



the acorn

Newsletter for the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI

LET'S MAKE A DEAL: NEGOTIATING A PUBLISHING CONTRACT

By Lisa Rojany Buccieri and Peter Economy,
authors of *Writing Children's Books for Dummies*
(Wiley, April 2005)



This issue's featured artist is KRIS MCLEOD. Please enjoy her work displayed throughout these pages. Interested in being the Acorn featured artist? Please see Santa and his illustration guidelines on page 5

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While the simple act of writing a story for children can be satisfying in itself, one of your key goals is to see your story in print-published in the form of a book by a traditional publisher and available at online sellers such as Amazon.com or at a bookstore near you. But before that happens, you're first going to need to find the perfect publisher for your book, and then negotiate and sign a publishing contract.

While we're not going to pretend that we are lawyers and give you specific legal advice on your particular contract situation (for specific legal advice, we suggest you contact an experienced attorney), here's a list of some of the most common things to pay attention to when it comes time for you to negotiate and sign your own publishing agreement:

•**Front cover byline:** Your name is on the cover, right? New authors especially should require that their name appear on the front cover and the spine of the book in a font size that is large enough to be read easily.

•**Free copies:** Make sure you get enough free copies to give away to your family and friends, as well as to hand out as promotional copies. While you're at it, make sure that your contract allows you to buy more copies at a special discount rate.

•**Advance:** Many publishers will pay you a fee for writing the book, which is actually an advance taken against your future royalties. The more copies of the book the publisher expects to sell, the greater the advance.

•**Royalty rates:** Royalties are generally 10-12 percent on hardcover sales and 5 to 8 percent on trade paperback sales. Push for a gross royalty rate (royalty based on the suggested retail price without publisher's cost subtracted from the price) versus a net royalty rate (royalties based on the retail price minus the publisher's costs).

•**Copyrights:** Make sure that the agreement provides that the copyright will be in your name.
•**Schedule:** Every publishing agreement has a schedule for delivery of the manuscript-what's yours?

Okay. So now that you know what kinds of things you'll see in your publishing agreement (this is just a small sample, most agreements have plenty more!), how can you make sure that they are written the way you want them to be? That's where good-old-fashioned negotiation comes into play. The good news is that anyone can negotiate like a pro. Here are some of the key tricks of the trade:

•**Be prepared.** We cannot overemphasize this simple but critical point-being prepared will provide you with a clear advantage in any negotiation. The amount of time you spend preparing for your negotiation will pay off many times over in the long run.

•**Leave plenty of room to maneuver.** In other words, create goals and positions that allow you to be flexible in your dealings. No one likes being forced into a take-it-or-leave-it situation-be sure that both you and other party are able to achieve your mutual goals.

•**Have lots of alternatives in mind.** Whenever someone rejects one of your positions, have several alternatives that you can

(Continued, see "Contact" page 2)



Illustration by Kris Mcleod



Illustration by Kris Mcleod

Stomaching My First Book Sale

By Elizabeth Provost

Once you sell your first children's book, everything becomes as easy as grinning, right? Wrong!

Reading the contract, those eight pages of legalese, was an experience my stomach will never forget. It took reassurance from several NORCA published authors before I could sign. Surely that was the worst of it, I mumbled, but wrong again.

The illustrations arrived. While I loved the artist's conception of the characters for my bedtime book-kid-appealing insects rather than the pudgy-cheeked babies I had envisioned-the wild gleam in the insects' eyes did not mesh with my book's theme.

What now? The illustrator had the weight of experience, not me. But the whole reason I wrote the book (especially after 9/11) was to calm children at bedtime. To make it more complicated, my editor praised the illustrations.

I have read and heard that new authors seldom have any say about illustrations. However, I scanned books on writing, and noticed several commenting, "If something's really bothering you, let your editor know. If she disagrees, at least you tried." Sounded like good advice to my stomach!

Honestly and semi-calmly, I wrote back to my editor. I pointed out that I really liked the illustrator's style and work in general, but my whole focus was to write a calming book. The children would probably love the tooting, clanging, and banging insects on their musical instruments, but, I would never buy this book for my little ones.

I noted a few other problems, with suggestions for solutions. Then I set the paperwork aside for two days before sending it off.

The editor responded that she would pass my comments to the illustrator.

Period.

Seven months later I got an envelope in the mail from my editor. Although the illustrator had been sidetracked with another job, he'd sent a whole new dummy with every page featuring sleepy-eyed insects!

Yes! Even one of my other suggestions was there!

After a dance around the kitchen, my stomach and I took-what-else?-a little celebration nap. 🍷

Contract

present in its place. This allows you to stay in the driver's seat in your negotiation.

- **Keep your word.** Successful long-term agreements are built on a solid foundation of trust; trust depends on keeping your word and doing what you say you'll do.

- **Listen more than you talk.** Be sure to listen to the other party very carefully. In negotiations, the one doing all the talking is often the one who gives up his or her positions and negotiation goals.

