



the acorn

Newsletter for the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI

An Author Profile

Daniel Pinkwater

By Patricia M. Newman

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 Genny Heikka
 Jeff Jackson

In the last 35 years, Daniel Pinkwater has written more than 80 children's picture books and novels.

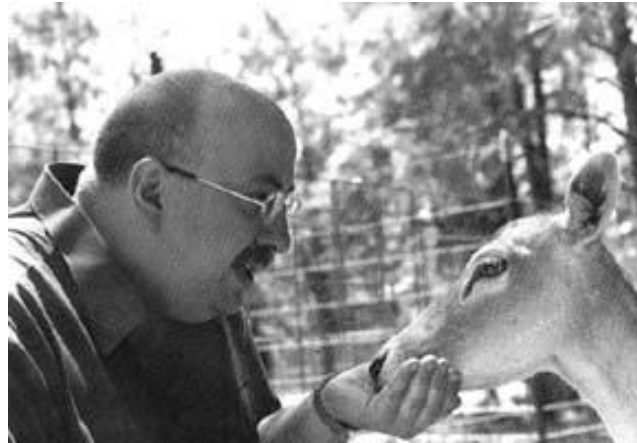
However, he says, "All my books are flawed. The next one is always better. My books are like footprints. They show where I've been, not where I am."

Under pressure, Pinkwater admits to being honest with his readers and not showing off for them. But "I don't try to do all the tricks I might have done with language. I've become simpler through the years." His motto is cleaner, better, more direct art.

His newest novel, *LOOKING FOR BOBOWICZ* (HarperCollins, 2004) received several outstanding reviews, but Pinkwater isn't satisfied because he says, "The sequel, *THE ARTSY SMARTSY CLUB* [HarperCollins, TBA], is so much better." He's calculated that it will take him another 30 years to produce a book he can really respect. To ensure he's around that long, he's turned his concept of cleaner, better, more direct art onto himself. The 62-year old author has "cleaned up his act with diet and exercise."

According to Pinkwater, "children make better readers than adults." They read with an intensity he finds compelling. "They read as carefully as I write." During school visits, kids quiz Pinkwater about his books, and when he can't remember the details they don't believe he wrote them. "I get letters saying I have read your book 17 times. If you're an adult novelist and

you get that letter, you should be afraid. You're being stalked. But kids always read them 17 times."

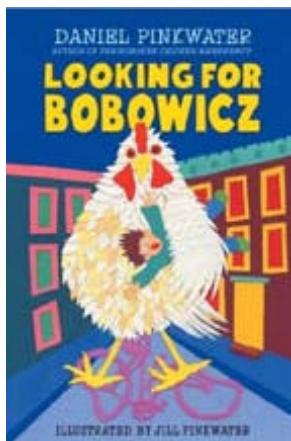


Pinkwater grew up in Los Angeles and Chicago and received a degree in fine art from Bard College in the Hudson Valley area of New York. He went to the city to crack the art world as a print-maker and figured

he'd arrived when he landed a one-man show. He continued painting, showing, and (as he puts it) "sucking up to clients" until he met a children's book editor at a party who suggested he could illustrate children's books. All he needed to do was find a writer. "I didn't know any writers even though I was a bit of a bohemian. I was brought up better than that." So he wrote his own stories—a short leap from his junior high school days writing *MADD Magazine*-style pieces to make his friends laugh.

Now, Pinkwater writes books he would have liked as a child. Ideas come 60 a minute, but he admits most of them stink. The trick is in developing the idea. For example, in *FAT MEN FROM SPACE* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1977), Pinkwater started with a kid who goes to the dentist to get a filling. "What if the filling receives radio signals? A cool situation, but not a story. What if the signals are from outer space and describe an alien invasion? We have a story!"

Although Pinkwater used to illustrate his own books, his wife, Jill, has now taken over that task. Married for 34 years, Pinkwater jokes "it's been hell. (Continued, see "Profile" page 2)



HOW TO CONTACT DANIEL PINKWATER

Website: www.pinkwater.com

SELECTIONS FROM DANIEL PINKWATER'S LIBRARY

LOOKING FOR BOBOWICZ, HarperCollins 2004.

BAD BEARS IN THE BIG CITY, Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

IRVING AND MUKTUK, TWO BAD BEARS, Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

YOUNG LARRY, Marshall Cavendish, 1998.

