become a reality. No fantasy could ever be as good as that.

If you'd like your favorite third-grade classroom to win a copy of *Third Grade Baby*, please visit Jenny's [blog](#) and click on the contest link in the sidebar.

Jenny Meyerhoff is the author of the chapter book, Third Grade Baby, and the forthcoming YA, The Impossible Secrets of Essie Green. She lives in Riverwoods with her husband and three children. Visit her on the web at www.jennymeyerhoff.com.

Someone You Should Know

Newberry Library's Jenny Schwartzberg

By Kristin Walker

I'd love to take full credit for writing this article, but the truth is Jenny Schwartzberg did most of the work. Which is amazing, considering how busy she must be preparing for the opening of her exhibit at the Newberry Library in Chicago. Jenny is the Gift Specialist at the library, and she's co-

curator of their **fall exhibit**: *Artifacts of Childhood: 700 Years of Children's Books*.



I had the opportunity to ask Jenny (at left) a few questions about the exhibit and her expertise. She is incredibly passionate and knowledgeable, and . . . well, see for yourself!

Please share the specifics of the exhibit, and a little bit about your background.

The exhibit — which runs from Sept. 27 to Jan. 17, 2009 — will be free and open to the public. There will be public lectures on fairy tales, the history of education and the history of children's literature, from well-known scholars such as Seth Lerer and Leonard Marcus during this period as well. There will be regular gallery walks on Thursday nights led by the exhibit curators, either Paul Gehl or myself.

I am a native Chicagoan and have been deaf since birth. I speak and use my hearing via cochlear implants. A historian by training, I am now a historian of children's literature, among other specialties in linguistics, Jewish history and genealogy, and bibliography.

How did you become interested in children's literature?

I have always loved children's books, kept my childhood collection and continued to add to it. When I was growing up, it was still possible to find older, illustrated children's books in the used bookstores at reasonable prices. I have a few chapter books from the early nineteenth century, but most of my books range from 1900 to 2008, with a strength in tales of magic and wonder.

I became a specialist in children's literature in a sideways way. When I began working at the Newberry in November 1989, I learned that they had just had a symposium on the history of children's literature. I have always regretted missing that event. They had put together a short checklist of ABCs and primers in the collection for the symposium and begun to realize that there was more to be discovered in the library's collection.

The librarian who put together that checklist, Alison Hinderliter, continued to dig into the library's old card catalog afterward, and I would keep telling her to look for this author and that author and/or subject. When she left to go to library school, I was asked to take over the project.

Alison had a computer file of several hundred books. Today, nearly 19 years later, my computer files list over 10,000 children's books and secondary literature. Through my research into our collections, readings on the subject and graduate school courses in children's literature, I have become something of an expert in the history of children's literature, though there is always more to learn!

Where did you get the idea or inspiration for the exhibit?

From the beginning, when I realized we had a great collection of children's literature, I dreamed of having an exhibit to showcase some of our books. It was the best way I could think of to publicize the collection and to tell people about it. There is so much material for inspiration for children's writers and illustrators, as well as for scholarly research into the history of children's literature, the history of education, the history of childhood and many other fields.

How did you select which books to include in the exhibit?

Over the years I made lists of potential books and mental notes as we were given or purchased more books. Part of compiling my catalog of our collection was calling up books to check that they were indeed children's books, and the spectacular and particularly intriguing ones went onto the list.

When I began to think about how to shape the exhibit, my goal was to show the incredible variety of material read to, read by and used by children across the centuries. I ended up choosing to use themes to frame the exhibit: the child as learner, the virtuous child, the child as book buyer, the rise of fiction for children, the child at play and the child as writer. I focused on choosing books to show these themes across the centuries.

How long have you been working on the exhibit?

I have dreamed about having this exhibit since I first realized what we had, as a way of showing people what a fabulous collection it is, i.e. since

1990. However, it was only in 1998 that I finally gathered up the courage to start persuading people at the library that we should have a children's book exhibit. It took a lot of talking, but finally people agreed it was a great idea and would bring a lot of people in to use our collections who might never think to come here otherwise.

However, fund raising for this exhibit took a very long time. People do not think of the Newberry as a place for children's books and were generally more interested in funding other kinds of exhibits and programs. It has helped that in recent years there has been a rise of interest in the history of children's literature and children's literature in general.

How do you define children's books?

Too many people think of children's books as just fiction, picture books and fairy tales, and they are so much more than that. My definition of children's books is anything that was read to children, read by children, taught to children, played with by children or written by children. That may seem overly broad, but it covers the incredible variety of materials held by the Newberry.

Seven hundred years is a long time! Can you tell us about some of the earliest children's books in your exhibit?

Before the development of books specifically for children, people used whatever was on hand to teach children to read. The Bible, particularly the Psalms, was commonly used. The Psalms were in verse, short, easy to memorize and to teach children to recognize. The earliest book in the exhibit is a small pocket Bible from 1250, which is open to the Psalms. Then we have two Psalters from 1480 and 1494 which show the changes in the formatting of the Psalms to make it easier for beginning readers to use them.

Also, Aesop has always been told orally to children as well as adults, and it was a popular text for children. We show a printed illustrated Aesop from 1485 along with a manuscript Aesop from ca. 1500 that was used as a schoolbook. I could go on and on about other books, but we would run out of room on the page.

In your opinion, what qualities in a children's book will help it endure through centuries?

A good, vivid story that resonates with all ages frequently survives the centuries. Aesop's Fables are still popular after more than 2,000 years, for example. Fairy tales and Robinson Crusoe are other good examples. Their appeal is universal. Indeed when you look in today's bookstores you see many books that have very deep roots in the past, and that is one of the major aims of the exhibit, to show people those roots.

Who do you think are some of the most integral children's authors?

If you mean authors who continue to be read today, certainly Lewis Carroll and Louisa May Alcott are still very important. Authors such as Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume have been continuously in print for over 40 years and have had enormous impact on both children and later authors. And let's not forget international authors such as Jean de Brunhoff or C.S. Lewis. One of the great things about living in today's world is that we have so many wonderful older books as well as new books available to children all over the world. It's a very different world of books than in 1700, 1800 or 1900!

What are some of your favorite children's books and why?

Oh, you would have to ask that! I've loved the Oz books since childhood, both those by L. Frank Baum, Ruth Plumly Thompson and other writers. My parents, who had loved them as well, made sure to give my brother and me used copies for birthdays and holidays. Those books taught me to love tales of magic and wonder. Other older authors were Frances Hodgson Burnett and Joan Aiken. Among current authors, my favorites are Diana Wynne Jones, Sherwood Smith and Shannon Hale. I read many, many other authors, but those in particular stand out at this point in time.

Did you find that there was a time period or periods when children's book writing made great leaps or transitions? If so, when? And why?

Changing concepts of childhood and education are often accompanied by shifts in educational material and children's fiction. The exhibit shows some of these shifts across time and space. I could go into tons of detail, but I really recommend you come to see the exhibit, especially since we are running out of space here.

What do you think the future holds for children's books?

I believe there will always be books for children. Many of today's favorites and old favorites will continue to be marketed to children and their parents. Parents always want to pass down books they remember fondly from their own childhood, which is part of why children's books have such incredible continuity.

There are now efforts to build digital children's libraries on the web, which can be downloaded and read by children. Multimedia books and CDs are flourishing in the educational book market and beginning to move over into children's fiction. I don't know if they will be more than a flash in the pan in the fiction market. We will have to wait and see.

I personally believe books will continue to be primarily physical, paper objects for the next 50 years. After that, who knows? I do believe stories will continue to be told and retold as long as there are human beings, no matter what format they are told in. Storytelling is part of human nature.

How long will the exhibit run, and will it always be at the Newberry, or will it travel?

It will be at the library until Jan. 17, 2009. After that it will come down and will not travel. I hope that in the future, we might be able to turn it into a virtual online exhibit on our website.

Once the exhibit is up and running, what will be next for you?

Well, I'll be leading a lot of gallery tours, participating in all the public programs and, hopefully, answering lots and lots of questions and meeting many, many people. I hope that all the excitement generated by the exhibit and the public programs will lead to future exhibits on different aspects of children's books and regular programming at the Newberry on the subject. I would love to see the library become a center for research on the history of childhood and children's books. In the spring, life will return to normal, and I will think about what long-term project to take on next. I have more ideas and dreams. . .

We'll have to keep an eye out for Jenny Schwartzberg's next project. But until then, we can head over to the Newberry Library and enjoy all the hard work and vast knowledge she has brought to this exciting exhibit, as well as to the world of children's books — the world we all love! Thank you, Jenny for sharing your thoughts with us.

Kristin Walker's debut YA novel, A Match Made in High School, will be published next summer by Razorbill (Penguin). You can find her at www.kristin-walker.com.

Writing Tips

What's In A Name? (Part Four)

By Carmela Martino

In this, the last installment of a four-part series, I will wrap up my discussion of character names. I mentioned last time that I wanted to address a couple of points children's librarian Lisa Chellman raises on her blog. In her [Feb. 19th post](#), Lisa asks "How do names alone suggest characterization? Is it something about the way they sound when you say them? . . . Or is it because of other words the name evokes?"

I believe that both a name's sound and its connotations affect characterization. Regarding sound, historical fiction writer Michelle Hoppe Prima provides the following advice in her online article, "[Naming Your Characters](#)."

"Say the name aloud. Hard sounds like 't' or 's' will strengthen your character, while softer sounds like 'd' or 'b' will have a pleasanter ring. Think about the image you wish to convey. Ending the name on a hard sound—Kent or Brooke—would be stronger than Hugh or Ella."

