



the acorn

Newsletter for the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI

Author/Illustrator Profile: Marla Frazee

By Patricia Newman

"Dear Ms. Frazee: I love the stories that you draw."

Marla Frazee says it took almost a decade to learn how to add her own voice to her illustrations—a voice that deepened the story and resonated with the text in a different way—so she is grateful to fans who notice that she does indeed draw

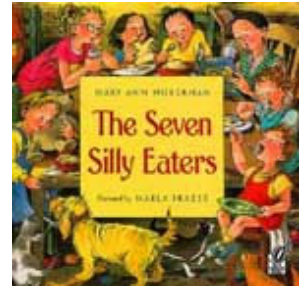


stories. The lesson required Frazee to move away from a commercial style where generic children have more appeal, toward a more personal approach where the children in her illustrations have their own personalities and their own lives off the page. "Kids do read the pictures in a way adults have lost," she says.

Frazee describes herself as a quiet kid who liked to read and draw, but she says, "So many things were hard for me as a kid." Going to school. Sleeping away from home. Riding a roller coaster. As she looks back over her body of work, many of her stories tap into her fears and anxieties. "When I'm called on to speak in public, I have to dig deep to find the strength. [My anxieties] don't prevent me from doing anything I want to do, but it's not easy," she says.

As a child, Frazee discovered Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* and Robert McCloskey's *Blueberries for Sal*. She intuitively knew that someone was behind the decisions in books and she wanted to be part that process. In *Blueberries for Sal*, Frazee says, "the decision to use blue ink was a personal gift." Likewise, in *Where the Wild Things Are*, the three page turns where Max's room changes into the forest made Frazee want to figure out how Sendak visually told his story. "That's when I started telling people I wanted to be a children's book illustrator when I grew up," she says.

When Frazee received Mary Ann Hoberman's text for *The Seven Silly Eaters*, she felt like she was already living the fictional Mrs. Peters' life. Frazee's three young boys kept her hopping and the chaos in the Peters household mimicked her own, but she needed to do more than echo the text. Frazee added two visual story lines to the book that were not mentioned in Hoberman's text: Mrs. Peters' cello and a visible presence for Mr. Peters. Frazee remembers thinking, "Mrs. Peters obviously needs a husband because she's having babies every time you turn the page." Frazee created a warm, loving, supportive father and husband who is an integral part of the story in spite of the fact he is never mentioned. Additionally, Frazee gave Mrs. Peters the ability to carve out some time for herself by practicing her cello. When the word-story and the picture-story are read together they are so intermingled they are difficult to separate.

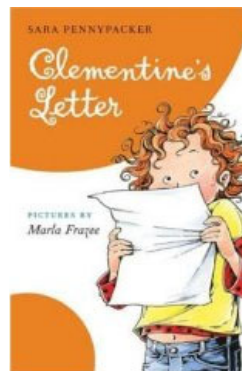


Early in Frazee's career, she illustrated books by other authors, but in recent years story ideas started percolating in Frazee's mind and she now writes and illustrates. Before find-

ing the idea for *Roller Coaster*, a different project had fallen through and she wanted to come up with something new. "My husband and I went on a driving trip with the boys for a week and a half...While I was on this brain-scrub of a trip, I planned to look out the window and let things come to me." Her boys had recently returned from a camp in which they visited several theme parks and rode roller coasters. Conversation for most of the trip centered on which brother

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was the bravest, which coaster was the steepest, which one had the biggest drop. Frazee remembers thinking, "If they'd just be quiet about roller coasters, I could think of something."

After Frazee refines an idea enough to feel the beats of the story, she starts the thumbnail sketches to uncover the rhythm and pacing, the important scenes, and the pauses. Some pages she hits hard with a two-page spread and other pages show small sequences of images that hip-hop across the page. During the thumbnail stage of her writing and illustration process, she says, "the content of each image might take quite a while to figure out." As the individual images unfold, a couple of places are more difficult than others. "Sometimes the picture is not different than the words. It's flat and needs something else," says Frazee.

