



The Wacky Hat Issue

Newsletter for the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI

ACORN

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Anybody reading this?
 IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT
 THE ACORN, WANT TO SUBMIT AN
 ARTICLE OR ART, OR JUST WANT
 TO TELL US WHAT YOU THINK
 ABOUT THE JOB WE'RE DOING FEEL
 FREE TO SHOOT US AN EMAIL AT
 LBOYDEN@CHARTER.NET OR
 GIMME.A.MOCHA@GMAIL.COM

Author Profile
 By Patricia Newman

Peter Sís



"There are two versions of my life," says Peter Sís. He remembers a loving, happy family in Prague, Czechoslovakia that encouraged him to draw. They told stories and he illustrated them. Free time centered around the family because they had no television or computer. As he grew older, he felt the underlying tension of the political pressures and everyday fear of living in Communist-controlled Czechoslovakia. Families stayed close to each other as much for protection as support.

Formally trained at the Academy of Applied Arts in Prague and the Royal College of Art in London, Sís followed in his father's footsteps and became a filmmaker. Over a ten-year period, Sís visited free-Europe with special permission from his government to work on documentary films. Each time he returned home with increasing reluctance. At the age of 30, Sís arrived in the U.S. as a visitor to produce a documentary on the 1984 Winter Olympics. Instead, the trip turned out to be the turning point of his life; the eastern bloc voted to boycott the Olympics, ending the film project. Ordered to return home, Sís refused.

Sís had no job and no family in the U.S., but he did have connections. An art museum director he'd met on his film project recommended him for a teaching

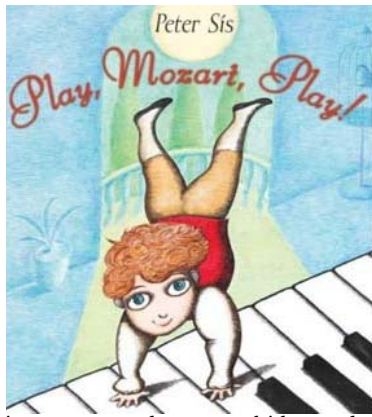
post at the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. The museum director also set up a meeting with Maurice Sendak, author of *Where the Wild Things Are*. Sendak assumed Sís wanted to illustrate for children and arranged introductions to New York publishers. "I was penniless," says Sís, who had never considered writing and illustrating for children. "I didn't say no. I [went] to New York to see if I could survive." But secretly he thought, I will do a book that will be very popular and then I will make a film of it.

Initially, Sís struggled financially illustrating book covers. His obvious talent landed him jobs with *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines, which paid twice as much as the children's publishing houses. Like many artists, illustrating other authors' work gave Sís the confidence to try writing. Early books, like *Fire Truck* and *Madlenka*, reflected his fascination with his own children and their stages of development. As his son and daughter grew, Sís looked inward and mined his own life and topics that interested him. "I had to reinvent myself," he says. "The close stage with my kids was over. I had to find a new path."

Sís started with *Galileo*. In the *Starry Messenger*, he combined Galileo's writings with his own story and inven-

CHECK OUT "SÍS" ON PAGE TWO

SIS



ive art to produce a multi-layered sensual world for the reader. In 2003, he put Charles Darwin under his artist's lens in *The Tree of Life*. These biographies require careful perusal because of the novelty of the format and the intricacy of the art.

Sis then turned to his own family history. Caldecott Honor Book *Tibet Through the Red Box* chronicles his father's trek to Tibet in the mid-1950s. The elder Sis left home for a filmmaking job, expecting to be home for Christmas. Two Christmases came and went, and still Sis's father did not return. Only decades later when Sis inherited his father's diary of the trip was he able to bring some closure to his father's absence and long-delayed return.

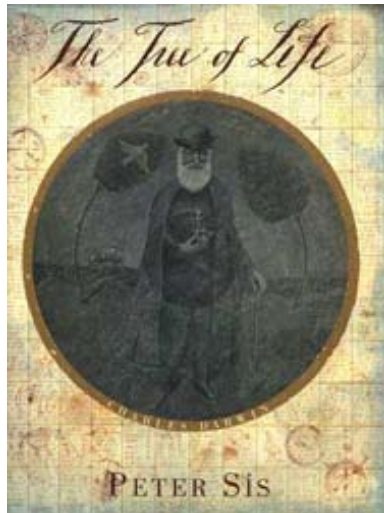
The *Three Golden Keys* illuminates the emotional journey Sis himself endured after leaving his home country. According to Sis, "[The government] says we gave you education, we gave you knowledge. You must give back to the country." Originally, Sis thought he'd never return to Prague, but now that the Berlin Wall is gone he returns with a different feeling. Working through his fear of Communist Prague, his guilt over leaving his country and his family, Sis celebrates the cultural history of his homeland.