Darcy Pattison also discusses how sound affects a reader's impressions in her post about word (and name) choices on [May 18, 2007](#). The post is actually a follow-up to her discussion of "word connotations" on [May 11, 2007](#). As part of that discussion, Pattison says that a word acquires connotations "from the way it looks, sounds, derivations, culture, experiences, and more." Lisa Chellman lists examples of this herself on her blog:

“You might expect a Kurt to be, well, curt. Or a Bruce to be bear-like, because of the word Bruin. Rose to be beautiful but hiding a few thorns.”

I believe that some of the cultural connotations come from associating a character’s name with that of a well-known personality, real or fictional. For example, most Americans have strong associations with the names Adolph Hitler, Elvis Presley and Paris Hilton. Therefore, being aware of common cultural connotations is important to the character-naming process. The good news is: We can use these associations to our advantage, as a form of “shorthand” for describing our characters.

The bad news is that not all names have the same connotations to all people. In her May 11, 2007, post, Darcy Pattison suggests, “Abraham, because of Abraham Lincoln, has the connotation of tall.” Personally, on reading about a character named Abraham, I’d be more likely to think of the Old Testament Abraham. In general, I don’t think conflicting connotations create huge problems for writers, though. While seeing a character’s name may evoke a first impression in a reader, it’s not the only impression. An author can use a character’s actions, dialogue, physical traits, etc., to make sure the reader’s impression falls in line with the author’s image of the character.

However, it is possible for a name to create an impression that is difficult to overcome. In her **Feb. 29th blog post**, Lisa Chellman talks about some of her “least favorite distinctive character names.” Her main problem with the names is that they are “too unfamiliar.” She includes on the list “Holling Hoodhood,” from Gary D. Schmidt’s Newbery-honor winning novel, *The Wednesday Wars*. As I mentioned in part two of this series, Schmidt justified his use of the name Hoodhood because it was the last name of one of his son’s classmates. Yet I agree with Lisa that if a name is too unusual it can call so much attention to itself that readers have a hard time “suspending disbelief.” In *The Language of Names*, by Justin Kaplan and Anne Bernays, John Updike is quoted as saying:

“What you want in a name is something odd enough without being grotesque . . . something with a little electricity.”

Interestingly, Ann Bernays, one of the coauthors of *The Language of Names*, got into legal trouble for using a character name that was too unusual—a name she’d gotten from a name-generating program. According to *The Language of Names*:

“. . . she was sued for a million dollars by a man who had the same unusual surname as one of her characters, a predatory, bisexual summer-theatre director. . . . She discovered, too late, that there were only five people in the Manhattan telephone directory with that name, and they were all related to one another. It cost her thousands simply to defend the suit, which was eventually settled out of court.”

Schmidt’s protagonist in *The Wednesday Wars* seems to have a surname that is equally uncommon. Lisa Chellman says, “I’ve never known a person named Hoodhood. In fact, on a Yahoo! people search, only nine Hoodhoods come up in the entire USA. Nine.”

When I read *The Wednesday Wars*, I wasn’t bothered by the surname Hoodhood. However, the combination “Holling Hoodhood” did raise a number of questions for me: What kind of parents would give a child the first name of Holling with the last name of Hoodhood? What was their motivation? Was Holling a family name? Was Holling Hoodhood named for someone? How did he feel about his name?

It’s been a long time since I read *The Wednesday Wars*, but I don’t recall any of those questions being answered. In my opinion, an author who gives a character an exceptionally unusual name should provide readers with the name’s associated backstory. By not doing so, authors risk not only alienating readers, but also missing an opportunity to deepen characterization.

Believe it or not, I still have more I could say on this topic, but I don’t want to risk boring readers who are thinking, “Enough already!” However, if you’d like additional tips on naming characters, I recommend Michelle Hoppe Prima’s article mentioned above and author Ann Marble’s article, **“Name that Character!”**

In conclusion, I’d like to add that one of the best parts of researching this topic was discovering the book *Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature*, by English professors Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don L. F. Nilsen. (In case you’re wondering, according to my baby-naming book, “Alleen” is a girl’s name of Dutch origin, and it means “alone.”) The Nilsens’ book is filled with wonderful examples of, as they put it, “the different effects that skilled authors bring about through their manipulation of names.” While the book defines young adult literature as “whatever readers between the ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read for their own pleasure or

enlightenment,” I think the same principles apply to literature for younger readers.

In their introduction, the Nilsens say:

“ . . . young adults are especially responsive to authors who are skilled in the literary uses of names—not just personal names, but also place names and names for events, inventions, animals, attitudes, social developments, and imagined concepts.”

Today’s young readers expect meaningful names in the fiction they read. With some extra effort, we can also provide them with “a little electricity.”

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Carmela Martino is the author of the middle-grade novel Rosa, Sola (Candlewick Press), which was named to Booklist’s “Top Ten First Novels for Youth: 2006.” She has an MFA in writing from Vermont College and teaches writing classes for both children and adults. For more information, or to contact her, visit: www.carmelamartino.com.

Critique Group Tips

I’ve Been Searching So Long

By Teresa Owens Smith

Finding a writing group that fits can be difficult. Some are too far away. Many are full. Sometimes it’s hard to walk away from one that isn’t working, or even more difficult to find one again. Like true love, the perfect group is out there somewhere. How do you find it?

Come with me to the hidden lands of potential critique group members.

In a Galaxy Far, Far Away: Online Offerings

Critique groups are often formed from meeting other writers. Unfortunately, many times you can’t get out to meet and greet them. But you have magic at your fingertips... online groups, discussions, classes. To join existing groups, Yahoogroups has been mentioned in a previous article,

but don't stop there. Googling "children's writers critique groups" will probably give you more leads.

If that sounds too much like a blind date, writer message/discussion boards can give you the chance to mingle. Such forums can be found on the national **SCBWI web pages**, Verla Kay's **message boards** and live chats or **Children's Writing Resource Center** from Children's Book Insider. This is a way for you to talk with and get to know other writers.

Also, as mentioned in a previous article, online classes can provide opportunities to work with and critique other writers. **Writer's Digest** offers several workshops. If you're a picture book writer, check out **Anastasia Suen's** picture book workshop. Finally, the **Institute of Children's Literature** also provides a variety of writing classes.

Back on Earth: Classes, Conferences and Retreats Closer to Home

Potential critique group members can be hiding anywhere. They might be in Esther Hershenhorn or Carmela Martino's classes (check out our SCBWI-IL listserv). Contact your local community college, too. Sometimes you might find one of our SCBWI authors there. I found a class with Carolyn Crimi that way. Just a state away, the University of Iowa offers the **Summer Writing Festival** every year.

Have you been avoiding professional conferences because they seem too big, too expensive? Look again. It may be well worth your time and money. Professional conferences are a good place to hone your craft and meet other writers. SCBWI has national conferences in Los Angeles in August and New York City in February. There are great lectures, chances to be critiqued by editors and opportunities to schmooze with fellow writers, well-known authors, agents and editors. Critique-group-deprived writers are hiding there, too.

"But that's such a big step and I'm just a beginner," you say. Then start with our local SCBWI-IL. In November, we offer Prairie Writer's Day. Odds are pretty good that you'll sit next to someone from Illinois. Be ready to network, listen and lunch with your fellow SCBWI members. Move beyond the basic questions of whether someone is a writer or illustrator (or both), genre and location, and ask if they are in a critique group. How did they

find members? Do they know of groups with openings? Don't be shy. Let people know you're looking for a group.

Hunt down potential critique group members at our chapter's retreats, like the great Words in the Woods offered by the combined efforts of the Downstate and Central Illinois networks this past June, as well as at workshops and local network meetings (Chicago, north, west, south, central and downstate). If you think about it, Illinois isn't too far from Wisconsin, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Michigan. They have SCBWI chapters, too, each offering conferences, workshops and retreats. All are fine stomping grounds for future online critique group members. Make sure to practice your best pick-up lines ahead of time.

Writers Are All Around

Writers are everywhere. They are librarians, school teachers, lawyers; they are young and old and anywhere in between. Keep your eyes and ears open, as well as your mind. Value all levels of writers, from beginners to well-published, but take your time. Be picky. You want people whom you look forward to seeing, who welcome your work and your input. Remember, you want your writing to be the best it can be. A strong critique group can help you get there. Maybe every critique-group-seeker's slogan should be: "I'm looking for a few good writers."

A few is all it takes.

Once upon a time, Teresa Owens Smith was a clinical psychologist. After stumbling upon SCBWI-Illinois, she chose to live happily ever after as a writer of middle-grade novels (or of anything interesting that pops into her head). You can contact her at PhDTree@aol.com.

Illustrator Tips

Surviving a Professional Dry Spell

By Kathleen Rietz

As freelance illustrators, we've all been there before – those times when assignments stop trickling in, and we find ourselves lying awake in our beds at night wondering how we'll pay next month's bills. Sometimes these

professional dry spells cause us to question what we may have done wrong. And if enough time passes, we may even begin to doubt our own talents as illustrators. Usually, though, dry spells last a short time, and new assignments bring us a new sense of security – and restore our sleep.

I know first-hand how difficult it can be to coast through a professional dry spell and survive, because I went through a dry spell that lasted nearly two years. I won't lie: Relying on an income solely through freelance work is not for the faint of heart. But if you use your time wisely, you can come out of a professional dry spell with a redefined sense of purpose and a clearer identity as an illustrator. I would even argue that dry spells are important and necessary if we choose to use our time wisely. For me, those two dry years turned out to be a time of immense growth as a children's book illustrator.

