



# the acorn

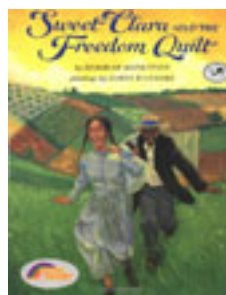
Newsletter for the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI

## Author/Illustrator Profile: Deborah Hopkinson

By Patricia Newman

Deborah Hopkinson has two full-time jobs, writer and professional fundraiser. Her readers are familiar with her award-winning picture books, nonfiction, and novels, and her university colleagues are familiar with her talents as the Vice President for College Advancement at Pacific Northwest College of Art in Oregon. As the primary breadwinner in her household, she cannot forego the health benefits of full-time employment, so she carves out chunks of time for writing. "I make lists," she says. "I tend to work on weekends and a little bit in the evenings on shorter things, or I divide what I have to do in smaller pieces."

As a young mother employed as a development officer for the University of Hawaii, Hopkinson read children's books to her three-year-old daughter. "I always knew I wanted to write, but I didn't know what or how to go about it with my family responsibilities," she says. One year she made a New Year's resolution-submit a piece of writing to a publisher every month. She persevered for two years collecting rejection letters before deciding on a different strategy. One of the few writing



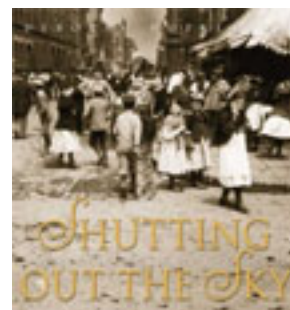
workshops that she successfully squeezed into her already-packed schedule included a session on writing for children's magazines. Hopkinson tried it and sold her first story to Cricket Magazine. The strategy worked; in two years she sold her first book, *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*.

While in college, Hopkinson gravitated to women in history. "Looking for stories about girls led me to become more interested in history," she explains. Scrolling through the results for a "women in history" search of the library catalog led her to Maria Mitchell, the first female astronomer. "I had never heard of her," Hopkinson says, her curiosity planting the seed for *Maria's Comet*.

Hopkinson likes to go beyond what appears in history textbooks, preferring the information in the shaded boxes to the actual chapter text. "Keeping my antennae up" is how Hopkinson describes the idea stage of a story. *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* came from an NPR story about a quilt exhibition commemorating the first African-American graduate of Williams College. *Stagecoach Sal*, an upcoming book, gelled

when Hopkinson visited the Wells Fargo Foundation in a fundraising capacity and happened upon an exhibit that featured women in history. Among them was the first female stagecoach driver in California. Hopkinson's newest book, *Abe Lincoln Crosses A Creek*, is a culmination of things she'd been thinking about in previous books. "I've been trying to do more on historical literacy, helping kids think about history and get excited about history." Because most of her characters are anchored in the past, she says, "I put myself in the shoes of the person I'm writing about, knowing as much about the time period, reading that person's writing, and trying to imagine what I have in common with that person, and how things might be different in that time period."

With over 30 books published, Hopkinson still receives rejection letters from editors. "A lot of what I've done in my professional career has helped me as a writer," she says. "In fundraising, sometimes my proposals are rejected, not because it's a bad project but because it doesn't fit the needs of the foundation. It's the same with editors. They all have different goals for what they are trying to do. It's part of the way the publishing world works."



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You throw out ideas and realize not all of them are going to work." Hopkinson cautions new writers that one story is not enough. You must approach writing like a professional and be open to looking at your story in a new way based on an editor's suggestions. During the revision process, Hopkinson may go back and forth with her editor producing nine revisions before the manuscript is finally completed. "I do a lot of grant proposals with fundraising and you get very used to writing collaboratively."



Hopkinson sees children's literature as a special gift for our children. "We read to kids when they're little," she says, "but I always think of having children as having the opportunity to have a lifelong book club. Once kids start reading on their own, parents don't keep reading the same books."