AT THE HOTEL LARRY, Marshall Cavendish, 1998.

ICE CREAM LARRY, Marshall Cavendish, 1999.

WOLF CHRISTMAS, Marshall Cavendish, 1998.

5 NOVELS, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997.

4 FANTASTIC NOVELS, Simon and Schuster, 2000.

UPCOMING

BAD BEARS AND A BUNNY, Houghton Mifflin, TBA.

THE ARTSY SMARTSY CLUB, HarperCollins, TBA.

BAD BEAR DETECTIVES, Houghton Mifflin, TBA.

DANCING LARRY, Marshall Cavendish, TBA.

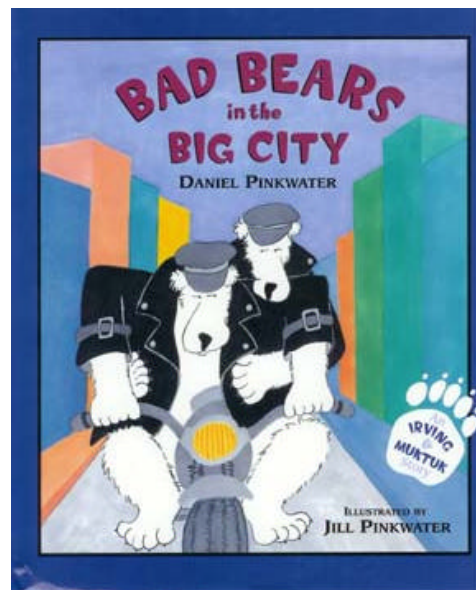
Patricia Newman's first picture book, **JINGLE THE BRASS** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), will be released this fall. Visit her website at: www.patriciamnewman.com

Profile

But she's such a great artist and such a great cook, and she's so beautiful, and she's got red hair that I overlook her faults." Jill's polar bears from the IRVING AND MUKTUK series and the Larry series are Pinkwater's favorite characters because Jill draws them so wonderfully. "She draws the way I would draw if I could really draw. The best thing is when she lets me make suggestions!"

In addition to writing, Pinkwater is a regular commentator on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" and "Weekend Edition Saturday." According to Pinkwater, "NPR has very smart people working in production. They find the best talent." When contacted by a breathless young intern who asked if he'd like to be commentator he said, "I always thought I should be!"

Pinkwater's irreverent sense of humor appeals to kids because it's off-the-wall. If you communicate with him via the Forum link on his website, ask him to tell you about the time he performed on the harpsichord for the Empress Maria Theresa (archduchess of Austria and queen of Hungary and Bohemia in the mid-1700s). Using the alias Wolfgang, he was a child prodigy exhibited before royalty all over Europe. Had he stuck with it, he would have written all the music there was to write. If you believe that, he'll tell you another one! 🐾



The Power of Accepting Criticism

by Tim Myer

The story of my first sale includes both the inevitable frustrations and the profound joys of the writing life, and it showed me clearly how much a writer needs to cultivate that most difficult task: staying open to criticism.

Before I visited Hawaii, I knew about the famous reef fish called the humuhumunukunukuapua'a-a fish whose aquarium label is longer than he is. Once in Hawaii, however, I read of another-the lauwi-wilinukunukuioi. My delight in learning to pronounce these beautiful names (and in teaching them to my kids) led me to a question: What would happen if the two fish were married? What could they possibly name their child?

This idea, of course, was bound to be a picture book for children. Writing it was a deeply pleasurable experience. I wrote out of delight in word play and the beauty of the reef creatures, with no concern for market placement.

Then came years of submitting and

waiting. I was desultory at first in sending it out, busy with the life that preceded my move to full-time writing (such as it is!). Once I began submitting in earnest, I soon collected ten rejections. At this point I moved to a new city and joined a children's writers group; the group leader encouraged me to join SCBWI. I put it off, but when I finally scraped together the yearly dues and began to scan their annual market listings, I found a small Hawaiian press that sounded promising. And mirabile dictu! -they wanted it.