I have compiled a list of suggestions for surviving a professional dry spell. Many of these I tried myself. Others are things I still plan to do the next time work slows for me.

- **Conduct a class or demo.** Art stores, such as Blick Art Materials, are often open to artists who are interested in teaching anything from a six-week course to a one-day workshop. This can be a quick way to earn some cash while promoting yourself as an artist. It's also a great way to meet and network with other artists in your community. Store managers like it because it draws customers who are inclined to purchase art supplies.
- **Get current.** Take a computer arts class. Even for traditional illustrators, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator skills are almost a must-have. Even if you pride yourself on being "old-school," many clients now expect artists to submit illustration jobs in digital format. You may also want to take a class to learn how to build your own website. If you can't afford a class at your local community college, Lynda.com offers \$25 monthly subscriptions to online tutorials you can complete at your own pace.
- **Experiment.** Always wanted to try acrylics, gouache or collage art? Now's your time to shine. Something you try might end up redefining your entire purpose as an illustrator. You can even find online demos and artist groups devoted to a specific medium. In my case, I wanted to get back to using acrylic paints, which I had in storage for years. Before taking them out for a try, I contacted an illustrator whose acrylic work I admired and asked her about her technique. She was more than happy to share her

technique with me. I am now using acrylic paint to illustrate a new children's picture book assignment.

- **Update your database.** Social sites for illustrators and writers, such as Jacketflap.com, can offer a wealth of information to aid you in compiling a database of publishers whom you may want to contact for future illustration work. The site contains information such as a publisher's most recent books, news, imprints, what type of books they publish each year and how many. Other sources for compiling your database are the SCBWI Bulletin and an annual publication titled *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market*. New copies sell for about \$25, but you may be able to cut costs by checking one out at your local library.

- **Revamp your portfolio.** Now's the time to be honest with yourself. Easier said than done, right? Sometimes, as illustrators, we want to include every fabulous illustration we have ever done. We lose focus of our portfolio as a whole. In that case, attending a group critique such as a local SCBWI chapter meeting can be helpful. Personally, I also found it very helpful to contact some artist agents and request feedback from them about my work and my portfolio. While each agent's advice differed to some extent, there were a few comments made to me by each agent that remained consistent. It was these key comments that really helped me to cull my body of illustration work and focus on creating some new illustrations that gave my portfolio a much stronger sense of unity.



- **Create a new promo mailing.** Now that you have updated your database and created some new pieces for your portfolio, it's time to design a new mailing to send to editors and art directors at publishing houses. Be sure that whatever illustration you decide to showcase on your mailing represents your portfolio and your purpose as an artist. Remember, you are trying to convince very busy editors and art directors to stop what they are doing and look at your website or online portfolio, so choose your illustration wisely. I find postcard mailings are best. Both VistaPrint.com and Overnightprints.com run lots of sales, and I have been very satisfied with the quality, color, and sharpness of the postcards I have ordered. Plus, you can actually see what the postcard you design will look like before you place your order.

While not having a constant influx of assignments is no picnic, an occasional dry spell can be a time of renewal for any illustrator willing to learn to be resourceful and honor the ebb and flow common to the freelance lifestyle.

Kathleen Rietz is a regular contributor to the Prairie Wind. She is currently illustrating two picture books for release in 2009. Visit her website at www.kathleenrietz.com and her blog at www.licoricegirl.blogspot.com.

Writer's Bookshelf

Finding Your Artist Self

By Jenny Meyerhoff

The Artist's Way

By Julia Cameron
(Tarcher/Putnam, 2002)

How many times have you started the day planning to write, only to find yourself swept along by the day's minor crises until it's bedtime and you must put your intentions to rest instead of fulfilling them? Too many days like these go by, and I start becoming cranky. Longer, and I start to lose track of who I really am.

Even when I am consistently writing, sometimes I get so mired down in the slog and drudgery of the writing *work*, that I lose the joy and creativity inherent in the writing *process*. I begin to worry that I no longer know what I am doing, that I have no more ideas, that I have no, *gasp*, talent.

I am, in a word, blocked.

For any writer who has ever felt this way, I recommend *The Artist's Way*, by Julia Cameron, a step-by-step program for reconnecting with your creativity.

Cameron begins by laying out the basic principles of her philosophy: that creativity is the natural order of life and that it is our nature to be receptive to it. Cameron draws on the spiritual principles of many religions to make her point. The book is deeply rooted in the belief in some kind of higher power, so if you are absolutely opposed to any whiff of spirituality, this book may not be for you. But Cameron invites readers to have an open mind. “Do not allow semantics to become one more block for you... What we are talking about is creative energy... [but] you may substitute the thought *good orderly direction or flow*.”

Cameron continues by laying out the two basic tools of her program: “morning pages” and “artist dates.” Morning pages are simply a daily writing practice, three pages of longhand, stream-of-consciousness writing. These pages are not the place to worry about sounding smart or eloquent. “The morning pages are often negative, frequently fragmented, often self pitying, repetitive, stilted or babyish, angry or bland – even silly sounding. Good!” The only thing morning pages can’t be, Cameron claims, is negotiable. If you want to tap into your full creative potential, you must do them every day, even if you write three pages of “I don’t know what to write.”

The second tool, the artist date, seems like a luxury, a frivolity. She suggests artists schedule a weekly block of time, one or two hours, to spend *alone* on a playful, creative excursion: a long country walk, a visit to a great junk store, a concert, a trip to the beach. These dates don’t necessarily need to be what we normally think of as edifying either. Cameron suggests you listen to your inner reactions. If you balk at all the high-brow museum visiting you *think* you should be doing, don’t ignore those feelings. “Listen to that!” Cameron states. “It is telling you your art needs more playful inflow.”

Cameron describes the two tools with the metaphor of a radio receiver and transmitter. “It is a two-step, two directional process: out and then in. Doing your morning pages, you are sending – notifying yourself and the universe of your dreams, dissatisfactions, hopes. Doing your artist date, you are opening yourself to insight, inspiration and guidance.”

The remainder of the book guides you through a 12-week immersion in the artist’s way method. Each week offers writing prompts, additional assignments, anecdotes from Cameron’s many years of teaching *The Artist’s Way* in a classroom setting. Cameron suggests that readers use

these chapters any way that feels right: Following them in order, or using only the ones that seem personally meaningful.

The point is, if you feel yourself yearning for more creativity in your life, be responsive and answer your own yearning. As she concludes, “Keep your soul cocked for guidance.”

Jenny Meyerhoff is the author of the chapter book, Third Grade Baby, and the forthcoming YA, The Impossible Secrets of Essie Green. She lives in Riverwoods with her husband and three children. Visit her on the web at www.jennymeyerhoff.com.

book look

Books That Make You Go, “Oh!”

By Brenda Ferber

Anecdotes and Reflections: The Building Blocks of Fiction

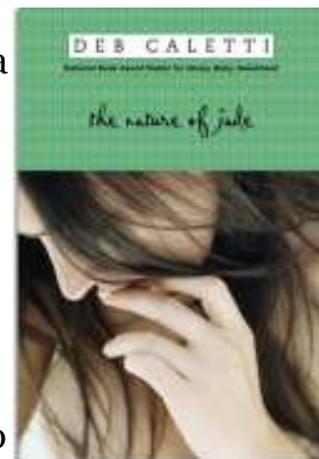
The Nature of Jade

By Deb Caletti

(Simon and Schuster, 2007)

Recently I came across a **video** by *This American Life*'s Ira Glass, from National Public Radio, about the building blocks of fiction. In a nutshell, Glass says there are two main building blocks for storytelling: anecdotes and reflections. An anecdote is a sequence of thoughts and actions—one thing followed by another. A reflection is a break from the action where you show what the point of the story is—the reason you are asking your readers to come along for this ride. A good story flips back and forth between these two elements and has both interesting anecdotes and meaningful moments of reflection.

This way of looking at storytelling seemed insightful, so I analyzed the next book I fell in love with along these lines. That book was Deb Caletti's *The Nature of Jade*, a young adult novel about Jade DeLuna, a senior in high school who has to deal with panic



disorder, a heavy AP course load, falling in love with a young single father, her parents' deteriorating marriage, and the distance she feels from her friends as they all get ready to move on to the next phase of life. Jade's decision to volunteer at a zoo and work with elephants allows her to develop rewarding relationships with both animals and humans while giving her the strength to deal with life's curvy roads.

I was so touched by this book, mainly because Caletti did an outstanding job of getting inside Jade's head. All the characters seemed well-rounded, with lifelike traits and flaws. The dialogue was spot on. And the sophistication of Jade's thoughts and struggles makes this book meaty enough to appeal to both teens as well as adults. Now let's look deeper... at the threads of anecdotes and reflections and how they are woven together.

With a hefty novel like this, there are numerous anecdotes and reflections, which, bundled together, become larger than the sum of their parts. Let's examine one small example. At the beginning of chapter nine, Jade is coming home from school on the bus with four friends. One of the friends is Kayla, a cheerleader from "the popular group." This scene is important to the plot because it sets up an invitation to a party, which in turn becomes a cover for Jade as she spends secretive time with her boyfriend. An author might just leave it at that and move on. Anecdote, plain and simple.

But Caletti moves into a moment of reflection, giving the story more meaning and letting readers get closer to Jade by knowing more of her thoughts. Jade reflects on popularity and how popular people assert a sense of dominance and think highly of themselves. She then goes on to consider self-esteem as a dirty word. She regards Kayla like this: "She's the kind of girl who shows how hot she is because she has nothing else to offer, who doesn't realize that hotness has an expiration date. Yet, I'm still a little nervous talking to her, like she's holding a lottery ticket she just might or might not decide to hand over to me. It is nuts, if you stop to think about it. I give her this power, and it's kind of like voting some idiot into office. But, hey, we're good at that, too."