Frazee's research informs her illustrations and makes them more believable. For *The Seven Silly Eaters* she built a cardboard model of the Peters house so she knew where she was in the space of their home. For *Hush Little Baby* she visited the living history museum in Fort New Salem, West Virginia to learn more about Appalachia of the 1850s.

When Frazee started *Santa Claus the World's Number One Toy Expert* she imagined Santa to be an incredible expert on toys, but that attribute alone wasn't enough. Santa's magic lay in the fact that he can match each toy with a child who will appreciate it. It's also Frazee's magic. Whether she's illustrating her own stories or the text of other authors, she creates a picture-story that is more than the sum of its parts. It may not come easy, but it's the perfect match for her readers. ☺

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WORLD'S
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TOY
EXPERT

HOW TO CONTACT MARLA FRAZEE

www.marlafrazee.com

SELECTIONS FROM MARLA FRAZEE'S LIBRARY

Author/Illustrator

A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever, Harcourt, 2008.
Walk On! A Guide for Babies of All Ages, Harcourt, 2006.
Santa Claus the World's Number One Toy Expert, Harcourt, 2005.
Roller Coaster, Harcourt, 2003.

Illustrator

Clementine's Letter by Sara Pennypacker, Hyperion, 2008.
Mrs. Biddlebox by Linda Smith, Harcourt, re-released 2007.
Clementine by Sara Pennypacker, Hyperion, 2006.
Everywhere Babies by Susan Meyers, Harcourt, 2001.
Harriet! You'll Drive Me Wild by Mem Fox, Harcourt, 2000.
Hush Little Baby (a folk song), Harcourt, 1999.
The Seven Silly Eaters by Mary Ann Hoberman, Harcourt, 1997.

Upcoming

All the World by Elizabeth Garton Scanlon, Harcourt, Fall 2009.
The Old Man and the Marvelous Wind by Elizabeth Garton Scanlon, Harcourt, TBA.

Patricia Newman is the author of *Jingle the Brass* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). Her newest book, *Nugget on the Flight Deck* will be available from Walker & Company in the fall of 2009. Visit her website at www.patriciamnewman.com.



Genny Heikka



Patricia Newman



Kathryn Jankowski

Congratulations to the three authors whose manuscripts were selected by editors at the Davis Spring Spirit IV conference as the most promising ones critiqued. Each author received a one-on-one meeting with the editor during the conference: Patricia Newman with Heidi Kilgras from Random House; Genny Heikka with Pamela Bobowicz from Delacorte Press; and Kathryn Jankowski with Victoria Rock from Chronicle Books.

Genny Heikka is the Assistant Regional Advisor in North Central California for SCBWI, as well as the "Good News" editor for the Acorn. She's had work published in magazines in both the children and adult genres, and some of her manuscripts have won the following awards: Honorary Mention, Smartwriters.com W.I.N. contest; 1st Place, Children's Literature Category, California Focus on Writers Contest; and Honorary Mention, California Focus on Writers Contest. Genny also writes articles about parenting and encouragement at her weblog at www.mycup2yours.com.

After *Jingle the Brass* was published, people began telling Patricia Newman their railroad stories. One story led Newman to consider the advent of the railroad and its effect on people's lives. *Railroad Crossings*, a picture book in three voices set in the early 1900s, captures the adventure and sense of hope that three children feel as the first train rolls into town.

Kathryn Jankowski's work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Odyssey* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A native Californian, she currently lives in the Central Valley. *The Mermaid's Daughter* is her first novel for children. ☺



By Linda Boyden

Tidbits

CRITIQUE GROUP COORDINATOR NEEDS HELP!

My computer hiccupped and I've lost part of the list. The system tried to recover the data, but it lost -- a lot. Since the list is organized by region, it looks like San Joaquin Valley places were lost. Part of the Sacramento list was recovered, but not all.

So, if you are interested in being in a critique group and you live in Sacramento, Elk Grove, Wilton, Galt, Lodi, the Stockton area, Hilmar, Tracy, Modesto, Delhi, Ceres, Arnold, Sonora, Fresno, or Visalia, please let me know.