But a sub-plot ran beneath all this, a series of events much more essential to the writer's life than marketing and submitting could ever be. One of the story's earlier rejections was from an editor at a major New York house, who wrote detailed comments on it before she sent it back. I was way too green to realize what this meant, or to appreciate the time this busy person put into my manuscript (I realize now that she

(Continued, see "criticism" page 3)

Davis Conference September 11

Please join us at the Veteran's Memorial Center for another exciting and informative conference. Lunches must be ordered by September 3 and the price goes up to \$35 after September 3. The information is on the Website www.scbwinorca.org. Contact Tekla White (tnwrites@cal.net) if you need more information.

Speakers

Jan Adkins is an award winning illustrator and author whose work has appeared in national publications including Harper's, Smithsonian, The Washington Post, Cricket, Muse, Click, Ask, and Cicada. His long list of published books include THE ART AND INDUSTRY OF SANDCASTLES (Walker & Company), A STORM WITHOUT RAIN (Little Brown), WOODEN SHIP (Houghton Mifflin), THE BAKERS (Scribners), JOHN ADAMS: STUBBORN PATRIOT (Simon & Schuster) and BRIDGES, FROM MY SIDE TO YOURS (Roaring Brook Press). Jan has served as an editor, associate art director at the National Geographic, architectural designer, freelance designer, and teacher.

Loretta Frances Ichord is a nonfiction, middle-grade, historical writer. She has three published books, two on the history of American food during colonial and pioneer times. The third is on the history of dentistry. Two more books are pending publication, one on the history of American houses, and the other on immigrant cooking in America.

Deborah Lee Rose has been a professional writer for 25 years. Her most recent children's book, THE TWELVE DAYS OF KINDERGARTEN won the Gold Award from the National Parenting Publications Association, and will be followed by a second kindergarten adventure featuring the same cast of characters. Deborah's books have been listed on many recommended reading lists, including the New York Public Library's 100 Children's books to Read and Share. Her next picture book, OCEAN BABIES, will be published by the National Geographic, in Spring 2005.

Connie Goldsmith has been writing since 1997. Since that time she's had two children's books published with two more due out in 2005. She's written more than 160 articles published in children's and adult magazines. She has a monthly children's book review column in a Sacramento regional parenting magazine. Connie has served as assistant regional advisor for the SCBWI in North Central California and has spoken at several SCBWI conferences.

Margaret Speaker Yuan has written four non-fiction books: AGNES DE MILLE: DANCER; THE ROYAL GORGE BRIDGE; THE LONDON TOWER BRIDGE; and, THE ARC DE TRIOMPHE. WOMEN OF ISLAM and AVI (a biography of the Newberry Award-winning writer) are future publications. Whenever possible, Margaret avoids leaving her house to do research, since she's so bad at finding her way around that she gets lost in her own home town. She worships at the altar of Google and is a disciple of Melvyl. A recent foray into fiction produced 14 drafts for a 2000 word story, with 40 pages of research notes.

Diana Thewlis has been a freelance illustrator for over twenty-five years, working in most genres including children's books and educational art for children. She is an instructor at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco, California where she teaches children's book illustration as well as several other courses.

Criticism

may have been requesting a re-write). And I resented her little yellow post-its with all their quiet, precise suggestions. So in my anger-which was, as so often, really just hurt in disguise-I let the story sit.

Months later, I came across it in my files and re-read her comments out of idle curiosity. To my amazement, I found that she'd been very insightful! One suggestion was that I change the name of the fish-child (I thought "Bixby" was kind of cute) to a Hawaiian word, in keeping with the names of the parent fish. I looked at some vocabulary lists I'd made in Hawaii and found hapa, which means "half" or "little bit." Sounds great, I thought; he'll be "Hapa."

After the book came out from Bess Press in Honolulu as LET'S CALL HIM LAUWILIWIHUMUHUMUNUKUNUKUNUKUN UKUAPUA'AOIOI!, my editor wrote me. A friend of hers had read my book to her child, a five-year-old boy. It turns out that hapa has other meanings too-in racially mixed Hawaii, this Japanese-based term also refers to children of mixed marriages. The boy's mother and father were from different ethnic groups. He loved the book, and when he and his mother finished it he pointed to the happy fish-child on the last page and said proudly, "That's me!"

Something I'd written had not only helped create an intimate moment between parent and child, but had also made that child's life better-if only for a moment. In my story that little boy had found pride and self-acceptance, and passionately so. I still can't find words for my gratitude that such a thing could be.