After this moment of reflection, Caletti brings us straight back into the anecdote as the end of the bus ride home unfolds. For those interested in the nitty gritty, Caletti crafted this scene with a page of anecdote, followed by a page of reflection, followed by a half page of anecdote.

There are other examples of this construction throughout the novel, with the length of anecdotes and reflections varying widely. The point is, there isn't only one way to weave a novel. The amount of each element is less important than the fact that you consistently use them both. A novel that is all anecdote might leave readers breathless, but it will also leave them empty, asking themselves, "So what?" And a novel that relies too heavily on reflection might give the reader something interesting to think about, but unfortunately the reader is probably too bored to care.

Caletti's placement and balance of reflection versus anecdote corresponds to the overall plot structure of her novel. At the beginning, she relies heavily on reflection. This allows the reader to get inside Jade's head, to become invested in her story. Then, as the story progresses, the balance skews toward anecdote. In fact, there are few if any reflections to be found near the climax. This helps with the pacing, giving the novel that page-turning quality that is indicative of a climax. For the resolution, Caletti does what you might call a tight weave. One-line reflections are sprinkled in throughout the final anecdote. I don't like to spoil endings, so I won't give any examples here, but suffice it to say Caletti does not disappoint.

So how can this framework help you in your own writing? Take a look at your manuscript. Mark the anecdotes in one color, the reflections in another. Are you happy with the balance, or is it off kilter? Does the balance vary throughout the story? Can you spice up your anecdotes? Add some humor and depth to your reflections? Do both the anecdotes and the reflections show your readers something new and interesting?

Thinking in terms of these building blocks is one way to make sure you're pacing your novel well, you're telling an important story, and you're giving your readers something interesting to ponder.

Have you read a book that makes you go, "Oh!"? If so, drop me an e-mail at BrendaAFerber@comcast.net and tell me about it.

Deerfield author Brenda Ferber's first novel, *Julia's Kitchen*, was published by Farrar Straus Giroux in 2006. She is currently working on her second middle-grade novel, *Jemma Hartman, Camper Extraordinaire*, to be published in 2009.

October Is National Book Month

Compiled by Tabitha Olson

Anderson's Bookshop

Polly Horvath

When: 7 p.m. Sept. 15

Where: Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville

Polly Horvath, winner of a National Book Award and a Newbery Honor, will present her new book, *My One Hundred Adventures*

Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin

When: 7 p.m. Sept. 18

Where: Anderson's Bookshop, Downers Grove

Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin are celebrating their latest story for young readers, *Thump, Quack, Moo: A Whacky Adventure*

Midnight Release for *Brisingr*

When: 11 p.m. Sept. 19

Where: Anderson's Bookshop in both Downers Grove and Naperville

Spend the final hour before the midnight release of *Brisingr* with fans and folks at Anderson's. Play their trivia game, discuss theories, then crack the spine of *Brisingr* at midnight.

Marc Brown and Judy Sierra

When: 1 p.m. Sept. 20

Where: Naperville location TBA

Born to Read is the new book by Marc Brown and Judy Sierra, award-winning collaborators of the *New York Times* No. 1 picture book, *Wild About Books*. Details to come.

Christopher Paolini

When: 6 p.m. Oct. 1. Doors open at 5 p.m.

Where: Tivoli Theater, Downers Grove

Cost: \$5

Christopher Paolini will give a presentation, followed by a question and answer session. Afterward, the film *Eragon* will be shown while the signing

takes place. With every paid admission, one extra book may also be signed.
Call or stop by for tickets.

Downers Grove: (630) 963-2665

Naperville: (630) 355-2665

Coming soon...

9/29 Naperville: Sharon Creech, author of *Acting Out*, *Walk Two Moons*, *The Wanderer* and more

9/29 Downers Grove: Joseph Delaney, author of *The Last Apprentice* series

9/30 Naperville: T. A. Barron, author of *Merlin's Dragon*

10/2 Tivoli Theatre, Downer's Grove, ticketed event: Neil Gaiman, author of *Coraline*, *M is for Magic*, and forthcoming *Blueberry Girl*

10/2 Naperville: Francisco Jimenez, author of *Reaching Out*.

10/7 Naperville: Sarah Prineas, author of *The Magic Thief*.

10/16 Naperville: Mem Fox & Helen Oxenbury, authors of *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes*.

10/17 Naperville: Nikki Giovanni, author of *Lincoln and Douglass: An American Friendship*.

10/18 Naperville: Andrea Beaty, author of *Cicada Summer*.

For more information, go to www.andersonsbookshop.com

SCBWI Portfolio Award

SCBWI Portfolio Award, for the best portfolio on display at the August conference in Los Angeles.

Grand Prize Winner: Patricia Cantor

"Picture Book" Award: Stephanie Roth Sisson

Second Place: Ken Min

Third Place: Hyewon Yum

Writing Contests

Delacorte Press First YA

Submission window: Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, 2008

Cost: Free

Winner: Standard book contract, \$1,500 in cash and a \$7,500 advance against royalties.

The contest is open to U.S. and Canadian writers who have not previously published a young adult novel. Writers will be notified between January and April as submissions are evaluated by the editors. Final contest results will be announced on the website on or around April 30, 2009. Click [here](#) for more information.

Children's Writer – PreK Seasonal

Submission window: Entries must be received by Oct. 31, 2008

Cost: Free for subscribers to Children's Writer, \$13 for non-subscribers

Winners: \$500 for first-place plus publication in Children's Writer; \$250 for second place; and \$100 for third, fourth, and fifth places.

Submit a fictional story or nonfiction article related to a holiday or season, up to 125 words, for children aged 4. They prefer the less well-known holidays, and the execution of the idea must be interesting both to younger reader and the adults who read aloud. Entries should be fun and informative. Click [here](#) for more information.

Off Campus Writers' Workshop

Two very special programs for children's writers is offered this fall.

Sentences: The Source of Beauty and Strength in Writing for Readers of All Ages

When: Sept. 4, 11, 18 and 25

Where: Winnetka Community House at 620 Lincoln Ave.

Cost: \$10 per session. Members may submit manuscripts for critique for \$15.

Fred Shafer is a literary editor, writer, workshop leader and lecturer in creative writing at Northwestern University's School of Continuing Studies. Using examples from picture books, stories and novels for children and young adults, as well as adult literary fiction, he will demonstrate the qualities that effective narrative sentences share in common and make suggestions about what writers can do to improve their sentences.

Not for Teachers Only: The Educational Book Market

When: Nov. 13

Where: Winnetka Community House at 620 Lincoln Ave.

Cost: \$10 per session. Members may submit manuscripts for critique for \$15.

Interested in writing for educational publishers but don't know much about them? Marlene will share her experience in this market with you. Recipient of several honors for writing, Marlene will have 66 books in print by 2010. Of her six books coming out in the next two years, one is historical fiction for grades 1-3, and the others are YA nonfiction titles about different decades.

For more information, please visit the [OCWW](#), or contact Ellen McKnight at ELTMCK@aol.com.

ILA Annual Conference

When: Sept. 23-26

Where: Navy Pier, Chicago

Illinois has one of the most extensive systems of libraries in the country. The ILA Annual Conference is attended by librarians, trustees, library assistants, educators and others interested in libraries. This is the third-largest state library exposition in the nation, representing 3,000 librarians from the state's public, academic, school and special libraries. For more information, click [here](#).

Fifth Annual Young Adult Conference

When: Sept. 27th

Where: Holiday Inn Select, Naperville

Cost: \$95

Anderson's Bookshop is hosting their fifth Annual Young Adult Conference. Authors like Holly Black, Nancy Werlin, Suzanne Collins, Ingrid Law and more will be available for book signings. They will also be speaking on topics such as memoirs, before you begin, fantasy, local treasures and more. For more information, please call 800-728-0708, or visit [Anderson's website](#).

Day of Reading Conference

When: Nov. 8

Where: Holiday Inn Select Hotel and Convention Center in Tinley Park

Cost: SRL members, \$110; IRC members, \$120; nonmembers, \$145; students, \$85

This conference is for librarians, special education teachers, school/district administrators, members of literacy or instructional teams, and the like. Keynote speakers are Cris Tovani and Lois Duncan. More information can be found [here](#).

Tenth Annual Jewish Children's Book Writer's Conference

When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Nov. 23

Where: 92nd Street Y, 1395 Lexington Ave., New York, NY

Cost: \$95 before Nov. 1, \$110 after Nov. 1; fee includes kosher breakfast and lunch

The 92nd Street Y, Bittenwieser Library and the Jewish Book Council are cosponsoring the Tenth Annual Jewish Children's Book Writers' Conference in Manhattan.

Featured speakers are associate agent Michelle Andelman of Andrea Brown Literary Agency, publisher David E. Behrman of Behrman House, executive

editor Michelle Frey of Alfred A. Knopf and Crown Books for Young Readers, editor Larry Rosler of Boyds Mills Press, director Joni Sussman of Kar-Ben Publishing and illustrator's agent Melissa Turk of Melissa Turk & The Artist Network.

Award-winning author Johanna Hurwitz will give opening remarks, and the day will include sessions on publishing and writing in Israel, the Sydney Taylor Book Award and Manuscript Competitions and individual consultations with editors and agents from past conferences.