In *The Wall* (to be released in Fall 2007), Sis revisits the Czechoslovakia of his childhood. A two-year ordeal, Sis relived painful memories and actually stopped working on the book twice. One of the most difficult

things for Sis to assimilate was that his memory is fallible; even though he "remembers" the Red Phone (the hot line between the Kremlin and the U.S. President), in fact it never existed and his editor could not allow it to appear in the story. "I had to find positives in a negative," says Sis of trying to write a story for children that dealt with the darkest time of his life.

Usually Sis submits a well-thought out concept of text and illustrations to his editors. But with *The Wall*, his editor first saw sketches and slowly pulled Sis into the idea. Perhaps this reverse creative process was one of the reasons the book was so difficult to complete. Sis affectionately describes his editor as a musher directing sled dogs. "She lets me go some distances as much as I please, but then she pulls in and cracks the whip at the end."

On a recent trip to Prague, Sis publicly celebrated the release of his newest book, *Play, Mozart, Play!* As part of the festivities, his old films from 30 years ago were shown at the local movie house. "They are from another life," says Sis. Although he's shifted media, art remains the focus of his life. "My books somehow happened because of me leaving home to live in another



er country. If I stayed in Prague and did books at all, they would be about usual subjects and usual things." His contribution to the people of Prague, and people all over the world, is his eclectic body of children's literature that continues to challenge the genre.

Ah, For the Life of an Author By Joy N. Hulme

Except for family-related events, my favorite trip is to sign books at a national math-teachers' conference. Ever since my first math/science/poetry book came out 16 years ago, math teachers have been my biggest fans.

This year I anticipated my March trip from California to Atlanta with eager expectation. Carol Schwartz, the award-winning illustrator of three of my books, would be there to sign, as well. We love to be together, in person or on paper.

Since my snow-white hair quickly identifies me as a senior citizen, I am often the grateful recipient of small courtesies such as a pre-boarding privilege, shuttle service, and help with luggage. This makes traveling alone much easier for me. I always use an elevator instead of an escalator when handling luggage by myself.

After my arrival in Chicago, the next 24 hours of my much-anticipated trip were spent in O'Hare airport due to bad weather, causing me to miss my planned signing time with Carol. When I finally arrived in Atlanta and met up with her, we took advantage of an unscheduled opportunity to sign books for a couple of hours. After a lightrail/shuttle trip to our motel and a delicious dinner nearby, I sank into bed exhausted. I had been awake for 44 hours.

Carol had to leave for a family reunion the next morning so I was on my own to sign books in the afternoon. She made sure I caught the right light-rail with a map and instructions before she left me to catch her flight.

I was the only passenger to get off at my stop and the only way to get up to the ground floor with my luggage was an escalator. "No way!" I thought as I looked from my roll-on piled high with another bag and a huge winter coat to the escalator. I searched in vain for an elevator or a person to ask for help. I was on my own. "People do this all the time," I said to myself. "I can do it."

So... I pushed my loaded roll-on ahead of me and stepped on the first step. Big mistake! Moving up, the luggage load tipped back into me causing me to lose my balance, which I could not recover. Soon I was riding up the rolling staircase, feet first, lying on my back, skirt hiked up, thinking about the ridiculous view from above and

CHECK OUT "AUTHOR'S LIFE" ON THE PAGE AFTER THAT

SCBWI Northern/Central CA Spring 2007 Davis Conference As Reviewed By These Nice Folks...

(We know it was two months ago, just smile and keep reading)

Esther Hershenhorn's Spirited Workshop

By Judy Vartan

Esther Hershenhorn - author, teacher, coach, speaker, and Illinois Regional Advisor, SCBWI Board Member - enthusiastically shared her insights and knowledge of the world of writing for children at the Spring Spirit III conference in Davis, March 10th. All who were fortunate enough to hear her presentation came away with concrete suggestions and strategies to hone their craft as well as with a renewed sense of purpose and hope.