When I wrote my editor back, of course, I never let on that the "layers of meaning" she'd been impressed by were anything but conscious decisions on my part.

After all, a writer does have to do a little marketing, right?

Tim Myers is a writer, storyteller and songwriter living in Santa Clara. His TANUKI'S GIFT got an excellent boxed review with art in the New York Times and was chosen as a "Best Book of the Year" by Bank Street College and Nick Jr. Magazine, among other honors. Basho and the Fox (2000) was read aloud on NPR by Daniel Pinkwater, made the New York Times best-seller list for children's books, and was chosen as a Smithsonian Notable Children's Book, a Children's Book Council "Not Just for Children Anymore" selection, and a Bank Street Irma Black Honor Book, among other honors. He's appeared in the Cricket group, the Cobblestone group, Appleseeds, Storyworks, Highlights, Chicken Soup for the Kid's Soul, New Moon, and others-won a national poetry contest judged by John Updike and has an adult poetry chapbook coming out-and has published much other fiction, non-fiction and poetry for kids and adults. He recently sold a new picture book to Candlewick and a poetry collection to Wordsong, his sixth children's book. In 2002 he was a SCBWI Golden Kite picture-book judge.

Query Letter Checklist

by Tekla White

Check the publisher's guidelines to see what should be sent to the editor. Some publishers accept queries. Others prefer outlines and sample chapters with summaries, or they may request the entire manuscript. Include a cover letter if you send the whole manuscript.

The Query

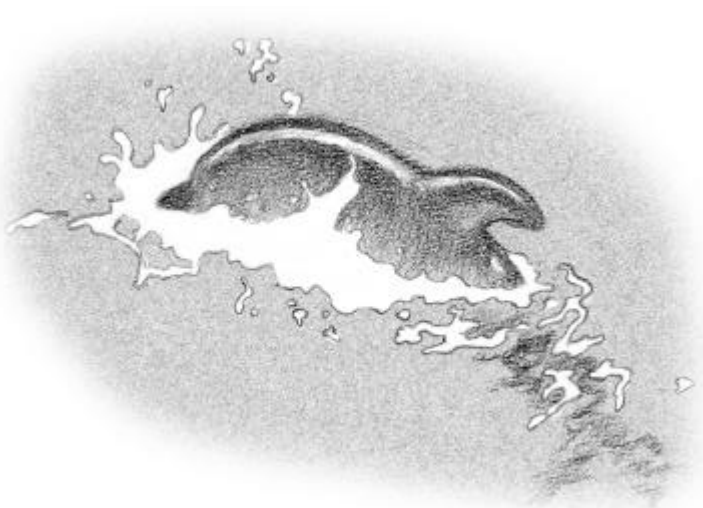
Your name, address, telephone number, and the date should be at the top of your letter.

Single-space the query.

Use a business letter format.

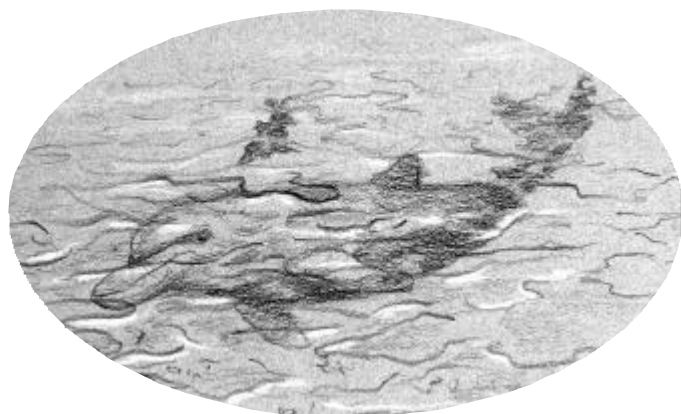
Personalize the query if you've corresponded with the editor or met the editor.