The registration form is available for download [here](#). Call (212) 415 5544 or e-mail library@92Y.org for additional information or to request the form by mail. The final registration deadline is Nov. 17.

Teen Read Week

When: Oct. 12 – 18

YALSA has announced the nominees for the **2008 Teen Top Ten Books**, with additional info [here](#). Teens may vote for their favorite books during Teen Read Week. Click [here](#) for more information.

Chicago Book Festival

Each October, Chicago celebrates books, authors and reading through a series of events throughout the city. This literary festival features some of the country's most accomplished authors in readings, book discussions and events in libraries, bookstores, museums and other local venues. Highlights of the month include One Book, One Chicago and the Carl Sandburg Literary Awards Dinner. The Chicago Book Festival features a schedule of book/author events that offer something for every reader. For more information on the author events, go to Chicago Public Library's [website](#) and search for Chicago Book Festival.

Chicago Latino Book Festival

When: Nov. 8 - 9

Celebrity and local Latino authors will present their new books and sign autographs. There will also be live music, storybook characters and educational workshops. The website is currently under construction, but stay tuned for more information: www.latinobookfestival.com

Midwest Literary Festival

The Midwest Literary Festival features some of the biggest, brightest and best literary talent from the Midwest and beyond. This annual celebration

of the written word promotes reading, the book arts and an appreciation of the Midwest's literary heritage.

Previous festivals have showcased writers of all genres who participated in workshops, panel discussions, poetry slams, book signings and intergenerational and multicultural activities.

Launched in 2003, the Midwest Literary Festival is an innovation of the Aurora Economic Development Commission's Seize the Future program in cooperation with the Aurora Public Library. An initial start-up grant from the Seize the Future program launched the debut of the Midwest Literary Festival.

The website is currently down, but stay tuned for more information:
www.midwestliteraryfestival.com

Save the Date

SCBWI's New York Conference is Jan. 30 through Feb. 1, 2009, at the Grand Hyatt New York City. Online registration begins Nov. 4 at www.scbwi.org. Slots fill up quickly, so check the website around the beginning of November for more information.

Blogs and Links of Interest

<http://www.ktliterary.com/daphne.html>

<http://queryshark.blogspot.com/>

<http://foliolit.blogspot.com/>

<http://thefirstbook.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.verlakay.com/>

Chicago author Tabitha Olson writes middle-grade and young adult novels. She first began writing at 16, when a zealous English teacher made her write a poem. She's been writing ever since. You may contact her through her website www.tabithaolson.com or at tabitha@tabithaolson.com.

Don't Miss

Fourth Annual Prairie Writer's Day!

Our theme this year is SmARTS & Craft. Visit the SCBWI-Illinois [website](#) to download your registration form. Here's what you need to know.

When: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 15, 2008

Where: The Priory Campus, Dominican University, 7200 W. Division St., in River Forest

Details: Registration begins at 8 a.m.

Cost: Fee is \$150 (\$165 for nonmembers), which includes a boxed lunch

SCBWI-Illinois' Fourth Annual Prairie Writer's Day continues the tradition of offering both novice and experienced writers the opportunity to learn, connect and grow. This year we break away from the format of author-editor pairs doing joint presentations. We offer a day absolutely brimming with professional advice and know-how!

Our editorial/agent "faculty for the day" will include:

Cheryl Klein of Arthur A. Levine Books

Martha Mihalick of Greenwillow Books

Caroline Meckler of Wendy Lamb Books

Agent **Michelle Andelman** of the Andrea Brown Literary Agency

The faculty talks will be centered on craft this year – helping us brush up on PLOT, CHARACTER, VOICE and REVISION.

Industry icon **Harold Underdown** will speak on the business side of children's publishing today.

Author **Sharon Darrow** will present a teaching segment using actual manuscripts to illustrate her points. (This presentation was a knock-out at a past Illinois retreat, and many have wished for a repeat performance of Sharon's "magic.")

In addition, our very own **Carol Grannick** will speak on how to handle negativity in the writing life, and **Mary Loftus** will get us out of our chairs and doing something positive for our bodies!

Attendees can sign up for a written manuscript critique from one of our guest faculty, and finally, the day will end with a mix-and-mingle session.

Registration information:

MAIL ALL REGISTRATION FORMS AND MANUSCRIPTS FOR CRITIQUE TO REGISTRAR EILEEN MEYER. SEND ALL MATERIALS

TOGETHER IN ONE MAILING PLEASE! Note the details below.

1. For the conference itself:

To register, send your check for \$150, (\$165 for nonmembers) payable to SCBWI-Illinois to

Eileen Meyer

9 McIntosh Ave.

Clarendon Hills, IL 60514

THE FIRST DATE YOU MAY MAIL YOUR REGISTRATION IS SEPT. 3, 2008.

All registrations must be RECEIVED by OCT. 31. And keep in mind, critique slots fill up quickly; if you want a critique, sign up as soon as you know you can come! No walk-ins will be admitted. Refunds are given only if your spot can be filled from the waiting list. You will receive an e-mail confirmation when your registration is received. Plan to arrive and sign in on Nov. 15 between 8 and 8:45 a.m. Please commit to helping us avoid a last-minute rush so that we can start on time at 9 a.m.

2. For individual critiques:

For a written critique from one of the guest faculty, the first date you may mail your submission is Sept. 3. All manuscript submissions must be post-marked by Oct. 6 at the latest. Send as early as you can – slots fill quickly. Fee is \$35. We can accommodate 75 manuscripts this year. Critique feedback will be written only. Please include manuscript with registration for the conference.

Manuscript guidelines:

- Enclose a separate check, payable to SCBWI-Illinois, for \$35.
- Submit up to five pages of a picture book or novel; you may start at the top of page one. Double-space. Use one-inch margins and a 12-point font.
- Write your name, contact information and the title of the work on the back of page one. Also include the genre, please!
- Novelists may include a one-page single-spaced summary, adhering to the above formatting guidelines. The synopsis counts as the fifth page – do not send six total pages.
- Picture book writers may include only one picture book.

- If too many manuscripts are received, some may not receive critiques. In that case, your check will be returned to you on the day of the conference.

Cheat sheet:

For the conference:

- Registration form
- Fee, payable by check
- Lunch choice indicated
- Mail on or after Sept. 3, 2008

For individual critiques:

- Manuscript, properly formatted and labeled with personal/genre info
- Fee payment
- Mail on or after Sept. 3, but mail as soon as possible
- Send this WITH YOUR REGISTRATION FOR THE CONFERENCE
- NO CHANGES OR LATER SUBMISSIONS

Season's Crop

Autumn and Winter Titles

Picture Books

Robert Burleigh

FLY, CHER AMI, FLY! THE PIGEON WHO SAVED THE LOST
BATTALION

(Abrams)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN COMES HOME

(Henry Holt/Ottaviano)

Scotti Cohn

ONE WOLF HOWLS

(Sylvan Dell)

Ilene Cooper

JAKE'S TERRIFIC THUMB

(Dutton)

Jeff Ebbeler, illustrator

ONE IS A FEAST FOR MOUSE: A THANKSGIVING TALE
(Holiday House)

Kim Hutmacher

PAWS, CLAWS, HANDS AND FEET
(Sylvan Dell)

Steven Layne

TEACHER'S NIGHT BEFORE HALLOWEEN
(Pelican)

Freddie Levin

1-2-3 DRAW DOGS: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE
(Peel Productions)

Bob Raczka

THE ART OF FREEDOM: HOW ARTISTS SEE AMERICA
(Lerner/First Avenue Editions)
SNOWY, BLOWY WINTER
(Albert Whitman)

Aaron Reynolds

METAL MAN
(Charlesbridge)

Ruth Spiro

LESTER FIZZ, BUBBLE-GUM ARTIST
(Dutton)

Middle-grade

Julia Durango

THE WALLS OF CARTAGENA
(Simon & Schuster)

Jenny Meyerhoff

THIRD GRADE BABY
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

Chris Rettstatt

KAIMIRA, THE SKY VILLAGE
(Candlewick)

Adam Selzer

I PUT A SPELL ON YOU: FROM THE FILES OF CHRISSIE WOODWARD,
SPELLING BEE DETECTIVE
(Random House/Delacorte)

Young adult

Candace Fleming

THE LINCOLNS: A SCRAPBOOK LOOK AT ABRAHAM AND MARY
(Random House/Schwartz & Wade)

Laura Ruby

PLAY ME
(HarperCollins/Harperteen)

Pam Todd

THE BLIND FAITH HOTEL
(S & S/McElderry)

Ysabeau Wilce

FLORA'S DARE: HOW A GIRL OF SPIRIT GAMBLES ALL TO EXPAND
HER VOCABULARY, CONFRONT A BOUNCING BOY TERROR, AND TRY
TO SAVE CALIFA FROM A SHAKY DOOM (DESPITE BEING CONFINED
TO HER ROOM)
(HMH/Harcourt Children's Books)

Revise Yourself

Permission to Dream, Not Dread

By Carol Coven Grannick

Above my desk is an old print I purchased in London in 1976, in a gift shop near Charles Dickens' office. It is a half-finished painting of Dickens in his office, which I'd just seen. The unfinished portion is pen-and-ink sketches of many of Dickens' characters filling up the space from ceiling to floor,

inhabiting the dreams of the writer, who is in his chair, pushed back from the desk, asleep.

That's where I am right now as I write this column, letting characters I don't know yet, places I haven't completely visualized, dance around in my consciousness.

Why? Because I finished the most complete draft of a novel I've been re-working for four years. While the novel is not finished, and by the time this column is published I'll be working on revisions, the story I've wanted to tell is told. It's out of my heart and brain and down on paper.