- **Don't give up too soon.** It can be tempting to rush through a negotiation when you're anxious to finalize an agreement and to get

to work on your new project. Don't do it!

- **Be able to say no.** Two words are absolutely essential in the vocabulary of

someone negotiating: yes and no. But while it's easy for most of us to say "yes," saying "no" can be much more difficult. However, when you're negotiating a deal, sometimes you've got to be able to say no to achieve your goals. If you're not happy with your publishing agreement, just say no!

Publishing agreements are an essential part of getting your book into print-don't just sign them out of hand. Review them thoroughly, be sure they contain the terms and conditions that you want in them-and don't be afraid to negotiate the specifics to ensure that your publishing goals are met.

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Lisa Rojany Buccieri and Peter Economy

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Tracking Your Writing Ideas

by Jon Vonhof

If you are like me, you have more ideas than you can effectively track. Your files are filled with scraps of paper scribbled in whatever color ink you happen to have-maybe even in crayon. There are emails, napkins, pages torn from magazines, and notes referencing a page in a book. They may be ideas for a picture book, an early reader series, a short story, characters for your next YA novel, or a magazine article. Way too many ideas to remember where they are, where they came from, and what you intended to do with them!

I recently decided to take control of my files and my ideas. My administrative side thought a project binder seemed like a good idea and my creative side agreed. I took a one-inch binder, labeled it Ideas, and added some tabbed dividers. I labeled my tabs Picture and Board Books, Early Reader, YA Novels, and Magazine Articles. A Miscellaneous tab was needed for all the ideas that didn't fit anywhere else. Label yours to reflect your writing needs and interests, but make a separate binder for each genre.

For the heart of the binder, the idea pages, I made a master file in my word processor using this template: a title line plus headers, audience, format, synopsis, special features, and sources. Choose a font size for each line and make them all bold. I used 18-pitch for the title and 14-pitch for the headers. I put the working title at the top, then drop down under each header and fill in the specific details for each idea. Keep your synopsis to one or two paragraphs. The plan is to capture the essence of your idea onto one page. Then save the file with a unique name, in a folder called Ideas. Print and add to your binder under the appropriate tab.

Add notes to the pages as you find additional pieces to your ideas. Add pages as necessary. Review your Idea binder monthly to keep the ideas fresh in your mind, particularly as you skim newspapers and magazines for more puzzle pieces. Take the binder to critique group meetings where ideas can be shared for feedback and further development.

Store any writing clips in sheet protectors in the back and take to conferences to share with an editor or publisher. Sort them according to what is important for each conference.

Occasionally, cull your Idea binder. If one is ready, develop it into a full-fledged project and make a Project binder for its manuscript, queries, and book proposals under individual tabs.

Throw other ideas away-or better yet, pass them on to writing friends. Maybe they will see where the idea is leading and bring it to fruition.

Use Idea and Project binders to track your children's writing ideas and you will stop losing those good and profitable ideas. Over time some of them will become winners. 🍀



Regional Advisor's Corner

By Tekla White

North/Central California SCBWI

Greetings from North Central California. I hope you've had an inspiring summer and time to fill a treasure chest with your illustrations and stories. The SCBWI has a new market guide which provides publishing information to help members decide where they should submit their work. Members may request a copy of the guide by sending return postage to the SCBWI, 8271 Beverly Boulevard,

Los Angeles, CA 90048. Please check the Website www.scbwi.org for the amount of postage needed.

I've just returned from the SCBWI conference in Los Angeles where I heard Lee Bennett Hopkins and Christopher Paul Curtis, two inspirational speakers. Bruce Hale presented practical advice for writers with his *Ten Secrets for Crafting a Successful Story*. Published writers and illustrators shared their expertise during workshops, and members displayed their work in the evening. There

were brave storytellers, writers, and illustrators who gave three minute segments of their school presentations. Verla Kay, who has moved to Washington, Linda Boyden, and Lynn Hazen were three of our talented performers. Jerry Miller was presented with the Barbara Karlan Grant, and Gennifer Choldenko received the well-deserved Sid Fleishman Humor Award for her book, *Al Capone Does My Shirts*. There were editors everywhere, giving advice and answering questions.

Northern California members met early Sunday morning to say hello to their regional advisors. The Beach Bash Gala and other social get-togethers were conference highlights. Sharing conference days and evenings with so many writer and illustrators of children's literature is, for me, one of the most valuable benefits of attending the conference. At home, these memories will keep me writing until I meet friends at the next SCBWI event.

By the way, I hope to see all of you at the September 10, 2005 North Central get-together in Davis. It's our first free event for members. We will have another conference in Davis on March 25, 2006. We always need volunteers. Email me, tnwrites@cal.net if you want to help during events or during the year. Put your talent to work. Best wishes and lots of fall contracts,

Tekla White
SCBWI Regional Advisor
North Central California. 🍀



Illustration by Kris Mcleod



Good News

Genny Heikka

Marsha Diane Arnold's book PRANCING, DANCING LILY has been named to the 2005 IRA-CBC Children's Choices list.