Hopkinson encourages us to pass on books to our older children. "Continue to read with kids even once they're reading on their own." ☺

#### HOW TO CONTACT DEBORAH HOPKINSON

Website: [www.deborahhopkinson.com](http://www.deborahhopkinson.com)

#### SELECTIONS FROM DEBORAH HOPKINSON'S LIBRARY

*Keep On!: The Story of Matthew Henson, Co-Discoverer of the North Pole*, Peachtree Press, 2009.

*Home on the Range: John Lomax and his Cowboy Songs*, Putnam, 2009.

*Abe Lincoln Crosses A Creek: A Tall, Thin Tale*, Schwartz & Wade, 2008.

*Into the Firestorm: A Novel of San Francisco, 1906*, Knopf, 2006.

*Who Was Charles Darwin*, Grosset & Dunlap, 2005.

*Apples to Oregon*, Atheneum, 2004.

*Shutting Out the Sky: Life in the Tenements of New York 1880-1924*, Orchard Books, 2003.

*Fannie in the Kitchen*, Atheneum, 2001.

*Maria's Comet*, Atheneum, 1999.

*Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*, Knopf, 1993.

#### Upcoming

*Stagecoach Sal*, Hyperion, Summer 2009.

*Michelle Obama*, HarperCollins, Fall 2009.

*Annie and Helen*, Schwartz & Wade, 2011.

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](http://www.patriciamnewman.com).

#### 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.

By Janet Batchelder Mason

At the beginning of the school year, I waited until Target put its back-to-school items on sale and bought a pack of miniature highlighters for my third grade son. Somehow, they ended up on my desk during one of my many revision sessions on my middle grade novel. My focus was character, and I was struggling to keep each of my four main characters distinctive in my mind, let alone on the page.

My eyes shifted to the highlighters. After staring at them brainlessly for a few moments, I came up with a little procrastination: game-matching my characters to the colors that best represented them. Tyler would learn to get past his impulsiveness and his disrespectful attitude—so he would be blue—a thoughtful, pleasing color. Sierra was definitely girly, but she would experience a character change, too and stop buying into stereotypes. Therefore, pink wouldn't do—she would have to be purple. Dakata was unusual but warm and friendly—from a dry land dominated by deserts and sand dunes—definitely orange. And Ernest, my annoying brainiac, would learn to love and protect something besides himself—the natural world. So green he was.

Suddenly an idea sparked in my burned-out brain. Since my story is told from Tyler's viewpoint, I started with him. Picking up the blue highlighter, I went through the first chapter of my MS, highlighting everything he says and does. Then I studied just those blue portions of the chapter to determine two things: first, whether he stayed in character and second, whether his characteristics were unique and interesting. I did the same for each character, one chapter at a time.

The result—yeah—one heck of a lot of work. But what good is a story if your characters don't jump off the page like—well, like they've been highlighted in bold colors? This activity not only helped me with the consistency and complexity of my characters, but it also helped me ensure they underwent important changes by the end of my story—changes that I need to show through actions and dialogue—not through "telling" narration. For example, in the first part of my MS, Tyler uses words like "lame" and "kind of." He shrugs a lot, rolls his eyes, and yawns. He tends to glance at things instead of looking at them closely. But towards the end he is more prone to say "sweet" or "intense." He pulls his bangs out of his eyes to really look at things. He nods. And he even smiles.

I have graduated to using colors for other things in my manuscript. I highlight verbs in pink since pink is a color that catches and holds my attention. Yellow is my least favorite color—perfect for adverbs—seeing them underneath a nasty, yellow sheen helps me eliminate them from my writing.

The possibilities here are endless—as long as the highlighter makers keep producing new color choices. So here's to making revision, if not easier, at least more colorful (especially if you come from a teaching background and tend to critique yourself in bloodthirsty red). Who knows?—at the end of the rainbow you create, you may actually find a pot of gold. Just don't sign your new book contract in boring black ink. ☺



By Linda Boyden

In the summer of 1997 my husband's work "forced" us to move to Hawaii. At first I clomped onto my teaching career and would not let go. Slowly though, it dawned on me this move was a gift. For the first time, I would not need to work. I could stop whining about wanting the time to write a children's book and just do so. My take: every ending is a new beginning.