So I am wondering what I will write next.

And I feel relaxed, unpressured and delighted by the thoughts and ideas that come and go. Still, in the spaces between the images and ideas I'm aware that I could be having a different response.

Because I am a learned, and not natural-born, optimist, I will always have "visitations" from old negative thinking – enough to keep me on my toes. I may have to practice optimistic thinking for the rest of my life. But so be it.

I do find pleasure in comparing how I think now – and therefore, how I feel and act – with how I may have felt 35 years ago, or even 15. What would I write next? Before I taught myself to be an optimist, I would have had a head full of worries instead of dreams.

Uncertainty, as I referenced it in my last column, creates open emotional space. That space can leave room for anxiety. And for pessimistic thinkers, anxiety invites in negative thoughts and beliefs. Those negative thoughts and beliefs impact your mood or "emotional state" and that, in turn, impacts your ability to act and work in a way that is in sync with your deeper longings and desires. It is not your feelings, but your thinking, that is getting in your way.

In a more optimistic, positive framework, uncertainty's open space can be dreaming time, a place of endless abundance of ideas and feelings that you entertain. For me, right now, it's a place to look at my notebooks and paper scraps where I've scribbled ideas, throw open the doors of a Jane Austen-sized ballroom in my brain, and let in all the possibilities I'd like to dance with. If you let yourself dream without commitment – mix and match the

ideas, ask “what if” to your heart’s content, try on all the “partners” to see how they “fit” your preferences, tendencies and passions – you’ll enjoy the party.

This is why I love my *Dickens’ Dreams* print. There the writer is, pushed away from the writing desk, letting himself rest and dream. The look on his face is peaceful and calm.

I know that one day, maybe before and maybe after I truly finish my novel, one dancing idea will shoot an arrow into my heart.

And that’s how I’ll know what to write about next.

Carol Coven Grannick is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in addition to being a children’s author and a proud member of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI. Please feel free to e-mail comments and questions to her at: carolgrannick@comcast.net

Promote That Book!

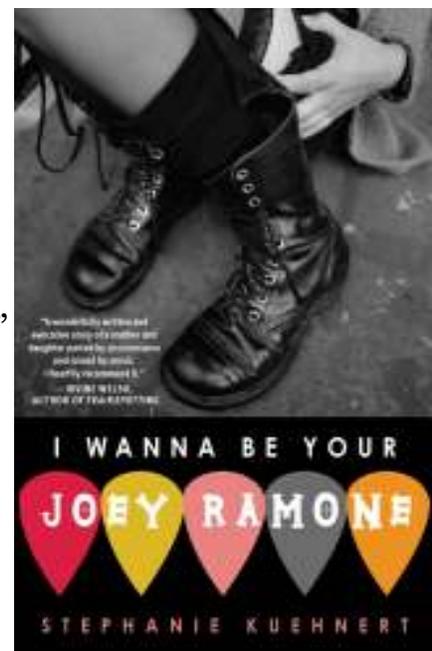
Promoting Like a Rock Star

By Stephanie Kuehnert

When MTV Books offered me a contract for my debut novel, *I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone*, I knew that my job as a writer had changed. New responsibilities were added to the job description. In addition to “Create unique characters and storylines,” and “Revise, revise, revise,” suddenly I needed to “Find unique ways to publicize,” and “Promote, promote, promote.”

I’d been told horror stories by my agent and author friends about authors who assumed it was the publisher’s job to do those things and their careers languished as a result. I was determined not to make that mistake.

Fortunately, I’d written about something I’m



very passionate about, which also happens to be a great hook: music, specifically punk rock. Like my characters, I spent my teenage years in the punk scene (though just as a fan, not as a musician like them), and I learned a lot about grass roots, D.I.Y.—Do It Yourself—promotion. When my agent encouraged me to promote my book like a band would an album, I ran with that... probably even farther than she intended.

Web Presence

I started with the basic necessities for any author or band these days: a good website, blog and MySpace page. It's essential, especially when writing for tweens and teens, to have a visually interesting site with plenty of interactive content that you add to fairly frequently. I know basic code, which is very useful for keeping the site up-to-date, but I asked a more technically skilled friend of mine to build stephaniekuehnert.com, and it turned out better than I could have dreamed. She mirrored the look of it on my blog and MySpace page.

But how do you keep those pages interesting? I add new things to my website about once a month. I've put up the "soundtrack" to IWBYJR and my next novel, "deleted scenes" from IWBYJR, and photos from the events I do. I actively comment on my "friends" pages on MySpace and keep them updated about all I'm doing with bulletins.

I blog three to five times a week. It's my main way of staying in touch with readers. At first, I just wrote about writing. Then my always-wise agent pointed out that every writer writes about writing and didn't I have more to say? So I revamped the theme of my blog to "Life, Words, and Rock 'n' Roll." As it turns out, my agent was right. Even though my readers are interested in what I have to say about the writing process, they get even more excited when I talk about bands or relate stories from my life. I've also just added a new feature, Women Who Rock Wednesdays, where I profile (preferably with an interview and a giveaway!) a female author, musician, artist or all-around awesome lady that rocks my world every Wednesday. This feature has been a real fan-pleaser, it allows me to network with other amazing creative women and cross-promote with them by exposing my readers to their work and them encouraging their fans to visit my blog.

A Little Help From Your Fans

Probably my biggest web tool is one that I remembered from my teen years and adapted for the internet age: the Street Team. Whenever I went to shows in high school, there were always kids standing outside afterwards with stickers and flyers and sometimes even free CDs and tickets for other bands. These hardcore fans were members of the bands' street teams. I was on a few street teams myself, and I plastered the streets of Chicago with stickers and flyers. My activities tended toward the illegal side on occasion, but thanks to the web, encouraging vandalism to get the name of my book out there was not necessary. Instead I encourage my street team members—who sign up on my website either because they love me and my writing or because they are enticed by my monthly “members only” contest—to spread the word about the book online via their e-mail signature, their blog, putting banners designed by my webmistress and easily accessible in the “Downloads” section of the website on their MySpace pages, or doing any other creative promoting. I reward these hardworking, loyal fans with swag like custom IWBYJR guitar picks (a huge hit and relatively cheap to produce), copies of my soundtrack, signed cover flats, ARCs or gift certificates for music downloads. It's a fun way for me to interact with fans and a way to advertise the book at a very low cost.

Events (or Gigs as I call them)

When my agent told me to promote like a rock band, she mentioned doing a lot of local events, from bookstore signings to library visits to open mic nights. And I did all that. Then I decided to go to the next level by setting up a West Coast tour. Guitar picks, bookmarks, presents for my webmistress friend to make up for the fact that I can't pay her—these were all investments of my advance money that my agent thought were fantastic. The tour, she told me, was not a smart investment. I wouldn't sell enough books to recoup expenses. And she's right. So why did I do it anyway? Because I wanted to celebrate my first book's release and visit my friends out West and travel with my boyfriend and be able to legitimately write some of it off on my taxes. Maybe it wasn't the smartest thing to do, but I had a blast and did all I could to gain exposure for my book.

Out West, I got to meet some amazing booksellers who were very passionate about my book. If I hadn't been coming to their stores, they may have never read the book. Now they are really excited about it, have it displayed as a staff pick and are hand-selling it. I may not have sold a bunch of books at the reading/signings I did, but my books will continue to sell well at those stores because I made that personal connection. Of course

I also got to make personal connections with fans and I met some incredible teenage girls that made the whole trip feel worthwhile. And last, but not least, I set up almost all of my events with local authors, which is absolutely necessary to get people out to your events when you're in an unknown in a city where you don't know very many folks, not to mention it's an amazing networking opportunity.

My biggest event was something that I put together with L.A.-area YA author Alexa Young. We both had debut novels out and are very passionate about music, so we wanted to put together a literary lollapalooza with authors and bands. The result was Rock 'n' Read, a three-hour festival with eight authors and five bands held at Virgin Megastore at Hollywood & Highland, a very busy store in the heart of Hollywood. It definitely was a lot of work to coordinate, but it didn't cost us much aside from presents for friends that helped us out. We didn't sell a ton of books, but over 75 people passed through the event that day and we got a lot of press that included our names and titles of our books. Whether this will all result in increased sales, I can't tell you, but I had a lot of fun doing it.

But you don't have to travel across the country and put on your own literary event to get the word out about your book. You just need to invest in the basics (a good website for sure and unique swag certainly helps), think about your passions and the passions of your book's audience and get creative. Then get out there, pretend you're a rock star and build some buzz!

Stephanie Kuehnert is the author of I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone (July 2008, MTV Books) and Ballads of Suburbia (July 2009, MTV Books). You can find her on her [website](#) or [MySpace](#). Be sure to check out her [blog](#) for more promotional ideas and every Wednesday for Women Who Rock Wednesdays and learn more about Rock 'n' Read at www.rocknread.net.

Opportunities

Coming to You This Fall. . .

Check out what **SCBWI Illinois Networks** have planned this fall for you and your writing!

Join the Chicago Network at 5:45 p.m. Oct. 16 for a gallery walk through the Newberry Library's new exhibit *Artifacts of Childhood: 700 Years of Children's Books* with curators Jenny Schwartzberg and Paul F. Gehl.

Or join the Far Northern Suburbs Network this month as they hear the secrets to picture book success with speaker Barb Rosenstock.

Make your plans now for the Central Illinois Network's big event: They host Darcy Pattison for a Novel Revision Retreat from Feb. 27 – March 1, 2009.

And Bloomington/Normal plans a program with Cricket Magazine Group editors on Sept. 20.