1. Begin with a hook that will attract the editor's attention. It could be a question, a quotation from your book, or an experience.
2. You can include the reason you wrote the book. If you do, be creative. I wrote this book because isn't an exciting introduction.
3. If the manuscript is nonfiction, compare your work with other books about the same subject. How is it different? Look in SUBJECT GUIDE TO BOOKS IN PRINT to find other books about your topic. If there are no listings for other books covering your subject, note this in your query.
4. Include the intended age of the reader and the genre.
5. List the credits and qualifications that relate to your writing and to your subject. Note your membership in writing organizations. If you have nothing to list, don't mention it.
6. Before you run out of space on the page, the MOTHER RULE applies. Say something nice. Let the editor know that you'll look forward to the reply, or add thanks for considering your proposal, book, or story.
7. Use the grammar and spell checker.
8. Include the SASE envelope for a reply.



All images from A BELIZE SKETCHBOOK
by Jeff Jackson

We hope you had a wonderful summer and found a sea full of ideas!



Bay Area Happenings

Jan Adkins will speak in Larkspur at Redwood High School on September 21 from 7:00 to 9:00 P.M.

Margaret Speaker Yuan will teach a class, Writing for Children, in Larkspur at Redwood High School. The first session is September 28.

Contact Margaret for information about both of these programs.
books4women@yahoo.com



Good News

Genny Heikka

Susan Taylor Brown just sold her book ROBERT SMALLS SAILS TO FREEDOM to Lerner for their ON MY OWN HISTORY Series. In addition, her article "Creative Non-fiction - A True Story Well Told" was published in the Children's Writer newsletter.

Cynthia Decker just finished illustrating a picture book for Dutton, which will be released in the spring of 2005. The title is EVERYBODY MAKES MISTAKES. She is currently working on the illustrations for another picture book, THE ALLEY-OOPS, for Urim Publishers out of Jerusalem. The publish date is also spring 2005. In addition, Cynthia recently illustrated a page for Lady Bug magazine, which will come out August 2004 (the back page).

Connie Goldsmith has contracted to do a book for Lerner Publications about antibiotic resistant infections. She also has an article about using your "day job" to break into children's writing in the 2005 issue of Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market.

Genny Heikka's poem, "My Darkness, His Light", has been accepted by DevoZine, Christian magazine for teenagers. The poem will be published in their November 2004 issue.

Cheri Eplin Molnar is happy to announce that her first children's book, DEE DIDDLY DRAGON IS NOT A WIMP! was published in May 2004, by Anton Berkshire Publishing. The book is illustrated by Gwendolyn Gutwein.

Patti Newman's nonfiction article "The Flying Referee" has been accepted by Highlights magazine.

Linda Joy Singleton has sold a 5th book to Llewellyn Publishing, titled SEA SWITCH. This will be the 3rd installment in her fantasy-mystery series, STRANGE ENCOUNTERS. The first book in the series, OH, NO! UFO was recently released and is now in bookstores. There's a contest for kids in the back of the book and book covers and news on her website (www.LindaJoySingleton.com).

Pamela S. Turner's book, HACHIKO: THE TRUE STORY OF A LOYAL DOG won a Silver Parent's Choice Award from the Parent's Choice Foundation, and is on the nominee list for the ALA's Notable Books of 2005. It is also a Junior Library Guild selection and received a starred review in Booklist.

Margaret Speaker Yuan's book, THE ARC DE TRIOMPHE, the third book written for Blackbirch Press's Building World Landmarks series, is set to go to the printers. She has also turned in the first draft of her biography of Avi, the Newbery Award winning author of CRISPIN: THE CROSS OF LEAD.



Regional Advisor's Corner

By Tekla White

North/Central California SCBWI

August 2004

I'm looking forward to seeing Northern California children's authors and illustrators in Davis at our September 11, 2004 conference. Inspiration, communication, and outstanding speakers, who give advice on tracking down information, will be the highlights of the program.

Our next conference in Davis will be on March 19, 2005. Information will be posted on the web site (www.scbwinorca.org) this fall.

I hope you had leisure moments during the summer months, special times without pressure, which provided creative energy for your next award-winning project. When you have time, send me an email about your inspirational moments so I can include them in the next Acorn letter.

We answer questions in the newsletter, and each edition has articles by our members. Let the editor, Linda Goossens, or me know if you have questions or contributions. We'd love to hear from you.

We'd like to know the title and author of your favorite childhood book. Please tell us why it was special.

Wishing you picture-perfect illustrations and success in the write world,

Tekla White
North Central SCBWI Regional Advisor
tnwrites@cal.net

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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 Goossens about submission due dates or for more information.

The Acorn

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