Since then I have been learning my craft. I do so primarily by attending countless workshops and conferences, from the fabulously energizing SCBWI Nationals in L.A. to serene ones in rural settings, gleaning knowledge from each: tools to hone my writing skills; mini-courses in illustration; challenges to leap into new genres.

Of course I took notes. Oodles of notes in oodles of notebooks ("Monica" from TV's "Friends" character that I am, they are all the same type-the marbled-covered kind I loved in grade school).

They line a shelf in my office. I glance their way from time to time. Occasionally, I open one and sneeze from the dust. I try to keep the contents organized: all the Davis conferences in one, for example, but seldom succeed. I do label them, however. At the recent Davis conference, I discovered I had forgotten to bring a book to read before bed. I opened the notebook labeled, "Davis-Carson City-SCBWI L.A. 2004-Davis-Lethbridge, Alberta, 2006 Wordcraft Circle Conference-Davis" and started to read. I became inspired all over again and hope these snippets from a few of the GREATS in our field will jump-start your summer writing projects, too:

Newbery and Newbery Honor winner, **Karen Cushman** started writing at age 50. She wrote 27 versions of the **FIRST PAGE** of *Catherine, Called Birdy*. Her advice: Show up. Tell the truth. **Linda's take: No excuses. Be like The Little Red Hen and get it done and do it well.**

**Bruce Hale**, author of the delightful *Chet Gecko* series et al., says to understand today's

kids, the trick is to connect the kid you were to kids of today.

**Linda's take: Don't write a YA if you don't know how to text or MySpace or don't fully appreciate vampires. Observe the age group you want to write about. Keep current.**

**G. Brian Karas**, illustrator of too many picture books to count, says the job of the illustrator is to go beyond the author's words. **Linda's take: Picture book writers in particular must use active verbs, strong nouns and captivating imagery so to inspire a stranger, your illustrator, to complete the circle you've started.**

**Bruce Colville**, author of many book series from *Aliens* to Shakespeare retellings, tells us that action and choices display the characters.

**Linda's take: Reveal your characters bit by bit through the plot.**

**Barbara Seuling**, prolific picture book author and master teacher, says a good picture book author sees through the eyes of a child.

**Linda's take: The younger the child, the more she or she thinks differently from you in every arena, from eating to humor and sharing.**

Newbery winner **Richard Peck** believes books should be better than real life, so lead your story with humor.

**Linda's take: Life is hard for every generation of kids. This generation has many nifty toys and gadgets for entertainment, so up the ante with excellent words and art, lace it all with humor appropriate to the age level, and entice more reluctant readers to the joy of reading.**

**Terri Farley**, author of the beloved *Phantom Stallion* series, values the role of risk, saying there is no safety at the edge of the frontier.

**Linda's take: Don't let your protagonist be a settler, i.e. one who is pleased to stay settled in safety. Make her or him antsy to venture out into the frontiers.** ☞

## Spring Spirit V Davis Conference

By Rachel Burns

First and foremost, I'd like to give a BIG thank you to **Tekla White** for all her years of organizational genius and dedication, as well as her uncanny ability to whip us into shape at conferences. This year's Spring Spirit Conference was the last one organized by **Tekla**. Despite an economic crisis and general uncertainty regarding the children's publishing industry, she pulled in a host of fantastic speakers to inform and

encourage us.

After a brief introduction by **Tekla**, who advised us to be rude and make mad dashes for the toilet during presentations, **Diane Muldrow** kicked off the conference. As an editorial director at Golden Books/Random House, **Ms. Muldrow** knows quite a bit about picture books. She took us through a history of American picture books, dwelling on some of her favorites like *GOODBYE TONSILS* and *POKEY LITTLE PUPPY*. **Ms. Muldrow** also reminded us that Golden Books is a great opportunity for rookie writers.