These opportunities and many, many more are just a click away!

Kidslitosphere

Get Familiar with Fuse #8

By Margo L. Dill

Elizabeth Bird writes a blog we should all be familiar with: **A Fuse #8 Production**. This blog is so popular with children's writers and illustrators that I was recently at the SCBWI LA conference, and John Rocco, author and illustrator of *Wolf! Wolf!* and *Moonpowder*, mentioned Fuse #8 in his talk on promotion. He said he was honored when his book was mentioned on this site, and he is a big fan of this blog. He said we should all check it out. As I listened to Rocco talk, I was thrilled to think I had already contacted Elizabeth for this column, and she was so generous with her time and answers, so here we go!

Elizabeth is a senior librarian with the New York Public Library's Central Children's Room (currently relocating to the Humanities and Social Sciences Library). She reviews for *Kirkus*, has reviewed for *School Library Journal* and is a top 50 Amazon.com reviewer. She has written for *Horn Book Magazine* as well. She is definitely someone who knows children's books and blogging, so we can learn from her wisdom and experience.

The purpose of The Fuse #8 Production is to give readers news about children's literary events. Elizabeth posts reviews, previews, conference reports and "anything else that strikes my fancy. Essentially, if I think it's fun, it goes into the blog." Since one of the most important things writers can do is read, here is a blog where you can find the titles of great children's literature. You can also keep up on current trends and industry news.

Elizabeth started her blog after she was a librarian at the Jefferson Market in Greenwich Village for about a year and read an article in School Library Journal about blogging. She asked the New York Public Library system if she could create a blog for her children's room. They didn't really like the idea, so she decided to make her own personal blog for fun. "The early attempts were pretty crude," Elizabeth said, "but soon I realized that I could post the reviews I'd normally write for Amazon.com and fill it with fun news items on the side. Before I knew it, I had a blog."

Then Elizabeth got a lucky break. She had been blogging for a year when School Library Journal contacted her about blogging for pay. "It's the offer every hobbyist longs to hear: We will pay you for what you would otherwise do for free." However, she didn't just jump at the chance, which is something all of us can learn from. She asked several questions before she agreed. Would she own her content? Could she quit at any time? Would she be edited? She said that SLJ worked with her through all these fears, and in the end, she decided it was a good deal.

Some of the content for Fuse #8 comes from her own brain and keyboard. Other information she finds and posts from trolling other blogs. "The reviews, for example, take the longest to create but are the most fulfilling," she says. "I also will write long recaps of publisher previews, conferences. I always credit the information I find, but it's fun to be a daily aggregator, too. On even the slowest children's literary news day, you can usually find something."

Some other blogs that Elizabeth loves are:

Read Roger

bookshelves of doom

Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast

Big A, little a

Educating Alice

Oz and Ends

Shaken & Stirred

Jen Robinson's Book Page

Kids Lit

Children's Illustration

The Monkey Speaks

The Excelsior File

Mother Reader

Finding Wonderland

ShelfTalker

Bottom Shelf Books

Book Moot

Crooked House

100 Scope Notes

Elizabeth has great advice for us on blogging and how it can help a children's author's career. "Depending on where you go with it," she says, "a blog can be an excellent bit of free publicity. These days a blogging children's author, when aligned with the other children's literary bloggers (we call it the Kidlitosphere), can publicize their titles free of charge and with very little effort. If you have a good blog, it can even get readers who wouldn't normally find your books." Since Elizabeth has a successful blog and knows a lot about Kidlitosphere, here are some tips she gives authors for using blogs as a marketing tool. "The first thing to do is research your blogs. Find the ones that are talking about and reviewing books like your own. The last thing you want to do is bug a picture book site to review your gritty YA novel or tell a YA site about how much they're going to love your easy reader about the flatulent cow.

“You may also wish to consider creating a blog tour. This is an event where an author is interviewed on a different blog every day, maximizing the amount of people who hear about their book. Not every blogger will want to participate in this, however, so you may wish to consider starting your own blog first. Try joining the Yahoo Group called Kidlitosphere. This is an organized and very large group of the children’s literary bloggers, and the group has great information and spreadsheets that discuss each blog and what they like to review. If you introduce yourself in the comments, some people may even link to your blog on their sites. Then, when you’ve established enough of a presence, you can query people about participating in a tour.

“Book trailers for your titles are always a good idea and blogs love to link to them,” Elizabeth said. “Essentially, everything comes down to creativity. If people like what you’re doing and it seems new to them, the viral marketing will take care of itself.”

Another tool Elizabeth has in her belt is a podcast. Here’s what she has to say about podcasts: “Podcasting is fun, relatively easy, and requires more time than you’d believe. The advantage is that now I can imagine my voice traveling in people’s cars all around the country. It’s a new way of reaching readers/listeners, and I appreciate that. Authors should certainly consider looking into podcasting, whether they do their own or seek out children’s literary podcasts like Just One More Book, which have redefined the genre and are the best in the biz, no question. An interview on Just One More Book is always a good idea. Mind you, I haven’t worked on my own podcast in a long time due to scheduling issues, but I intend to hop back on that horse the minute I can.”

Elizabeth loves children’s literature, and this is more than apparent in her blog. Even though she set out to be an archivist, her love for children’s lit won over, and we can all be thankful for that! Take a minute to check out Fuse #8. In her own words, “I guess I like the genre so much, in part, because it’s something that almost everyone has some experience with. You were a child once, yes? You read books? Then my job and my blog apply to you. It’s a great conversation starter at cocktail parties, too. ‘What was your favorite book as a child?’ is a personality test for every human alive. You can learn more from that answer than 100 hours of therapy, I am convinced.”

Margo L. Dill is a freelance writer and substitute teacher living in Mahomet. She has been published in several magazines and anthologies such as On the Line, Pockets, Grit, Teachers of Vision and Missouri Life. Her first novel, Finding My Place: One Girl's Strength at Vicksburg, will be published by White Mane Kids in late 2008 or early 2009. Visit Margo at www.margodill.com.

Booksellers' Perspective

The Book Stall's Liz Moore

By Kate Hannigan

This summer, *The Prairie Wind* talked with children's book buyer and event coordinator Liz Moore at The Book Stall at Chestnut Court. The store's roots go back to 1940, when it opened doors in Winnetka as Chestnut Court. In 1986, the name changed to The Book Stall at Chestnut Court. Liz has been there since 2005.

With a new school year beginning, can you tell us some of the books you're most excited about?

I must say, I love the classic picture book characters, so having a new Babar book, *Babar's USA* (Abrams Books for Young Readers), and a new Madeline book is pretty exciting. The Madeline book, *Madeline and the Cats of Rome* (Viking Juvenile), was written and illustrated by John Bemelmans Marciano, the grandson of Ludwig Bemelmans, and he carries on the tradition brilliantly. I am also quite fond of *Bats at the Library* (Houghton Mifflin) by Brian Lies, the follow-up to his wonderfully quirky and beautifully illustrated *Bats at the Beach*. For older readers, I will encourage *White Sands, Red Menace* (Viking Juvenile), Ellen Klages' new novel, and Ingrid Law's *Savvy* (Dial), a wonderful debut novel. Two of my fellow children's staffers are wild about *Hunger Games* (Scholastic Press) by Suzanne Collins.

Could you name a few recent must-reads for children's authors?

In my opinion, writers should read EVERYTHING. That is to say, read what the reviewers praise, but also read what the kids devour: Rick Riordan, Jeff Kinney, Anthony Horowitz, Stephenie Meyer and the like. Obviously you

have to write what comes from your soul, but reading the popular titles helps writers get in touch with what the majority of young readers gravitate toward.

Last summer featured the final book in the *Harry Potter* series, this summer the Stephenie Meyer's series. While it would be difficult to generate the same excitement *Hogwarts* inspires, do you see any literary blockbusters on the horizon?

Personally I think the *Harry Potter* series is an anomaly. I hope I am wrong – for the sake of all of us – but I don't think anything will ever match that magic. Now, having said that, I do think there is significant enthusiasm for other series, like Stephenie Meyer's and Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson*, but they each have a much narrower readership. Everyone read *Harry Potter*.

John Flanagan, Jeanne Birdsall, Gail Carson Levine. These are just a few of the authors you bring to your store for book readings. In your opinion, what makes a successful book signing? What have you seen that makes young readers respond?

A good author event is when the author is truly engaged with her audience, not trying overtly to sell books (though that is, of course, the reason for it!), and ego is checked at the door. The author feels lucky to be there with an audience, no matter the size, and the audience is likewise engaged with the author. Kids really seem to enjoy when an author chats informally with them, making them feel important to the event – which, of course they are! The pragmatic success for a book store is obviously book sales, but when everyone leaves happy, I feel like it has been a truly successful event.

The Book Stall's Children's Book Club is an innovative way of connecting worthwhile books with children. How do you choose the books that you send to participating Book Club families?

Our amazing Betsy Balyeat, a retired teacher who taught, over the span of her career, kindergarten and middle-school English, is well-equipped to handle the task of choosing books for our over 200 kids in the Book Club. We have a brief description of each child's reading ability and interests, and Betsy sticks mainly to new books to avoid sending something they have already read.

Through Bookworm Angels, your store donates gently used children's books to Chicago school libraries. This is just one part of your commitment to getting kids to read. Do you feel that, despite all the distractions, kids still do get excited about reading?

I work in a community that embraces reading, and the kids I see daily are in the store because they are enthusiastic readers. The adult role models are key to creating engaged readers, and as we all know, that piece is missing for many children. I spend a lot of time thinking about how I might help in more direct ways to encourage literacy. Programs like Rock for Reading are out there doing some great things for kids of underserved communities, and I would love to get more involved. We all need encouragement!