Please send me, Pam Wilkinson pwmwmarigrace@comcast.net an e-mail with 'critique group request' in the subject line and give me your full name, CITY or area, and writing and/or illustrating interests. If the e-mail you use to send me the note isn't the one you want used for critique group contacts, please note your preferred e-mail address in the body of the e-mail.

THANK YOU!

Pam Wilkinson
Northern California NORCA
Critique Group Coordinator

My Own Book

RA Tekla White forwarded me an inspiring email from Kyle and Brady Baldwin. They are two California teens, young men who think outside of themselves and give at-risk children a piece of happiness and the key to possibility: a book of their own. They do this solely through donations and the kindness of strangers. I hope many of you decide to visit their website www.myownbook.net and read the details for yourselves.

Hello:

We are two bothers, 15 and 17 years old, who have started an organization called My Own Book (www.myownbook.net et). We visit K-3rd grade classrooms in low income areas, read a book, tell the children about the public library, and then lay out a selection of brand new books for the children to pick out a book of their very own. Next we add a book plate with the child's name on it to each book.

The children are thrilled about getting their very own book, and in many cases it is their first book. So far, we have given out over 10,000 books and are working on growing our program even more. Our program is different in that teens READ TO THE CHILDREN to encourage reading through example. We are a 501(c)3 organization.

Would you be able to donate any books to our program? We would certainly appreciate it. Please let us know. Thank you,
Kyle & Brady Baldwin
4657 Green Valley Road
Green Valley, CA 94534
(by Fairfield- we go to Davis for 4-H events!)

Attached is an article about our program that was featured in American Profile recently. You can also access this by going to <http://www.americanprofile.com/>

Musings:

SCBWI 37th LA Conference, August, 2008

On August 1, over nine hundred SCBWI attendees hustled and bustled their way into the Grand Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza Hotel. We represented 44 states and 14 countries. We were authors (both published and unpublished), illustrators (ditto), editors, agents, and publishers; a diverse group of people from around the globe united by a single element: the love of children's literature.

One of the many traditional conference delights is the introduction of the faculty of presenters and the Regional Advisors. Each person does so by means of a defining word or phrase of their own choosing, for their own reasons. Like most authors, words fascinate me, so I jotted them down to examine later, just for fun. Weeks later, I realized that embedded within the sassiness, poignancy and humor of the word choices lurked some solid inspirations for the writing and illustrating life. Here are my takes on a few of their words:

1. IF All art begins with this tiny word of enormous possibilities. We write for children and a child's world is nothing but a series of ifs: IF I taste, smell, break, explore, what will I learn? IF I try this, or not that, what might happen? As cre-

ators of works for kids, we must stay connected to a feeling of IF in order to produce works that will ring true.

2. C-C-C-COURAGE! The Cowardly Lion had it right. It takes enormous courage to put ourselves on paper, in either art or words, and reveal something entirely personal. Once made public, our work is subjected to the world, which is not so much a stage as it is a c-c-c-critique! Rejection happens, but the trick is to depersonalize it. Listen, learn and have the c-c-c-courage to use it to strengthen your art.

3. SPARKLE Books that kids love, sparkle. These are the ones whose pages are battered from loving use and for which tiny voices clamor, "Again!" or for which older readers grab flashlights and sneak under blankets to finish one more chapter. While there is no "recipe" to create such treasures, writers can add sparkle through revision, which amounts to playing with words. It takes time and patience to find the perfect strong verbs and nouns, the beautiful, rich imagery and humor, the keys that open the hearts and minds of young readers. Illustrators add their touches of sparkle using color and composition, but also by adding that extra element- a sense of playfulness that stems from the heart and ends with the observer saying, "Oooh!"

4. BUTT-IN-CHAIR An artist's life is solitary by its very nature. To create means to think and imagine, then to go to an office or studio and put those ideas on paper or computer. Art can be very stubborn. Why can't the right words appear in the rough drafts or the perfect pictures

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Good News:

By **Genny Heikka**

ARA SCBWI North Central California

Genny Heikka had an article "The Sandwich Generation" published in Sacramento Parent magazine's September issue, as well as another article "The Grass Is Greener" published on HybridMoms.com. In addition, her blog, (MyCup2Yours at www.mycup2yours.com), was featured in the Family Friendly Blog Network, 5MinutesforMom.com, as well as CWO Online Magazine.