For those of us who are not the most technologically savvy, **Chris Eboch** broke down virtual school visits. With the help of a computer, a camera, and Skype, you, too, can present to schools in your pajamas. Just make sure you take anything embarrassing off the walls of your office. **Sara Kahn**, who is in charge of our website, followed **Ms. Eboch**. **Ms. Kahn** has traveled around the world presenting books and gave us two presentations, including a fascinating talk about Iranian storytelling through scrolls and puppet shows. **Linda Joy Singleton** wrapped up the morning's presentations by wading into the complex world of blogging, Myspace, Twitter, and Facebook. By using Myspace to reach out to her readers, **Ms. Singleton** has gained a whopping 3,000 friends on the social networking site.

After lunch, **Kendra Levin**, associate editor at **Viking Children's Books**, gave us some good news. With the economy as it is the last thing parents want to do is take something away from their children. This includes books! As writers, it is our responsibility to take a step back, think about what we are writing and why, and then put together a book that will grab editors' attention in these tough times. Why we write particular manuscripts is an important question for **Ms. Levin** and she advises us not to do so strictly to get published.

**Diane Muldrow** took the stage again in the afternoon, this time as an author. Like **Ms. Levin**, **Ms. Muldrow** touched on our incentives to write. She stressed the fact that writing is extremely personal and told us to write our truth. She also advised us to be patient and let ideas gestate. Agent **Nathan Bransford** of **Curtis Brown** echoed **Ms. Muldrow's** theme of patience with his talk, "Take Your Time". His advice? Procrastinate wisely. When you don't necessarily feel like writing, visit agents' and authors' blogs, or go to **Verla Kay's** message board. Read as much about the industry as you can. Likewise, when you are seeking representation, be patient. Don't take the first agent who will take you on.

See Davis on page 4

## Agent Profile: Deborah Warren, East/West Literary Agency

By Erin Dealey

A day in the life of agent Deborah Warren, head of East/West Literary Agency in Santa Monica is never typical. "It's all about selling, advocacy, and communication: spearheading the process through answering emails, developing pitches, shopping projects, researching the market, promoting our authors and illustrators and list, keeping up with who's going where and who's acquiring what ... generally, juggling about 100 balls at once," she explained. "Plus editing/reviewing/shaping/revisiting manuscripts/submissions/ and selling of rights." When and how is she able to communicate with clients? "Because we limit the number of clients we take on, we are able to give one-on-one personal attention to each and every client," Warren said. "Every time a manuscript or portfolio is submitted, a copy of the submission (mostly digital these days) goes to the client, as do most editor responses. And trips to New York (and publishers in other geographic areas) always yield tons of feedback opportunities for our agency's clients. We are here to help them build and nurture their careers, so we believe in feedback wholeheartedly-and engage in it often."

When asked if agents are taking on anything besides mid-grade and YA's right now, she said, "Yes, of course! Anything that is very well-written, has a truly unique voice, presents the subject matter with a unique and truly new perspective, is carefully researched as to its competition, and is saleable as to its format is welcome. Yes, there are certain segments of the market that are very tough right now, but that will always be true. Someone has to provide the books that do get published! For example, three of our most recent deals were for picture books: on acquired by Feiwel & Friends/Macmillan and the others conceptualized by SCBWI NorCal members Gianna Marino (Chronicle) and Jim Averbeck (a two-book series pre-empted by Simon & Schuster). In fact, she adds that recently, "We've negotiated deals for writers and illustrators of children's fiction and non-fiction (both new, established, and bilingual) in categories ranging from first serial electronic to individual titles and series targeting the following markets: board (a 3-

book series by Random House), concept (a 2-book series preempted by Simon & Schuster), novelty (a 4-book series by Running Press) picture (a four-book bestselling series by Viking, and *Nugget on the Flight Deck* by another SCBWI-NorCal author and Acorn contributor Patricia Newman due out this fall! ), chapter (a 6-book series by Piggy Toes Press), Middle Grade, and Young Adult (a 10-book series by Scholastic).