If you could make a wish list, what trends would you like to see more of in children's literature? And what, in your opinion, have you seen enough of?

I love what I am seeing even in the last year or two with innovative literary forms – *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Scholastic Press, 2007), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2007). Good storytelling can take many forms, even within the genre of children's literature. I would like to see the continuing blossoming of creativity; kids are wide open to it! What have I seen enough of? You've no doubt heard this before: series. The formulaic, one-every-two-months, etc. Certainly there are quality series out there, but there are so many, it's dizzying. And of course there are subject trends that one tires of. A few years back it was pirates, then vampires; this spring it was apocalyptic young adult novels – too much of a not-too-good thing!

Chicago writer Kate Hannigan is working on picture books and middle-grade novels when not managing her children's playdates and soccer schedules. She is also editor of the Prairie Wind. E-mail her with comments or questions at KateHannigan@gmail.com

Fitness Through the Year

By Mary Loftus

Despite what the calendar says, for any teacher, parent, student – or anyone who ever was a student – September feels like the start of a new year.

Anyone remember those resolutions of January '08? Who cares? You can start your new year right now. Below are a few ideas to help you meet your fitness goals through the seasons.

Fall

Crisp mornings are the perfect time to celebrate the changing seasons with a walk. The palette of colors is at its peak and Mother Nature shows off. There's nothing like setting a brisk pace in nature to clear the mind and ground the body before sitting down to write.

Winter

Once Midwesterners acclimate to the lower temperatures, there's loads to do outdoors. Take advantage of a sunny day, get a vitamin D boost and stimulate your circulatory system with ice skating, sledding or even a snowball fight. Your body works extra hard to stay warm, so you can burn even more calories than you might with the average indoor workout.

Spring

When the snow melts, take the bike out of storage and start pedaling. What better way to appreciate the scent of spring blossoms? Or, you may want to take a class or lessons in a sport you've never tried before. Spring – the season of rebirth – the perfect time to try something new.

Summer

Cool down on hot days with a dip in the lake or a neighborhood pool. Summer is the season for swimming. Have you ever tried a water workout

class? No swimming skills are required. You don't even have to go in the deep end! So snap on a pair of goggles and dive right in.

No matter what the season, the guiding principle for fitness is the same. Find something you consider fun and do it. Enjoy!

Chicago native Mary Loftus is a freelance writer, former middle-school teacher and part-time fitness instructor. She is writing her first novel for young adults. Please send ideas, questions or comments to turtle44@sbcglobal.net

Horoscopes

Nuggets From Nunki: Horoscopes for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

By Nunki Pelagus

Horoscopes for September 2008

SPECIAL OFFER REPEATED!

What do the stars say about you? To receive a free overview of your birth chart, focusing on areas that reflect writing or illustrating skills, send your first name, along with your date, time, and place of birth to nunki@inorbit.com. Please specify whether you are a writer or illustrator (or both) when making your request.

RETROGRADE* ALERT: Mercury (planet of the mind and communication; ruler of writers, editors, publishers, manuscripts, post offices and artists' supplies) is retrograde Sept. 24-Oct. 15. During that time, it will behoove us all to be extra aware of what and how we communicate and how we interpret communication from others. To the joy of Sagittarius and Pisces, Jupiter turns direct Sept. 7.

ARIES, The Ram (March 21-April 19)

Rams, your ruling planet Mars is in Libra all month—not its favorite place to be. You may feel tension between a desire to act (Mars) and an uncharacteristic fear of upsetting the apple cart or making an unpopular decision. Mars in Libra also forms an opposition to your sun in Aries, which suggests the possibility of conflict and irritability. The Sun enters Libra on

Sept. 23, increasing the potential for disagreements. It's not all bad, though. This same energy often brings a particular activity to a triumphal climax.

TAURUS, *The Bull (April 20-May 20)*

The September forecast for you Bulls is definitely what Teddy Roosevelt would have called "bully," as the Sun in Virgo forms a harmonious aspect Sept. 1-22 with your natal Sun. A high energy level and strong sense of equilibrium can help you examine past successes and failures objectively and prepare yourself for future challenges. A bit of turmoil may arise Sept. 25-30 when your ruler Venus (in its detriment in Scorpio) forms a difficult aspect with your Sun.

GEMINI, *The Twins (May 21-June 20)*

Your ruling planet Mercury's position in Libra is a plus for you Twins. Although you'll still have to be cautious during the Mercury retrograde, the harmonious aspect between Mercury and your Sun can enhance clarity of mind and communication ability. The Sun's placement in Virgo Sept. 1-22 is another matter, as it represents the potential for challenges or "tests" for Geminis. Beneficial energy arrives when the Sun moves into Libra on Sept. 23, although you may find it difficult to choose which projects really deserve your time and effort.

CANCER, *The Crab (June 21-July 22)*

September 1-22 provides you Crabs with energy from a Sun-Sun sextile, and you tend to work and play well with others. Take a look at how far you have come toward realizing your goals and determine what remains to be done. The good times don't roll all that well Sept. 23-30, but this can be an opportunity to address problems with someone who seems to be working at cross-purposes with you. You may struggle to maintain harmony Sept. 9-11, especially with the opposite sex. Sept. 23-24 looks like a great time to recharge your mind and body.

LEO, *The Lion (July 23-Aug. 23)*

Lions, you romp through most of September under a Sun-Sun sextile that benefits your interactions with others. Be aware that your ruler the Sun enters Libra Sept. 23. The Sun is in its fall in Libra, which suggests that you may experience a disconnect between your current self-image and who you really are. Take a moment to ask yourself if you have lost touch with your true nature in some way. A Mercury-Sun sextile helps offset the Mercury retrograde for Writers. Illustrators enjoy a harmonious Venus-Sun sextile Sept. 1-24.

VIRGO, *The Virgin* (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

Birthday Greetings, Virgos! September is your month, so assert yourself, express yourself, and let the sun shine in! With Mercury as your ruling planet, the Mercury retrograde may present a challenge or two, especially for Virgo writers. Sept. 25-30 could offer a mixed bag for illustrators, as Venus (in its detriment in Scorpio) sextiles your Sun. Virgo birthdays of interest: Roald Dahl, Joan Aiken, Arthur Rackham, Charles William James Keeping.

LIBRA, *The Scales* (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

Happy Birthday to Librans born in September. The placement of Venus, ruler of Libra, in Libra Sept. 1-24 gives all Librans extra creativity, love, and pleasure. Illustrators in particular are likely to be inspired during this transit. For writers, a Mercury-Sun conjunction helps offset the troublesome nature of the Mercury retrograde. All Librans may feel a need to establish deep emotional connections Sept. 25-30. September-Libra birthday of interest: “Shel” Silverstein.

SCORPIO, *The Scorpion* (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

With Scorpio’s ruling planet Mars in Libra all month, Scorpions may find it difficult to maintain a single focus. Libra often confers a tendency to see many sides to a situation, which can be a blessing or a curse. A Sun-Sun sextile helps relieve some of the tension Sept. 1-22, and you may find it especially easy to integrate your energies with others. As always, writers need to be vigilant during the Mercury retrograde. Illustrators, you may find yourselves more open to exploring emotional depths in your work Sept. 25-30.

SAGITTARIUS, *The Archer* (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Centaur, our ruling planet Jupiter turns direct Sept. 7. This improves our chances to reap the rewards of hard work and efforts. Jupiter is still in its fall in Capricorn, however, which tends to suppress the Sagittarian’s natural spontaneity and openness. A Sun-Sun square Sept. 1-22 could add other challenges to the mix. A harmonious aspect between Mercury and our Sun this month softens the Mercury retrograde for writers. A similar aspect between Venus and the Sun creates beneficial energy for illustrators Sept. 1-24.

CAPRICORN, *The Goat* (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

It’s Happy Time for you Goats when the Sun is in Virgo Sept. 1-22, forming a harmonious aspect with your natal Sun. Your ruler Saturn is also in Virgo,

auguring smooth sailing and low stress. You may want to take advantage of an opportunity to expand the range of your skills through training. Writers, possible challenges courtesy of the Mercury retrograde may be compounded by the fact that Mercury forms a difficult aspect with your natal Sun this month. Illustrators have similar issues with Venus.

AQUARIUS, *The Water-Carrier (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*

For most of September, Aquarian writers benefit from Mercury's position in Libra, just as Aquarian illustrators benefit from the placement of Venus in Libra. Around Sept. 23, the Sun moves into Libra, forming a harmonious aspect with your natal Sun. This is a great time for Aquarians to do a quick review of the past few months to see what has been working and what hasn't. If you have any regrets, don't dwell too much on them. Use your time and energy to prepare for the future.

PISCES, *The Fish (Feb. 19-March 20)*

Fishies join Centaurs in celebrating Jupiter's return to direct motion Sept. 7—and not a moment too soon. You may need that extra energy to cope effectively with a Sun-Sun opposition Sept. 1-22. Jupiter's continuing location in Capricorn can be a plus for Pisces. Even though Jupiter is in its fall in Capricorn, the sign of the Goat forms a harmonious aspect with the sign of the Fish. Relations with people in power (editors, publishers, art directors) are likely to improve, and income from an unexpected source is possible.

* **Retrograde Motion:** An apparent backward motion of a planet among the stars resulting from the observation of the planet from the planet Earth, which is also revolving about the sun at a different velocity. When a planet is retrograde, its energies are blocked, inhibited, or contradictory.

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