Jim Averbeck's lyrical bedtime picture book, IN A BLUE ROOM, has sold via auction to Samantha McFerrin at Harcourt.

Nanette Cooper-McGuinness is happy to announce that her story "Terminator the Exterminator and the City of Hamilton" (a fractured fairy tale version of "The Pied Piper of Hamelin") came out in KidTime Magazine, in their July, 2005 pilot issue. In addition, her article, "Marian Anderson: Singer of Courage" has been accepted by Hopscotch for their April 2009 issue.

Alessia Cowee's YA novel, THE CALENDAR OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, took first place in the 2005 W.I.N. Competition, hosted by Smartwriters.com. Another one of her YA novels, OVERCOME, placed second, and her YA novel LIFE'S TOO SHORT received an honorable mention.

Deborah Davis got an offer from Clarion on her YA novel WHAT KAYLA WANTS. This is her first fiction sale in 12 years.

Genny Heikka's poem, "Not Perfect", is being published in WITH Magazine in November, 2005.

Anne Issacs has signed a four-book deal for sequels to SWAMP ANGEL with Simon and Schuster, Atheneum. The first book, DUST DEVIL, will be illustrated by Paul O. Zelinsky, and is due out in fall 2007. Her next book, THE TRUE STORY OF TOBY LITTLEWOOD, is being illustrated by Mark Teague, and is due in fall 2006. She is also working on a YA novel under contract with Scholastic, a novel that takes place in ancient Egypt.

Emily Jiang received second place in the novel category and second place in the poetry category in a writing contest sponsored by the 2005 Jack London Writer's Conference. She is also a recipient of the 2005 Kimberly Colen Memorial Grant for her novel-in-progress.

Sara Kahn's illustration for Hans Christian Andersen's "Little Mermaid" story was selected by a prestigious jury, which included illustrator Tony Ross. The competition was held in Venice. Sara's work was selected among hundreds of illustrations, and her work ended up in the top thirty illustrations that will tour around Italy. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue.

Connie McLennan is awaiting the expected mid-August delivery of her third picture book, WATER BEDS: SLEEPING IN THE OCEAN, written by Gail Langer Karwoski and illustrated by Connie. This book was awarded Most Outstanding Children's Author, 2005 at the Book Expo America in New York. It was chosen for this award by Dr. Twila C. Liggett, Creator and Executive Producer of Reading Rainbow. The book has also received an endorsement from Brad Andrews, Sea World Adventure Parks, Corporate Vice President, Zoological Operations. Connie is also working on illustrations for a second book for Sylvan Dell, OCTAVIA AND THE PURPLE INK CLOUD, due out in May 2006.

Jerry Miller was this year's winner of the Barbara Karlin Grant for aspiring picture book writers, for A STORM TO REMEMBER. It is a biography of the Black Sunday Dust Storm of April 14, 1935.

Nancy Raines Day's fifth picture book, FLAMINGO'S FIRST CHRISTMAS, illustrated by Fiona Robinson, is coming out around Labor Day from Abrams.

Linda Joy Singleton's second book in her THE SEER series, LAST DANCE, has been published. She was also offered a contract from Llewellyn for a fourth book in THE SEER series. In addition, on September 10th, Linda will be speaking in Idaho at a SCBWI conference hosted by Verla Kay's WA/ID SCBWI group. Other speakers include Deborah Norse Lattimore and a Prinz winner.

Susan Taylor Brown's middle grade verse novel, HUGGING THE ROCK, was bought by Tricycle Press.

Pamela S. Turner's first book, HACHIKO: THE TRUE STORY OF A LOYAL DOG, won a Golden Kite Honor for picture book text, and a Henry Bergh Honor Award from the ASPCA. In addition, Pamela received a Highlights for Children Science Feature of the Year award for her article, "A Lifeline for Lions," which appeared in their January 2004 issue.



Illustration by Jeff Jackson (not the Acorn Featured Artist)

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Acorn Submission Guidelines

The Acorn would love submissions of articles of interest to children's book writers and illustrators, and photos on N. CA. SCBWI events

For Articles, please query Tekla White at tnwrites@cal.net or other editors listed in this newsletter. Photos should be in JPG or GIF format as close to 150 dpi as possible (but if you have prints you can mail, that's okay too - enclose a SASE and they'll be returned to you) We'll need the usual who, what, and where for the caption, and the photographer's name for the credit line.

Payment for one-time rights (or reprint rights) is not extravagant. In addition to a byline or credit line and the heartfelt gratitude of your peers, the acorn can offer you a gift from the SCBWI collection of logo items.

Acorn Submission Deadlines

The Acorn is a tri-yearly publication. Issues will be posted on the SCBWI NorCa website <http://www.scbwinorca.org/news/newsletter1.htm> on or around the first day 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.

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