Deborah Warren and Erin Dealey

Photo courtesy of Erin Dealey

As for taking on an author who has already sold a project to a house and would like an agent's expertise, Warren explained, "We prefer to bring clients into the agency with whom we share a common career-building goal; however, we can also negotiate publishing agreements on a case-by-case basis. So, we will, absolutely help out a writer who is in this position—if the house is a legitimate one (there has been a proliferation of vanity presses which sometimes require an author's investment; self-publishing houses; and online publishing options, etc. and not all the contracts they proffer are negotiable). Many writers and illustrators do not like to muddle the financial negotiations with the creative ones, and they are also not familiar with everything they should be asking for or getting in their contracts. Agents exist for this reason, and to help them build relationships that will grow their career. We can step in at any part in the process and help the client—assuming there's a meeting of ALL of the minds, including the publisher.

The good news: 95% of East/West's children's clients are members of SCWBI. "It is the best organization out there for meeting 100% of our authors/illustrators' needs," Warren says. "And if someone that has been referred to us indicates their membership in SCBWI when submitting a manuscript, we know that they have done their due diligence."

In regard to rejections and at what point an agent might retire a project, Warren cited a

quote by Julie Andrews: "Perseverance is failing nineteen times and succeeding the twentieth." In Warren's words, "Sometimes the timing of the project and the zeitgeist is off. Sometimes editors move or publishers and imprints change their direction or ed boards don't green-light a project, regardless of the passion of the editor. When you boil it down to its essence, this business is so very subjective: each editor has her or his own perspective and either the work 'clicks' almost immediately or it doesn't. When the feedback from publishers overwhelmingly indicates that revisions are necessary, we discuss making those changes with the client. And you know, it works the other way, too: either the feedback 'clicks' with the client or it doesn't. Regardless, if we cannot champion a project wholeheartedly, we will not take it on. And since we are so choosy about taking on projects/clients (East/West is currently taking on new clients by referral only.), and we are relentless in our perseverance, we typically find that 'write' fit ... even if it does take twenty times!" Trust the process, Warren suggests. Remember that publishers reject a manuscript; they don't reject you. "We all have our special talents and I thank you for being authors and illustrators. I appreciate what you do. I'm so honored to be in this industry and to represent you!" 🍀

## Davis

Make sure that he/she is the right agent for you.

As an added bonus for SCBWI's published authors, many were invited to give five-minute presentations on recently released or upcoming books. This provided an excellent way for authors to market their new work. As usual, the Avid Reader set up shop to sell our members' work.

Thank you again to Tekla, as well as to all of the volunteers and presenters who made this year's Spring Spirit a success!

*Rachel Burns,  
Grant Writer, Traveler, and YA  
Novelist who is creeping on the  
come up*



# Regional Advisor's Corner

**From Tekla White**

**SCBWI Regional Advisor North Central California**

I enjoyed seeing so many writers and illustrators at our May 2nd Spring Spirit V conference in Davis. I always wish I had more time to visit and talk about your current projects. Do let me know from time-to-time what is going on in your writing and illustrating lives. Anytime you'd like advice, just ask. I can't guarantee an answer, but I may be able to help you find what you need to know.

This is my last column as a regional advisor. I've enjoyed the last ten years. Your friendship and guidance have been appreciated. You are, to quote a new member at the conference, "...great people! ...generous with...smiles and welcomes!" It's been an honor to serve as your regional advisor. I thank all of you for your support. In August I'll add the title emerita after my name. I'll have more time to visit and learn at other conferences, and more writing hours.

Our honored volunteers for 2008, are Nancy Barnet, email lists coordinator; Jeff Jackson, Acorn graphics designer; Linda Boyden, Acorn editor; Pam Wilkinson, the North/Central critique group coordinator; Sara Kahn, website person for North/Central California and San Francisco, East/North San Francisco Bay areas; Joy Allen and Kris McLeod our illustrator coordinators; and of course our terrific Genny Heikka, our Assistant Regional Advisor.