Heidi R. Kling's novel, *Sea*, the story of a California teenager who spends three life-changing weeks at a post-tsunami Indonesian orphanage sold to Putnam and has a publishing date of Summer, 2010.

Michele Cohen Krueger has had her work appear in anthologies by Jack Prelutsky and Lee Bennett Hopkins. In May, Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the national literacy organization, highlighted Michele's poem, RIF DAY on their website, and circulated a video of the poem across the web on YOUTUBE and MYSPACE.

Caren McNelly McCormack recently won a Biography Feature of the Year 2007 award from Highlights for her story, "The Tallest Kid in the Lunch Line," which ran in the March 2007 issue.

Nanette McGuinness's translation of Vittorio Giardino's *Sin Ilusion* (the final and concluding volume of his graphic novel series *No Pasaran*, about the Spanish civil war), from Italian into English, came out with NBM Publishing this past June.

Linda Boyden signed a contract with the University of New Mexico Press for her third picture book which she will write and illustrate, with a publishing date of Spring 2009. ☺

WEB

in the thumbnails? It takes time and incubation for a piece to come to life. There are no shortcuts, but the first and most reliable step is butt-in-chair.

5. **LUCKY** Work hard to learn your craft, stay in your chair and write and revise, draw and revise, observe the market, attend conferences, but never forget the element of luck.

Scene 1: Overworked Assistant Editor randomly selects a ms. from the slush pile. Bleary-eyed he begins to read and can't put it down. Enter Senior Editor. Assistant Editor cries, "YA GOTTA READ THIS!" She does, then grabs Assistant by the lapels. "QUICK. CALL (insert your name here) AND OFFER A CONTRACT! FORGET SALES & MARKETING. THEY'RE GONNA LOVE IT!"

As fantasy-ridden as that scenario is, never doubt that luck comes to the prepared. "Overnight successes" have been preparing for luck to strike in the same way that farmers prepare soil before planting- through demanding work. You cannot control luck, but you can make yourself ready to receive it.

6. **PERSEVERANCE** Without a doubt, this is the single most important ingredient in any area of success. Talent is as common as air; persistence beats talent hands down. As a smart, but anonymous, person once said, "Success is like wrestling a gorilla. You don't quit when you are tired. You quit when the gorilla is." I have plastered this in a number of places where I can see it often. It's a long road to reach a goal. Never, ever quit. ☺

Upcoming Events

**From Margaret Speaker Yuan
Regional Advisor, www.scbwi.org**

Save October 25:

UnMask Your Character: Reveal Your Story

The keynote address by Elizabeth Partridge, author of biographies of John Lennon, Woody Guthrie, and Dorothea Lange, will be followed by presentations from Gretchen Hirsch, editor at HarperCollins and Julie Romeis, editor at Chronicle Books, plus agents Erin Murphy of Erin Murphy Literary Agency and Jennifer Laughran of Andrea Brown Literary. Writers Carrie Watson (Quad) and Leigh Purtill (Love Meg) will join Elizabeth Partridge for a discussion of the YA fiction and non-fiction.

Save February 6 & 7 The Kittridge Retreat:

Green Gulch Farm, Feb. 6 & 7, 2009 (Friday and Saturday nights, departing on Sunday Feb. 8)

Optional Thursday night, Feb. 5
No speakers, no programs, just time to write or draw surrounded by the beautiful scenery of West Marin, plus informal evening readings and critiques. Green Gulch Farm is part of the San Francisco Zen Center. The farm is located off of Highway 1 north of the

Golden Gate Bridge, in a valley that opens out onto the Pacific Ocean. The accommodations for the retreat are at the Lindisfarne Guest House. The Guest House is a distinctive octagonal building with twelve rooms on two floors surrounding a 30-foot skylit atrium. The atrium provides a relaxing skylit sitting area where guests often gather to read or sit with a cup of tea by the fire. The building is constructed in a traditional Japanese style and heated with a central wood-burning stove and passive solar system.

FYI: The February 2008 retreat sold out, so please register early! To reserve your space, send \$150 by Sept. 1, 2008.