In a mere 80 minutes, the audience received a condensed course in writing for children that included specific suggestions and exercises to further their current project, stimulate the creative process, develop their craft, and market their stories. Additionally, she handed out an extensive bibliography of helpful resources - books, websites, and blogs.

Whether approaching your first project or yet another new project, Esther shared a number of motivating practices to try. For example, imagine only being able to write one book, what would it be? That's the book you should be writing now; that's the story you need to uncover and develop.

When fostering the creative process, she offered several exercises such as changing your writing tool, perhaps to a magic marker, or change the font you're using.

Esther is a writing teacher whose positive, can-do attitude enables her to inspire her audience and impart her skills and information so writers can discover, craft, and market their stories. Her passion for all things having to do with writing for children is contagious. One cannot help but leave her presentation with a new level of excitement and confidence.

Tim Travaglini, Senior Editor Putnam: Writing For Life

By Linda Boyden

Mr. Travaglini began his presentation with a simple question to the audience: why are we here today, attending this conference? For the answer, he asked us to think of a book we had read in childhood, one that has stayed in our memories until this day. This memory of a childhood book should be your core, he said. It should be the reason you write: to create a piece that gives the readers something to connect with for life.

As a publisher, Travaglini seeks writers who have a passion to write, for whom not writing is not an option. Travaglini searches for the book that he can't NOT publish.

He further cautioned that getting published should not be the only measure of your success. There are many good writers who are not published. He suggested that a writing career is a process with a great number of steps. It takes a long time to get from being unpublished to being an established author. One of those steps is to attend conferences to build and maintain a sense of community, as well as to recharge your writing life.

Travaglini believes the key to success in any career is perseverance. He urged us to view rejections as our red badges of courage; as proof that you are trying to live your art and work your craft. He ended with some serious writing advice: write, study, attend conferences and follow your passion. He is looking for the best thing he has ever read.

The Page
AFTER THAT

Author's Life

wondering what to do next. The answer was to call for aid.

"Help! Help! Help!" I yelled several times.

Suddenly I heard thudding footsteps behind me and felt strong arms lift me to my feet just before I reached the top. Several teenage boys were waiting there to answer my cry, as well. They must have grabbed my luggage and reached for my hands. Trembling with fright and grateful for the rescue, I was able to answer their question, "Are you all right?" with "I'm okay."

It wasn't until I arrived home late that night after a long and successful signing session that I finally removed the sweater I'd worn all day and saw the evidence of my adventure. The back was covered with big black splotches rubbed from the surface of the escalator steps. So much for thinking I was a dignified, well-dressed, experienced writer signing books for my favorite fans.

Ah, what a life for an author!



Spring Spirit III SCBWI Davis Conference: Haiku Highlights

By Emily Jiang

When asked to report on the fabulous presentations, I turned to haiku form. The first speaker, Jennifer Jaeger, an editorial agent with Andrea Brown Literary Agency, reminded us that YA literature is still growing and becoming more complex. She provided tips for submitting to an agent with clarity and humor:

When submitting,
Don't forget SASE.
Avoid "Dear Agent."

Your childhood heroes—
Authors, real folks with hopes, dreams,
Fears of rejection.

Next, Esther Hershenhorn, writing teacher, writing coach, and author of *Chicken Soup by Heart*, shared information and suggestions for brainstorming in the writing process, the importance of remaining educated about children's literature, and visualization of success:

We are traveling
on writers' plotlines
with hopeful endings.

Publication was
the carrot, but the prize
was finding her voice.

Last, Jo Kittinger spoke about easy readers, a genre traditionally for ages 4-6, but now more for ages 3-10. The text of an easy reader ranges from as few as 41 words to as many as 1191 words. While picture books need pictures to complete the meaning hinted from the text, easy readers feature text that is less dependent on the illustrations:

Reading three books
called *Moving Day* - nice to hear
different voices.

A child sits alone
reading by himself, so proud—
Easy Read Magic.

Read more EJ's haiku
highlights at:
<http://emilyjiang.blogspot.com>

Digital Illustration: A World of Possibilities

By Linda Boyden

THE FOURTH
PAGE

DEMO START



Drawings by Jeff Jackson

DEMO END

The dynamic duo of Joy Allen and Jeff Jackson presented an overview of the art and technology of digital illustration, specifically comparing Photoshop and Painter programs.

With over 40 books to her credit, Joy Allen has been illustrating children's books since 1998. Her interest in digital art began before her children's books career, when she was an art director in graphic art. Today, she illustrates both in traditional and digital mediums. She shared her knowledge of the program, Painter.

