



the acorn

Newsletter for the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI

An Interview with SCBWI's President, Stephen Mooser

by Tekla White
Regional Advisor, North Central California

Stephen Mooser, SCBWI's President, is a California native. He grew up in Fresno, California and attended high school in his home town. Steve went off to UCLA where he was a double major student receiving degrees in filmmaking and journalism. He attributes his love of the printed word to his mother, a librarian, and his father, who read a lot as well. Growing up, Steve enjoyed magazines more than books and he read two newspapers each day.

What were your favorite pursuits as a child?

I was interested in reading about and then looking for treasure in old ghost towns in the nearby Sierras. I always kept journals of my adventures and, eventually, the first thing I ever sold was a true treasure story based on one of the treasures I had searched for.

What other events and people influenced your literary career?

Film school was a big help because it taught me how to think in terms of scenes, and journalism school taught me how to tell a story in a clean, straightforward way. Early on the people I met in the SCBWI were most helpful, especially Sid Fleischman who took time to critique my writing.

One of your early writing projects was a reading program, Reader Rabbit which you wrote with Lin Oliver. What are some of the other educational materials you produced?

We also wrote the primer and pre-primer for Harcourt Brace and wrote a beginning program in Spanish as well. The best thing about work-

ing with a controlled vocabulary is that it forces you to examine each word in the story to make sure it's necessary and if it's appropriate.

Why do you think SCBWI members today should, or should not, broaden their careers by producing materials other than trade books?

It's tough to make a living as a writer strictly doing trade books. I think it's important to take on projects that relate to children's books if you need the extra income. Every project can only make you a better writer. Besides, you

never know what opportunities might arise when you take on a project.

What were some of your favorite trade book projects?

Early on I wrote some non-fiction books about making simple monster movies. It was fun because I was able to draw on my film experience and hopefully I inspired a few kids to try filmmaking themselves.

Most of your trade books are middle grade novels including

humorous ones, page-turning adventures and series books including, THE HITCHHIKING VAMPIRE, NIGHT OF THE VAMPIRE KITTY, and THE CREEPY CREATURES CLUB. How do these books benefit middle-grade children?

I hope they benefit kids by giving them an enjoyable reading experience. Kids that have fun reading will read, and through that practice will become confident readers. In my opinion there's no greater skill a child can develop than the ability to read.

What advice would you give writers and illus-

(See "Mooser interview" on page 3)

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This month's article contributors:

Tekla White
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Regional Advisor's Corner



Warm greetings from North Central California. Hopefully the heat wave will be over when this newsletter is posted on the Web.

Many thanks to Nancy Barnet and Julie Donahoo for their newsworthy efforts to produce the second edition of *The Acorn*. They do need your help. Please send your questions, suggestions, and articles to Nancy (illustration and tech), Julie, and Tekla.

The reward for articles? You do have a byline, of course, along with a writing credit and the admiration of your peers. North Central will add a free electronic subscription and an SCBWI pen. If two or more of your articles are published, you'll receive the SCBWI book bag.

Check out the conferences on the Web and in this newsletter. Attending a conference is a great way to network with other writers and illustrators, polish your craft, and have fun. I hope to see you in Soulsbyville, Sacramento, Chico, Davis, and Fresno.

Wishing you a stack of acceptance letters,

Tekla White

SCBWI Regional Advisor, North Central California (All the counties from Kings, Tulare, and Inyo to Del Norte, Siskiyou, and Modoc except counties touching Monterey and San Francisco Bays and San Benito)

Conferences, workshops, networking

Conference Calendar

Note: You'll find registration information to our conferences on our Web site at www.scbwinorca.org.

September 21, 2002, Soulsbyville

Mini-Conference. See details, page 5.

Contact: Verla Kay
verlakay2@mlode.com

September 28, 2002, Sacramento

Mini-Conference. See details, page 5.

Contact: Connie Goldsmith
goldwright@aol.com

October 5, 2002, Chico

Mini-Conference. See details, page 5.

Contact: Tekla White, tnwrites@cal.net

March 29, 2003, Davis

Conference, details TBA

October 17-19, 2003, Fresno

North Central California SCBWI will hold a joint two-day conference with

Fresno State University in October 2003. Details TBA.