If you register by Sept. 1, the price is \$275.

After Sept. 1, the price goes up to \$350.

Optional Thursday night, Feb. 5, is \$100.

Registration form is on the www.scbwinorthca.org web site. ☺

ACORN SUBMISSION DEADLINES

The Acorn is a triyearly publication. Issues will be posted on the SCBWI NorCa website <http://www.scbwinorca.org/news/newsletter.htm> hopefully around the middle of January, May, and September of each year. The deadline for submissions is one month prior to each publication date. Please contact Linda Boyden about submission due dates or for more information.

The Children Make The Book

By **Lea Lyon**

One of the highlights of my relatively new career as a children's book illustrator has been working with children to create the illustrations for my picture books. While some people create characters from their imagination, I prefer to use models. Since most of the characters in my books are children, my models are children, too.

When I got my first contract in 2004, to illustrate the award winning book about bullying, *Say Something*, by Peggy Moss, I realized I needed to paint an entire classroom of kids: kids walking down the school hall, kids on the playground, kids crying, laughing, teasing and feeling angry and sad. I had to portray the same children on page after page and make the characters convincing and real.

Where could I find so many children of the right age to act out my story and model for me while I took digital photos? I contacted a local school, arranged to spend a few hours with a class, had the students get release slips signed and set a date for our "photo shoot."

I had already divided the manuscript into pages, done rough thumbnail sketches, and had the basic idea of what I wanted on each page. With this, some samples of my paintings, the photos I had used to paint from, the manuscript for the book, and a presentation on how picture books are made, I set off to meet my class.

The children found it hard to believe that a single piece of paper had all the words for a whole book. This was just the first of the amazing things they learned about what it takes to illustrate and create a picture book.

After I described and showed samples of the steps an illustrator takes, the teacher and I led a discussion about bullying. I knew that I needed to make this book current, to appeal to kids now, and also have it still feel current for years. I had to understand what bullying "looks like" now, not rely on what it was like when I was a child. I explained this to the kids, and we had an incredible discussion on bullying.

Then I put on my film director hat. I set up each scene (page) the way I wanted it with the characters that the teacher helped me cast. We had a ball!!!

The next day I returned to show the kids some of the photos I had taken and gave them pictures of themselves to keep. Over time, I made several more return visits to show them the dummy, some of the paintings, and, finally, the finished book. They will never look at a picture book the same again. Plus, they felt like celebrities.

Each of my next three books had a special aspect to the modeling and filming. For my second book, *Playing War*, one of the five children I worked with had a Golden Retriever who wanted to get into the act while we were "filming." So, I put him in the book too.

My third book, *Keep Your Ear on the Ball*, by Genevieve Petrillo, again took place in a school. This time it was about a blind boy in a regular classroom. I found a school, Bay View School in Oakland, that had visually impaired children in their classrooms.

My latest book, *The Miracle Jar*, by Audrey Penn, is a Hanukkah story that takes place at the turn of the century in "the old country." I rented costumes from a production of "Fiddler on the Roof!" You should have seen my "family" when they put on those costumes—all four of them started dancing around the room!

I can't describe the pleasure this process has given me. As exciting as it is to see my books in print, sharing the books with the kids who modeled for them is the best yet. I can't wait for the next project!

Lea Lyon is the illustrator of three books from Tilbury House Publishers, Say Something, by Peggy Moss, 2004, Playing War, by Kathy Beckwith, 2005, and Keep Your Ear on the Ball, by Genevieve Petrillo, 2007. Her newest book is from Tanglewood Press and is The Miracle Jar, by Audrey Penn, October, 2008. Lea is the Illustrator Coordinator for the SF/South SCBWI region. Visit her at www.lealyon.com

THE CAREFUL CRITIQUER'S CHECKLIST: Part II: HOW TO GIVE AND GET GOOD CRITIQUES

by **Nanette Cooper-McGuinness**

Check out the Spring '08 Acorn for Part 1 of the "Careful Critiquer"

Congratulations! You did it—found a handful of like-minded writers at roughly the same level, set up some guidelines, and started a brand new critique group. Now that it's up and running, how do you keep your group going? Some critique groups can last for years; others quickly fall apart. Which camp will yours fall into? While there's a certain amount of luck and chemistry involved—plus the sheer ability to stay committed—the following pointers getting and receiving critiques can help group members feel satisfied. And satisfied members stick around.