Jeff Jackson, an animator, illustrator and storyboard artist, has worked professionally since 1997. His first love was, and still is, illustration with an emphasis on animals, but he also teaches figure drawing, perspective drawing, storyboarding, and animation. Jeff focused on Photoshop.

As a newcomer to the world of illustration and totally ignorant of any kind of digital art, this workshop opened my eyes to a new world—a scary new digital world, but definitely one overflowing with possibilities for professional growth.

Consequently, I did not take many notes. Instead, I watched these two masters tear up the "stage" with their energy, humor, and expertise.

However, I did manage two "baby steps" of learning: RGB and CMYK.

RGB is a color standard model where red, green and blue are combined or layered to reproduce other colors.

CMYK stands for Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and K, Black, as printing presses have four different plates on a drum. In CMYK, magenta/yellow makes red; magenta/cyan makes blue and cyan/yellow makes green. Use of CMYK results in a good final print with much better contrast.

Together, Joy and Jeff gave us many insights and tips on how illustrators can utilize digital technology to enhance their art. Their enthusiasm spurred this newcomer on to a world of possibilities.

DEMO END



DEMO START



Drawings by Joy Allen

THE MARCH 10 SCBWI CONFERENCE IN DAVIS WAS A FIRST LOOK AT GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR MANY OF YOU. THE AIM OF MY TALK WAS TO HELP YOU THINK ABOUT PRESENTING YOUR STORY IDEAS IN A NEW FORM-A FORM GAINING MOMENTUM AMONG CHILDREN, TEENS, LIBRARIANS, REVIEWERS, AND EDITORS. AFTER A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRAPHIC NOVELS IN AMERICA, I SUGGESTED THREE ELEMENTS YOU SHOULD HAVE IN YOUR GRAPHIC NOVEL TOOL KIT:

- 1) THE ABILITY TO DETERMINE HOW THE ART AND THE TEXT WORK TOGETHER. GRAPHIC NOVEL ART IS GENERALLY ABSTRACT. ARTISTS ELIMINATE SOME DETAILS TO EMPHASIZE OTHERS. ASK YOURSELF WHAT THE ARTIST IS TRYING TO SUGGEST IN HIS ILLUSTRATIONS.
- 2) CLOSURE OR THE READER'S ABILITY TO OBSERVE PARTS OF THE ACTION, BUT PERCEIVE THE WHOLE. UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTIONS READERS ARE MAKING BETWEEN THE PANELS OF GRAPHIC NOVELS.
- 3) LEARN TO SET THE MOOD IN YOUR GRAPHIC NOVELS WITH COLORS, A VARIETY OF SHAPED SPEECH BUBBLES, AND THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF THE PANELS. BUT, PERHAPS THE BEST WAY TO REVIEW MY TALK IS TO TRANSPORT YOU TO THE CONFERENCE. . .



Give your characters unique physical traits, expressive attributes, and personality quirks so they are distinguishable from the other characters in your story.



Make your dialogue expressive.

each panel is the reader's camera;

the device by which you can grab the reader by the shoulder, guide them to the right spot and say,

TICK TOCK TICK TOCK

"Now, LOOK!"

Scott McCloud of Making Comics



rumble

rumble

rumble

...of graphic novels. The market is wide **OOOOOPEN.**

says "Think of Genre fiction as the future.."

sweep sweep



click!

TO LEARN WHAT YOU MISSED, READ "MAINSTREAMING THE GRAPHIC NOVEL" IN THE 2007 ISSUE OF CWIM!

Email Patty at newmanbooks@earthlink.net with questions, comments, or good news!

The Perfect Blending of Words and Art: Design and Editorial Advice from Two Publishing Houses

By Linda Boyden

I. Chronicle Books, Sara Gillingham, Design Director

Chronicle Books is a publishing house that produces an eclectic mixture of classic and innovative children's literature. Sara Gillingham, their Design Director, shared Chronicle's approach to the role of children's book illustration.