Networking for Writers

If you're interested in forming or joining a critique group, contact one of the following critique group coordinators:

North Coast and the Sacramento area

Connie Goldsmith
Goldwright@aol.com

South of Sacramento

Verla Kay
verlakay2@mlode.com

Chico, Redding, Red Bluff and areas to the east and north

Alessia Cowee
acowee@pacbell.net

Networking for Illustrators

All but one who responded to the illustrator survey in April said they were interested in getting together with other illustrators in their area. Now we need folks in

various counties to step up and be willing to get things rolling.

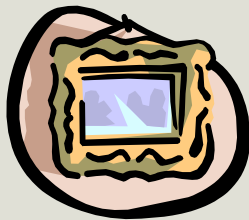
Here are some ideas on how to get set up:

- Plan to get together for a couple of hours on a weekday or weekend for lunch, show-and-tell and to talk shop (lunch is bring-your-own; show some recent art you've finished or are currently working on).
- If you meet at homes/studios, rotate the location so you share host duties.
- Keep your group size reasonable (say, 12 or less if possible) so there's time to look at everyone's work.
- Meet on a frequency that suits your group.

To volunteer to coordinate a group, contact Nancy Barnet (nancy@nancybarnet.com) to be put in touch with interested artists in your area. ❖

Tips for illustrators

Become a featured illustrator



The redesigned main SCBWI Web site now showcases an illustrator each month. All active associate and full member illustrators are eligible to apply.

To apply, you are asked to send three samples of your work along with the application form and biographical information of 300 words or less. The application can be made through an on-line form at the Web site or by mail. If you choose the mail option, your art must be supplied on a CD, floppy or Zip disk. If you are selected, you and the SCBWI staff will decide which of the three pieces of art will go up — but the SCBWI reserves the right to make the final decision.

There are specific guidelines for what artwork can be considered and that information is available on the Web site. Go to www.scbwi.org and click on the featured artist picture on the main page. In addition to the article on the current featured artist, you'll find a menu down the left side of the page with links to submission rules and the application.

We hope to see you featured! ❖

Market news

Markets

Greenwillow Books announced earlier this year that the publishing house was not accepting unsolicited queries or manuscripts. They stated the mail would be discarded and not returned. This policy was to be up-dated in June. The phone message at Greenwillow states that the ban on unsolicited mail will continue. Call 212-261-6627 after September 3 for the unsolicited policy at that time.

Editors on the move

Yolanda Leroy (Courtesy of J.L. Bell) is the new acquiring editor for trade books as well as the marketing manager of the school division at **Charlesbridge**.

Kate Nunn (courtesy of J.L. Bell) is the new editor-in-chief at **Children's Press** which is a Grolier Publication which is part of the Scholastic family. ❖

Mooser interview

(Continued from page 1)

trators who want to work on middle grade books?

Try to draw on your own experiences to create believable, interesting, and perhaps humorous characters. A good plot is important, but it's always the characters who will elevate your novel above the rest.

Many books have a short shelf-life today. What are ways writers and illustrators can prolong a book's life or recycle it?

A number of e-publishers, ipicturebooks for one, are taking out-of-print books, scanning them into a database and making them available on demand to libraries. Not all books qualify, but I think this could be a healthy trend for the future when no book need ever truly go out of print.

What is the best part about the write years?

I was able to successfully freelance for 25 years, and because I worked at home I

was luckier than most fathers in that I got to watch my children grow-up.

Your first SCBWI conference was held in 1971 in Santa Monica. How many people attended? How many writers and illustrators attended the 2001 conference in Los Angeles and the 2002 conference in New York?

Fifty people attended the first conference. There were 950 last year in LA and 750 earlier this year in New York. The growth and success of the SCBWI is due primarily to the dedication of our Regional Advisors. Like all of us at the national office, they unselfishly give their time to help others achieve their goals in the field. They are the glue that holds the organization together proving the SCBWI is more than just publications and awards, but is a caring community working to improve books for children, and the careers of those that create them.

You've had the opportunity to review many award winning books and talk to their authors and illustrators. What do

some of these books have in common?

Good books speak with a distinctive, honest voice. The best are so fresh and unique that they surprise you. A good example of this, I think, was Louis Sachar's book HOLES.

What are your plans for the SCBWI's future?

For the SCBWI to continue to not only grow in membership, but in services. The SCBWI is about to launch their new web site which will provide for an interactive component, which we hope will bring the membership together in a worldwide electronic community, opening up new opportunities for learning and networking. The new web site will become an important asset over the next few years as it expands and improves. The SCBWI is a unique writer's organization. I don't think there is another organization that offers as many services, and thanks to the Regional Advisors, there is none that offers the friendship, caring and community. ❖

Sacramento Spring Mini-Conference report

by **Connie Goldsmith**

The mini-conference held on 4/13/02 at Sacramento's Arden-Dimick Library had 25 attendees and five speakers.