How to be a good critiquer

1) Be kind, constructive, specific, and honest. No need to say something is awful and will never get published—even if that's the case—but no need to say a manuscript is the next Harry Potter, either, if you think it belongs in the recycling bin—permanently.

2) ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS begin with something positive and specific. Try not to just say "I liked it," or "Wow, that was interesting." Don't simply dive into all the inherent problems in a manuscript without first finding something good to say. It will be there: find it and start with it. Let the words, "specific and positive" be your mantra.

3) Even if you disagree with what another critiquer has said, be polite. Miss Manner's and your mother's rules will stand you in good stead. Try not to interrupt, but try not to drone on either: share the "floor." If you have a facilitator, s/he can control the flow.

4) The piece belongs to the author. Even if s/he disagrees with your strongly-held, cogently-developed opinion, so be it. Just

See Checklist on page 6

Checklist

PICK DETAILS VERY CAREFULLY FOR SUCCESS:

ITEMS TO READ FOR

PLOT: Is the plot believable and the topic interesting? New, or with a new twist or fresh viewpoint? Are the pacing and flow successful?

DETAILS: Are there errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation? Is the word choice apt? Does every word count? Every sentence flow? Are the transitions smooth?

VOICE: Is the author's voice strong and consistent? Is each character's voice distinctive? Does the choice of narrative voice work?

CHARACTER(S): Are the characters fleshed out? Even if the story is told by a despicable anti-hero, is there a reason to care about him or her?

FORMAT: Do the format, topic, and treatment match and do they suit the intended audience? Do the section endings make the reader want to continue? Do the work's divisions make sense? Are the sections and overall length in line with the market? If not, is the manuscript nonetheless compelling?

STYLE: Are the style, tone, and vocabulary compatible with the topic, market, and genre?

repeat to yourself ten times, "It's not my piece." Respect the work and the author's intention. If the author or the group rejects your suggestion, move on-don't harp or harangue. (Review #3 above about Miss Manners.)

5) If a member brings something to read and requests a specific kind of feedback only (see below), honor that request. For example, if a writer is getting ready to send out a manuscript the next morning and wants final proofreading, it can be destructive to say that the piece needs a complete overhaul. But if the writer then asks if it's ready to go out, that's your moment: jump right in-constructively!

6) Keep an eye on the time, so that each writer gets an equal amount of attention.

7) When critiquing, here are a few things to read for-and a saying to help remember them (see sidebar). Be careful about suggesting wholesale changes in format or voice unless there's a real problem that needs solving. (If there isn't and you're still tempted, review #4 above.) NB: Some of these items only refer to fiction.

- Pick (PLOT)
- Details (DETAILS)
- Very (VOICE)
- Carefully (CHARACTERS)
- For (FORMAT)
- Success (STYLE)

How to get the most out of a critique

- 1) You may wish to start out by telling the group:
- what the piece is (i.e., genre, audience, etc.);
 - what stage the manuscript is at (early draft, ready to go and only requiring final touches, etc.);
 - what kind of feedback you want (general/overall, anything and all, help with a specific problem, etc.).

The group should honor that request.

2) Don't justify what you've written or get defensive. Listen to what people have to say. Take a "Yes, and..." attitude instead of saying "No, but..." and play with "What if?" Should more than one person say something about a spot or an aspect of your manuscript-even if what they say is different-realize that something in that area probably doesn't work, whether or not you accept the specific feedback.

3) If you have trouble doing #2 above and need a way to short circuit a tendency to justify your work, try simply listening to everyone's feedback. Period. Don't say anything beyond "thanks," or "okay," when folks are commenting, unless someone asks you a direct question. Take copious notes on what you're hearing and then sleep on the suggestions before starting into or rejecting any revisions. You may find that your perspective changes after your unconscious has had a chance to mull over what your critique group said. But if not, go on to #4, below.