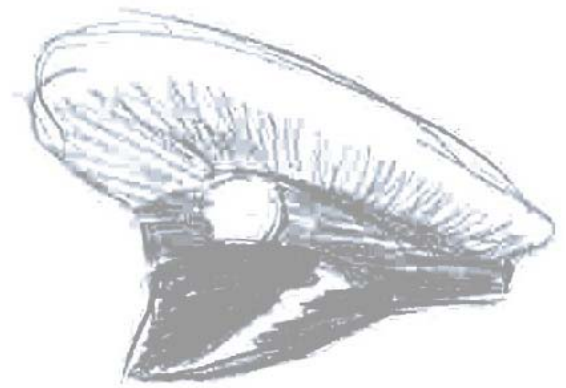
Collaboration between the editorial and art departments is key from the onset of each project. A picture book is the perfect blending of words and art, so the two departments have developed a keen sensitivity to sense and style, working hard to pair writers with artists. They plan for the art and the text to be the right mix, without being formulaic. They look for a wide range of illustrative styles from traditional to digital to quirky, and take pride in honing their illustrators' visions.

II. Candlewick Press, Sarah Ketchersid, Senior Editor

Candlewick Press is a 100% employee owned, independent publisher of children's literature. It is an author/illustrator-centered house, which seeks to foster the professional growth of their employees. Furthermore, Candlewick tends to keep the same authors and illustrators over time; some actually become owners of the company.

Ms. Ketchersid publishes in many genres, although picture books are Candlewick's hallmark. Regardless of the genre, Ketchersid likes stories which evoke honest emotions. A key ingredients is the ability to take a tired theme and give it your own twist.

Both these professionals gave the audience an honest look at their publishing worlds, proving that the publication of a picture book, in particular, is indeed the perfect blending of art and words.



Confessions of a Contest Queen

By Emily Jiang

I'm a self-proclaimed contest queen. I love entering contests, mostly the artistic kind like writing contests and music competitions. My newest experiment is the costume contest.

At the SCBWI LA conference last summer, the costume contest theme was "jade," and since I'm Chinese-American, I thought, how could I NOT enter this contest? Plus, I had a secret weapon: my good friend Bonnie, who is a professional costumer. She threw ten different articles of jade-themed clothing at me, and I selected the ones I wanted to wear. The end result was more like an elegant outfit than a costume, but I thought I looked sufficiently "jaded-out."

At the conference, I took the time to do my hair and paint my

fingernails and toenails jade-green. When I arrived at the dance, I spotted another woman (Lindsay Bell) wearing a very similar-styled green outfit. I suggested that we enter the costume contest together, and when it was our turn to strut the costume contest catwalk, we spontaneously danced a simple step that others thought we had choreographed in advance, but which we hadn't. We were just going with the flow and having a blast. In the end, as "the jade twins" we each won a prize, a gift certificate to the bookstore.

Every contest is a learning experience, whether you win or you lose. If I hadn't made the effort to dress up and entered the costume contest, I would have never made a new friend in Lindsay, and we never would have gotten free books. I would

CHECK OUT "CONTEST QUEEN" ON THE SEVENTH THING

Contest Queen

never have a great story to tell, or a great outfit for my upcoming talk, "Confessions of a Contest Queen."

Last November I spoke at the SCBWI Second Saturday, where I first presented, "Confessions of a Contest Queen, How Winning AND Losing Contests Can Help Pave the Path to Publication." Almost forty people showed up, and I am very thankful to have such a great audience.

For those of you who missed it or want to see it again, I will be presenting an updated and improved "Confessions of a Contest Queen" talk on the evening of Wednesday, May 9 for the Sunnyvale-based South Bay Writers, the largest branch of the California Writers Club. I have revised my presentation to be more interactive and useful. My goal is to help everyone become a winner.



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Good News By Genny Heikka

Jan Black is the "2006 recipient of the First place SCBWI Magazine Merit Award for Nonfiction" for her article, "Treasures in a Pinecone", which appeared in the December, 2006 issue of Highlights for Children. SCBWI president Stephen Mooser notified Jan of this award via letter.

Linda Boyden has her poem, "Tournesol" included in Ahani: Indigenous American Poetry, Volume 9. Fall 2006, a literary anthology published by Oregon State University. Also, her poetry chapbook "WomanSong" was reviewed by a literary website, Moondance: Celebrating Creative Women, www.moondance.org

Connie Goldsmith has had another book published by Lerner, titled "Superbugs Strike Back: When Antibiotics Fail." Also, her book titled "Influenza: The Next Pandemic?" has just been named a New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age 2007.

Emily Jiang's novel "Paper Daughter" won 1st Runner Up for the Charles and Lois Cook Writing Prize for novels, sponsored by Komenar Publishing at the Jack London Writers Conference. In addition, Emily will have 3 poems ("Penelope's Tests", "Fall Promise", "Avec L'Amour") published in the 2007 issue of The Sand Hill Review, a literary magazine based out of Stanford.