The first speaker, Janet Wininger, is a children's librarian for the Sacramento Public Library system. Some topics children's librarians are looking today for include:

- board books for the very youngest
- high-low books (high interest, low reading ability)
- holidays other than Christmas and Halloween (esp. multicultural)
- biographies for all ages (including PB)
- books about trains, planes, trucks, and boats
- books including disabled children as characters

The next three speakers talked about writing for children's magazines. Connie Goldsmith discussed reasons new writers should consider magazines including: improving research skills, accruing publishing credits, and gaining experience in working with editors. Patti Newman gave the group ideas on targeting query letters. She handed out theme

lists and web sites for some popular children's magazines, and provided the first paragraph for a potential article on an exciting scientific breakthrough. Laura Torres spoke from an editorial POV, giving the group insider advice about submitting early for seasonal themes, entering contests (provides a guaranteed read), and the importance of knowing a magazine before submitting (read a year of issues).

Lou Foley discussed plotting and conflict. Two points: don't let truth stand in the way of a good story (don't write a memoir when you intend to write fiction), and avoid easy problem resolutions (it just happens to start raining when protagonist is trapped in a forest fire). She diagrammed the triangle shape of PB conflict, indicating where the resolution key should be inserted.

After lunch, the group broke into small critique groups, an activity much enjoyed by all. A special thanks to Lou, Patti, and Tekla White for helping with conference arrangements. The next Sacramento mini-conference is scheduled for September 28, 2002. ❖



Photos courtesy of Connie Goldsmith

Sacramento Mini-Conference, April 2002

Attendees (top left) listen to speakers Lou Foley (top right), Laura Torres (center right) and Janet Wininger (bottom right). A critique group (l to r: Deborah Case, Leslie Farwell, Patti Newman, Pam Turner and Erin O'Toole) meets to fine-tune manuscripts.

Upcoming Mini-Conferences sponsored by the North/Central CA Region

Soulsbyville

Saturday, September 21, 2002

Time: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Place: Willow Springs Clubhouse, 29522 Willow Springs Dr., Soulsbyville, CA

Cost: \$25 for SCBWI members, \$30 for non-members

Meal: Potluck lunch

Details & contact: Conference flyer is available for download at www.scbwinorca.org. Conference organizer is Verla Kay, verlakay2@mlode.com

Session topics

Registration and coffee hour, Portfolios for Publication, Giving Dynamic Presentations, informal Q&A session, informal critique sessions

Speakers

Trish Burgio, BZ Smith

Sacramento

Saturday, September 28, 2002

Time: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Place: Gethsemane Lutheran Church, 4706 Arden Way, Carmichael 95608 (near the intersection of Arden & Fair Oaks)

Cost: \$30 for SCBWI members, \$35 for non-members

Meal: Coffee and tea provided for morning break, cookies for afternoon. Bring lunch.



Tips for writers

Hobby or business?

If you're wondering if you're a hobby or a business (in the eyes of the IRS, that is), or have other taxing questions, you might want to take a look at the *Writer's Pocket Tax Guide*. The online guide, written by Darlene Cypser, Attorney at Law, gives general information on current tax law as may pertain to freelance writers.

The guide makes suggestions on setting up your bookkeeping to make tax time easier, gives links to IRS forms you may need, and attempts to unravel some of the mysteries of Schedule C. The guide comes with the caveat that it's for general informational purposes and is not a substitute for personal legal or accounting advice should you have questions about your specific situation.

You can find and print the *Writer's Pocket Tax Guide* online at www.foolscap-quill.com ❖

Details & contact: Conference details and registration form available at www.scbwinorca.org. Conference organizer is Connie Goldsmith, goldwright@aol.com.

Session topics

Hot Tips and Techniques: selected advice from 114 authors & illustrators, From the Editor's Point of View, Handout Makeovers: look your best in print, Secrets for the Perfect Interview, Manuscript critiques, Portfolio Show-and-Tell/Presentation Ideas (I)

Speakers

Elizabeth Koehler-Pentacoff, Laura Torres, Nancy Barnet, Patti Newman

Chico

Saturday, October 5, 2002

Time: 9:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Place: Evangelical Free Church of Chico

Cost: \$45 for SCBWI members, \$50 for non-members

Meal: Lunch \$9 (can specify vegetarian)

Details & contact: Conference details and registration form available at www.scbwinorca.org. Conference organizer is Alessia Cowee. Contact Tekla White with questions, tnwrites@cal.net.