4) If you really disagree with someone's suggestion, don't use it. Be willing to try it, but in the end, you are the author.

With these ideas in mind and some luck, you'll have a critique group that keeps going and going and going and....

On Self-Publishing

By Robin Koontz

Self-publishing is sometimes a good choice for people and there are good companies out there, but not many. Some examples of successful self-published books are regional tales, how-to books and specialized non-fiction, and family histories. Most of the time, it is not a wise choice, especially if you do so out of frustration over getting your book published in the trade market. Typically the company expects you to do the marketing, tags on a higher-than-normal retail price, does not allow bookstore returns and, reviewers run the other way rather than review self-published books. So many people publish their less-than-professional books the entire field is wrought with a bad reputation that is hard to get around. I strongly recommend that if you take this route, still have your book professionally edited by a reputable editor-don't trust the "free service" provided by the vanity publisher. And think long and hard about a marketing plan before you find yourself with a garage full of unsold books. POD (Publish On Demand) is all the rage now so warehousing is not such a big deal. But, they are usually overpriced compared to industry standards, and the publishers will lean on you to get all your friends and families to buy copies of your book.

I've discovered some publishers are not fulfilling their promises, and people who go this route are better off starting their own publishing company and using a reputable printing company to assist them in the design and production. And again, hiring a free-lance

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Inside the Illustrator's Cranium: Zap! Jeff S. Jackson

By Linda Boyden

According to the dictionary, an illustrator is one who illuminates, clarifies or uses the visual arts to demonstrate ideas. Whether robots, animals, ships, or you-name-it, animator/illustrator, Jeff S. Jackson imagines a concept, grabs his favorite #935 Prismacolor pencil or revs up his computer, brews a never-ending pot of coffee, then zaps life into ideas. Like many authors and illustrators, his art is done while multi-tasking other jobs, parenting, and volunteer work such as being the Graphics Designer for our Acorn online magazine.

After graduating from San Jose State College, Jeff has worked as both an animator and illustrator for a wide range of clients: Hallmark Cards Inc., The Nature Company, Wizard Magazine and the Seaside Police Department. In the year 2000, his first picture book debuted from Hoopoe Books, *The Silly Chicken*, a Central Asian tale retold by Idries Shah. In this book, Jeff takes his humor and love of drawing animals to a delightful level, partnering seamlessly with Shah's "the sky is falling" storyline.

Jeff started in animation as a traditional effects animator. He has taught storyboarding, figure and animal drawing as well as other subjects at Cogswell College in Sunnyvale. He also enjoys coordin-

ating Zoo Sketch Crawl events (aka ZSCs) where students and illustrators spend a day at local zoos, sketching animals then critiquing their works. Check out Jeff's gallery at www.sonjebasa.net or his blog at <http://sonjebasa.blogspot.com/>

Here's Inside the Illustrator's Cranium, Jeff S. Jackson in his own words:

1. What's your favorite word?

I love words that have a sense of flow like slugabed, disingenuous, superfluous, mellifluous, and tensor fasciae latae. I also love onomatopoeic words like Blam, Whoosh, Boing, pow, and "kazzzzzzzzzoooooooooooshah!"

2. What's your least favorite word?

I really hate words that depersonalize human acts between two or more people like gifting or words that condense a group effort into a single moment that can be checked off on a clipboard like animations.

3. Describe your artist statement.

"Coffee. I love you, coffee."

4. Describe your work ethic in regards to your art:

Let's see, after the kid goes down for nap and when grading is all done, I jump into what I have on the board or on the computer and try to get something done...nuts, the kid's awake or the toilet is overflowing...guess I'll have to stay up (see number 3).

5. What is your favorite medium and why?

I work a lot in Photoshop or Painter now. My favorite tool is still a black #935 Prismacolor pencil.

Self Publish

editor to polish their manuscript before letting it loose on the world is very important.

That said, illustrators do get work from vanity presses. My advice is to get paid outright, don't sign a royalty contract. And do NOT deliver anything without a written contract and a downpayment. Write a kill-fee into the contract as well. Typically it goes this way: 1/3 on contract signing; 1/3 on approved sketches; 1/3 on delivery and approval of final art. Kill fee = 1/4 of total and all rights to art you've done reverts to you. If you are working in digital format, you can ghost a disclaimer on all the pieces until you get your money. I recommend it. You might even get an attorney to look things over before you sign.