Many thanks go out to all the writers and illustrators who take time out from their illustrating and writing to volunteer at conferences and for special projects. Don't forget that Sacramento's Fairytale Town's book celebration will be held on September 26-27th. Volunteers will be needed to help with North/Central's activity and information booth.

I could end my column with sage advice, but I'll skip that and just hope the world of children's books continues to grow and flourish in spite of challenges. I'll look forward to seeing your books in the bookstores and reading your magazine articles. May your words and pictures provide fun, pleasure, hope and knowledge to young people everywhere and keep all of us young at heart. ☺

Tekla White  
SCBWI Regional Advisor  
North/Central California

FROM ALL OF US IN  
NORTH/CENTRAL SCBWI,  
BEST WISHES, TEKLA!  
THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING!

# Spring Spirit V Illustrator's Sessions

**By Linda Boyden**

As usual, the break-out sessions for the illustrators at the annual Davis Spring Spirit Conference were of top-notch quality, deftly emceed by Jeff Jackson.

Leading the afternoon off was Scholastic Art Director for Arthur Levine, Orchard and Scholastic Press Books, Marijka Kostiw. When she was young, she was undecided about a career, thinking maybe to be a librarian or teacher, but after being hired at Scholastic, everything fell into place. Her best insight: collaboration. Each book needs many minds and hands to become the best it can be.

Next, Joy Allen detailed her experiences in getting her art products

licensed. She advised it is a long road that you can help along by cataloguing your existing art with a numbered system, then creating a web site and registering your name. Of course, it is important to research companies to find a right match before sending inquiries. She recommended visiting a trade show first to familiarize yourself with the "big picture" and also to visit [www.licensing.org](http://www.licensing.org) for more information. Currently, Joy has lines of cards and fabrics on the market and in 2010, her line of Christmas cards will debut.

Kendra Levin from Viking Children's Books broke from the Writers' sessions to share submission tips for illustrators

# Good News:

**By Genny Heikka**

**ARA SCBWI North Central California**

**Sue Douglas Fleiss** just sold her first book, *Shoes For Me*, to Marshall Cavendish Children's Books. It will be part of their new line of Pinwheel Books and is slated for spring 2011.

**Genny Heikka** had an article published in Sacramento Parent Magazine, as well as at PluggedinParents.com. Another one of her articles was published in Mothersclick.com, a division of Lifetime Digital.

**Cheryl Renee Herbsman's** debut YA novel titled *Breathing* (Viking, 2009) was just released.

**Nanette McGuinness** has an article, "Marian Anderson: Singer of Courage," coming out in the April/ May 2009 issue of Hopscotch for Girls.

Two of **Ginger Wadsworth's** three 2009 books are now available: *Survival in the Snow*, illustrated by Craig Orback, and published by Millbrook Press, is the true story of Moses Schallenger, a teenager who survived a winter alone in the mountains of California in 1844, before the Donner Party's well-documented winter in the same location. *Up, Up and Away*, illustrated by Patricia J. Wynne, with Charlesbridge Publishing (in both paper and hardback), is the story of one garden spider's adventure-filled journey after she hatches from an egg sac. To enjoy an introductory trailer for this book, you can go to Ginger's website: [www.gingerwadsworth.com](http://www.gingerwadsworth.com) ☺

from the simple, Don't send original art, to the specific, Sending her a dummy is fine. She ended with Q&As.

The final speaker was Ruth Sanderson, illustrator of 75 books for children of all ages. Despite some technical difficulties with equipment, her dazzling art and her use of live models bedecked in authentic period costumes amazed us. She left us something to consider: for thirty years her personal road to publishing has been more or less charmed because she was in the right place at the right time. Luck plays an important role in the business of publishing children's books. ☺



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