Session topics: Advertising with Directories, the Web and Direct Mail (I), Query and Cover Letters, The Secret of Writing Novels for Short People, Portfolio Enhancement Session (I), Patience, Perseverance, and Practice — Paths to a Published Picture Book, Be a Story Teller, panel discussion for writers, portfolio discussion for illustrators.

Speakers: Gennifer Choldenko, Marsha Diane Arnold, Zilpha Keatley Snyder, Nancy Barnet

The SCBWI has launched a remodeled and expanded website at

www.scbwi.org

Check your address label on the June SCBWI Bulletin for your password which lets you access the members-only areas of the website for news and publishing information.

Handy Hints on making a Web site

By Mira Reisberg

Having a website is a sign of being professional. It is a highly effective promotional tool and not that difficult to do. If you can afford it, hire a professional. If not, find a teenager or learn to do it yourself. The current standard software programs for Web design are Dreamweaver and Photoshop. (Flash is also a standard, but is slow loading for those that do not have DSL).

One of the easiest ways to begin is to take a class at your local community college, if it offers affordable Web designing courses. You may be able to design your Web site as a class assignment.

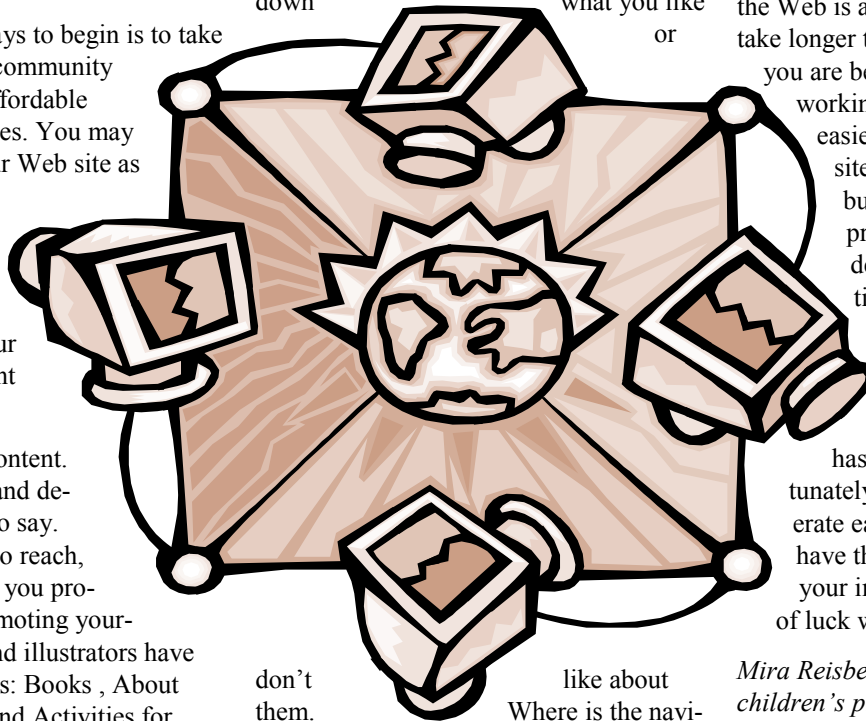
In making a website there are two aspects you need to cover: form (how your site looks) and content (what goes in it).

First, start with the content. Gather your images and decide what you want to say. Whom do you want to reach, and what service can you provide besides just promoting yourself? Most authors and illustrators have the following sections: Books, About Me, School Visits, and Activities for Teachers and Children. Engage the viewer by adding something more interactive. Create a narrative that weaves through the site. An example is Yuyi Morales' www.yuyimorales.com. Keep your site lively. Make your text as succinct and as entertaining as you can. The Web is a fast-paced medium.

After you've figured out approximately how many pages you want to have (remember your home page, also known as your index page, counts as a page) and

what you want to go on the pages, it's time to think about the form. Form encompasses both the aesthetics and the *architectural information* (how you navigate through your site, what the first pages to access are, etc.). Make a rough sketch of your content: your page names and how they connect with each other.