Since 1987 Robin Koontz has illustrated and/or authored scores of picture books, early readers, novelty books, activity books and nonfiction for both trade and educational publishers. She is the Regional Advisor for the Oregon SCBWI.



From Tekla White

SCBWI Regional Advisor North Central California

Grandchildren, scrubbed and polished, are off to school, and the first fall leaves are decorating my front lawn. I must confess that raking and digging into household chores are not at the top of my things-to-do list. I'll finish them off in good time, of course, but I have a better plan. Inspired by the great speakers at the August SCBWI conference in Los Angeles, I've decided to clear my desk and uncover all the manuscripts I didn't finish this year. After that, I'll revise a few oldies but goodies that have decorated my files for longer than I can count. It's mind boggling, especially the desk part, but I've promised myself that rain, sleet, snow or life's other distractions won't slow me down! Since our average daily summer temperature has hovered around a dry 97 degrees, the sleet and snow part is a pretty safe promise. Check back with me in December, when the days are cooler, and I'll send you a progress report.

I hope all of you have experienced a more productive writing and illustrating year so far, and your creative to-do list is much shorter than mine. Be sure to keep your successes flowing to Genny Heikka, North/Central's talented assistant regional advisor, genny.heikka@gmail.com. She'll post the list with your name in the next Acorn.

North/Central California covers 38 counties. If you would like to have some get-togethers during the year in your area, contact Tekla White tnwrites@cal.net. If you are interested in joining a critique group, contact Pam Wilkinson pmmwmarigrace@comcast.net. To be added to the email list for illustrators or the list for both authors and illustrators contact Nancy Barnett nancy@nancybarnet.com.

DATES TO REMEMBER

May 2, 2009
Set aside the date for our spring conference in Davis. We're lining up speakers right now, so we can celebrate and learn more about the writing and illustrating world. I hope to see all of you there.

Wishing you a stack of contracts,
Tekla



6. Any tips on using that medium?
Buy Prismacolors by the box, it's cheaper. Try working on animation paper or layout bond paper.
7. Any tips on illustrating?
Try to learn something from each project, whether it's about the subject you are illustrating or about the medium. That will keep it from seeming like a job.
8. What's your favorite book?
This week's fav: *Pi-Shu; the Little Panda* by John Butler. The one I like to read again and again, Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*.
9. What inspires you to create your art?
Other than the need to eat? I have been teaching a lot lately and I love it. To be able to relay concepts and see my students begin to apply what they have learned and get better in the process is very inspiring.
10. Who are your favorite painters and/or composers?
There is not enough room here to even begin a list. The golden age illustrators like Dean Cornwell always beckon to me, as do masters like Jose Jimenez y Aranda, Vermeer, Caravaggio and Velazquez and some modern day wonders like Joy Allen, Janet Stevens and Daniel San Souchi.
11. Who are your real life heroes?
My dad. He is such a great dad (and now grandpa) that he is the bar to which I measure everything. And anyone who doesn't use words like...gifting and animations.
12. What intrigues you?
Why on earth I would be asked to fill out this questionnaire when there are some many other truly incredible and talented folks out there who would be waaay more interesting than myself.
13. What profession/job other than illustrating would you like to try?
I have always wanted to work as an ice cream flavor tester.
14. What profession/job would you never try?
The person who squishes lemons for lemonade at Hot Dog On A Stick.
15. Assuming there will be an afterlife, whom would you like to meet and why?
Hmmm...see question 10. I would love to get J.S. Sargent, Charles Dana Gibson, N. C. Wyeth, Illya Repin, Rembrandt van Rjin, Dean Cornwell, Bill Peet, Tyrus Wong, Edgar Degas, Howard Pyle, Frank Thomas, Ollie Johnston, and Marc Davis in the same room so we could all talk shop.
16. What is your favorite work motto/mantra?
Mind over matter-if I don't mind, it won't matter.





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