Bitsy Kemper sold another article to Children's Book Insider.

Nanette McGuinness sold an article to Highlights, titled "Anything But Farming: Opera Singer Birgit Nilsson."

Caren McNelly McCormack was named as "Author of the Month" by the editors of Highlights, following her article, "The Tallest Kid in the Lunch Line". In addition, she received her first contract offer for her picture book, "Lolo's Fast Feet."

Tim Myers has had his picture book "Basho and the River Stones" nominated for a 2007 California Young Reader Award (in the "Picture Books for Older Readers Category"). The award is supported by the California Association of Teachers of English, the California Library Association, the California Reading Association, and the California School Library Association.

Karen Stanton's 2nd picture book will be out in April. "Papi's Gift," which was illustrated by Rene King Moreno, is published by Boyds Mills Press.

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 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.

REGIONAL ADVISOR'S CORNER

ALMOST
LAST PAGE

The Manuscript Critique Process By Tekla White

After the March 10 SCBWI Spring Spirit III conference, I was asked about the process of selecting manuscripts for the editors and agent to critique.

The process begins by sending all manuscripts to the Writers Ink team, Stephanie Gordon and Judith Enderle. They select the manuscripts without bias, since they don't know the people submitting. I cannot select from my Northern California friends. While I think I would be fair, it is better to have objective readers.

The Writers Ink team are professional editors, on the board of the SCBWI, and complete the critiques on schedule. Editors and agents submit their guidelines to them, including the type of manuscript and genre they would prefer to critique. Each one takes ten or fewer manuscripts.

Writers Ink then critiques the rest of the manuscripts, to help the writers improve their work and gain a better chance of success in a very competitive field. The editors also critique the manuscripts they receive to help each writer improve the story he/she has submitted. Submitting the manuscripts is a way to receive detailed, professional criticism.

More than 100 manuscripts were submitted for the March 10th conference. Less than thirty of those went to the agent and the editors, who read them and gave their written opinions.

All the money received for the manuscripts goes to the critiquers and for postage and expenses. Usually, the fee does not cover all the expenses, but our region picks up the cost. If you send your manuscript directly to Writers Ink, the fee is much higher.

We provide this opportunity so writers will be able to improve their manuscripts and craft.

Once you've had the critique and are ready to send your story out, you can send it to the editors who presented at the conference. This is a sound way to sell your manuscript. The critiques are for improving the story. Keep in mind, a critique is one person's opinion, but it can be valuable to consider another view. It may be the reason your story isn't selling.

The best way to consider the critique is to read it at home. Set it aside for a day or two and think about the comments. When you come back to your story, you can work on the comments, and include the suggestions, or reject them. It's your story. These critiques can prepare you to work with an editor on your manuscript once a publisher has acquired it.

Good luck with your future stories.

Please check the website for information about a school visit to The Mustard Seed School for homeless children in Sacramento. The guidelines and application will be posted. The deadline for the email application is May 1, 2007 for a fall 2007 visit.

Wishing you all a joyous spring,

Tekla White, SCBWI Regional Advisor
North Central California

P.S. Many thanks to the wonderful volunteers at our March 10th conference. We couldn't have managed without them. Sheri Smith, Maggie Cruz, Katy Larson, Nadine Pinkerton, Erin Dealey, Kris McLeod, Linda Boyden, Margaret Speaker Yuan, Gina Buchanan, Sara Kahn, and our ARA Genny Heikka were terrific.

Thank you, Patricia Newman, Jeff Jackson, and Joy Allen for your fabulous presentations. We are so fortunate to have these talented writers and illustrators in Northern California.

SOME WACKY CONTRIBUTORS



Tekla White as your Regional Advisor



Emily Jiang as your Haiku-er and con r lewler



Patricia Newman as your profiler and con speaker



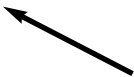
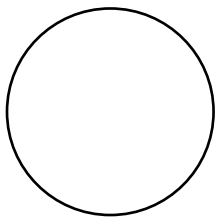
Linda Boyden as your Editor and con r lewler



Genny heikka as your Assistant RA and Good News-er



Jeff Jackson as your Layer out-er



We have other very kind Contributors but because they are so busy we couldn't get a picture of them so j ust imagine them here, okay?

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