Now look at other websites and write down what you like or



don't like about them. Where is the navigation? Is it above, below or on the left? Is it easy to get around and find your way back? Is it a simple or a busy design? Is there a background image, colored or white space behind the text and images? Is it easy to read? Elegant? Fun? What are the navigation buttons like? How quickly does it load? What kind of type do you like? Is it easy to read? What makes one site look professional or exciting and another clunky or boring?

Books that are helpful are Lynda Wein-

man's *DESIGNING WEB GRAPHICS* and the *VISUAL QUICKSTART* books. Write down the qualities that you like. Make sure your home page has links to all of your other pages and that all the pages have a link to your home page as well as contact information. Ideally they should all connect with each other. Figure out what images go with what pages. There is a dance between text and images; the Web is a visual medium but images take longer to load. The more prepared you are before either taking a class or working with a Web designer, the easier and more successful your site will be. Remember you can build your site and then hire a professional to tweak it or redesign it for you later. One last tip: when using line art such as a logo or art with areas of flat color, save it in gif format. If you are using photographs, or anything which has tone, save it as a jpeg. Unfortunately, Web format images degenerate each time you save them, so have the correct size and format for your image before you save it. Best of luck with your website. ❖

Mira Reisberg is the illustrator of eight children's picture books as well as being a professional Web designer. She is an instructor at UC Berkeley Extension and San Francisco City College Extension. Mira is available for private consultation and instruction. You can contact her at miraguy@earthlink.net. Her Web sites include www.ashleywolff.com www.elisakleven.com www.staceyschett.com and her own site www.mirareisberg.com



Tech Talk

5 tips to get your files from here to there in one piece

by Nancy Barnet

Email is a great convenience when we can work up to the sweating edge of deadlines. It's a tremendous frustration when we get follow-up calls from clients who tell us they didn't receive the file, can't open the file or that the file is nothing but symbols and gibberish.

Here are five tips that might help you avoid common problems.

1. Exchange computer details with your client when you get the assignment. What computer and operating system are they using? What email program will be handling the files you send? Do they have any file size restrictions? What program (and version) will they be using to open and work with the files? In what format would the client like the files?
2. For writers, if you can send in your assignment as plain ASCII text in the body of the email, that will head off nearly all potential problems.
3. If you must send a file (particularly larger ones) as an attachment, compressing the file into a tidy ZIP or SIT package can help it arrive without getting mangled along the way. (Note that many email systems may have size limits on attachments that may be as low as 1mb.)
4. Avoid email altogether for really big files. Web-based file transfer services such as WhaleMail let you upload your file and notify your client that the file is ready to download. There are monthly fees for these kinds of services.
5. Learn more by typing in "email attachments" in your favorite search engine. You'll be rewarded with a wealth of information. ❖

Send your "Tech Talk" questions or comments to nancy@nancybarnet.com

Note:

The SCBWI Listserv has been phased out. Your password to access SCBWI member information and the new discussion boards is printed on your June SCBWI *Bulletin* Label.

Acorn submission guidelines

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

For articles, please query Julie Donahoo at juliedonahoo1@yahoo.com. Articles of 500 words or less are best, but longer pieces will be considered as space permits.

Send photos to Nancy Barnet at nancy@nancybarnet.com. Photos should be sent in JPG 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. Contact Nancy if you have questions.

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 one-year subscription to NorCa SCBWI electronic services and an SCBWI pen. If two or more of your articles are published, you'll receive the SCBWI book bag. ❖

North/Central CA Region of
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www.scbwinorca.org/NCregion.html

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Good news!



Margaret O'Hair sold her second book, STAR BABY, to Clarion Books. Michele Coppola is her editor. On other fronts, she is doing a presentation on "Writing for Children" for the California Writers Club, Marin Chapter, on October 12th at the Marin Headlands. It is the first annual Writers Way Conference, and there are other speakers on different topics as well. The url is <http://www.marinwriters.com/conference.htm>

It is sure to be a wonderful weekend away, and a perfect chance to renew the writing spirit for the fall.

Marsha Diane Arnold's early reader THE TAIL OF LITTLE SKUNK, a Golden Book, was just released in June 2002 and her website www.marshadianearnold.com is now up and running. She hopes everyone will drop by and say hello.

Nancy Raines Day sold two picture books this spring, FLAMINGO'S FIRST CHRISTMAS to Dutton and A FAIRY CHILD'S BUSY WEEK to HarperCollins.

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