

Prairie Wind

Bulletin of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI

SPRING 2022

illustrator in the spotlight:
Matthew Cordell



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Illustration by Matthew Cordell



In This Issue

by Amy Alznauer



My introduction will be a little longer than usual because it's also a goodbye. After almost five years directing the *Prairie Wind*, I've decided to hand on the torch (read to the end to find out who will now be carrying it!). In November of 2017 Sara Shacter sent me an email asking if I might want to take on this position at the *Prairie Wind*. I worried I didn't have the time or expertise but finally decided I couldn't refuse; the SCBWI-IL chapter has given me so much. In particular, working with Esther Hershenhorn through the Laura Crawford Memorial Mentorship transformed my writing, started my career, and best of all gave me a lifelong friendship. And through this chapter, I've continued to find inspiration, career know-how, and great friends. In fact, the *Prairie Wind* itself has been an amazing source of all three.

First, the *Prairie Wind* team has been a joyful collaboration. Pamela Dell, our editor, is as insightful and witty as she is eagle-eyed, and I will always treasure these years working with her. Brooke O'Neil, our designer, is a beautiful artist with abundant energy and good cheer. Jenny Wagh, our regional advisor, is unfailingly supportive and kind. And Sheila Path-McMahon, our newest volunteer, has been a speedy and expert proofreader, giving us all peace of mind before we go to press. Rich Green, Urania Smith, and Deb Aronson have also been invaluable and kind resources in helping me staff our illustrator columns, Voices of Change, and Network News.

And second, it has been an honor and inspiration to work with all of you—the readers and columnists of the *Prairie Wind*. So many columns have brought me to tears or made me laugh out loud. So many have spurred me to action in my own writing and as an author in the world. Your art and words and attentive reading make the *Prairie Wind* a lovely publication, and I will remain deeply grateful. And I can think of no greater tribute here than to celebrate the columnists in our current issue.

Debbie Topolski starts us out with her [Greetings!](#), reflecting on food, community, and the ways in which both of these nourish us, noticing in particular how our local SCBWI-IL chapter is such a rich source of sustenance.

When I asked the Caldecott-Award-winning artist Matt Cordell to be our [Illustrator in the Spotlight](#), I doubted he'd have time for my request. He not only accepted my invitation but said this about the cover image: "I was thinking I'd

draw an original something for it, if that would be ok? I have this recurring mouse character I draw (sort of a self-portrait character) that I was thinking I could draw standing in a windy field (prairie), out birding." This act and the beautiful resulting illustration encapsulate for me what I see repeatedly in the children's book world: a combination of humility, generosity, and brilliance.

Michael Leali's [Tale from the Front](#) (the story behind his debut middle-grade novel *The Civil War of Amos Abernathy*) is a rousing narrative of one person's brave refusal to stagnate. As Leali puts it: "There is always further to go. Sometimes we ride the waves, and sometimes we're forced to float, but the journey is always at hand." And in [Creative Sparks](#) we are thrilled to feature two beautiful illustrations by Pamela C. Rice and a compelling excerpt from Patricia Hruby Powell's in-progress novel-in-verse (which she also mentions in [Writer's Tips](#)).

In our [Features](#) section, [Lizzie Cooke](#) tells of how capitalizing on the resources of SCBWI and persisting through setbacks and rejections will help ensure that your story is never over and that the words "to be continued" foretell good things to come. The 2022 Illustrator Mentorship pair [Denise Holmes](#) (mentor) and [Erin Hookana](#) (mentee) have a conversation about their months working together (complete with before/after pics from Hookana's work!). And [Malcolm Newsome](#) tells a personal, poignant story of writing about death and loss for children and offers tips for others who may want to embark on this deeply meaningful task.

Nate Lyon kicks off our [Columns](#) section with a powerful [Voices of Change](#) piece on balancing what he terms queer pain and queer joy. After working through his own childhood pain toward a present adulthood that "is bursting with queer joy," Lyon realized he wanted that same joy for his characters. Paula M. Karll, who persisted valiantly through two false starts (bookstores that did not respond to repeated queries), finally struck gold with [Bookie's](#); you can see it in the beaming selfie she snapped in their charming children's section. Krista Barba offers a series of helpful [Illustrator's Tips](#) on unclogging our creative blocks (so writers, this column is for you too!) and then populates the column with her own visually delightful examples.



In This Issue

Patricia Hruby Powell in [Writer's Tips](#) expertly and concisely guides us through the stages of conceiving and drafting a novel, or explains, as she puts it, "how to get started and keep going." In a moving [Writer's Bookshelf](#), Traci Dant tells the story of a shattering event that forced her to go back to the very beginning and start writing and reading anew. With help from three favorite books, Dant shares how others might begin "falling in love with words again, restarting a writing routine, and remembering the goal of publishing." Guari Dalvi Pandya's [Mentor Texts](#) is a wonderful twist on our standard column, this time annotating a list of books that are not only mentor texts "in the sense of great writing and illustrating" but "also carry forgotten wisdom for groan-ups like you and me."

I'm always particularly grateful to the pinch hitters who come in at the last minute and rescue a column that for some reason has fallen through. Donna Beasley happily volunteered and wrote up her take on SCBWI-IL's wonderful [Diversity Network](#) in a weekend! And as always, thank you, Jenny Wagh, for collecting this [Season's Crop](#).

And a huge final thankyou from me to the whole *Prairie Wind* team for these years of support, laughter, and comradery. Now, I'm thrilled to introduce the new *Prairie Wind* director, author Shirin Shamsi, who through our initial meetings has already shown great warmth, energy, and skill. I can't wait to see what she brings to this publication and team.

Director [Amy Alznauer](#)

who joyfully plans and acquires content for each issue

Editor [Pamela Dell](#)

who expertly tweaks and polishes all of our content

Designer [Brooke O'Neill](#)

who creatively designs and lays out every page

Advisor [Jenny Wagh](#)

*who remains our faithful and supportive
Regional Advisor*



Illustration by Brooke O'Neill

Greetings!

A RECIPE FOR COMMUNITY by Deborah Topolski

I'm an avid cook, the kind of person who finds making meals for family and friends the most relaxing and satisfying parts of my day. I enjoy experimenting with new recipes and techniques and have even stretched beyond my own heritage to embrace and recreate special foods from my husband Brad's Jewish tradition. His grandma, the late Goldie, was particularly fond of the homemade bagels I serve for family brunch. She called me a *ballabusta* (Yiddish for *good homemaker*), but never found her own joy behind a stove.



Rather, Goldie created new communities, nurturing a career in the Florida real estate market in the 1960s and '70s. So I was surprised when, after her recent move, my mother-in-law sent over a recipe box that had belonged to Goldie during that era. Despite a penchant for avoiding the kitchen as a rule, Goldie kept the box of recipes and passed it down to her daughter. In turn, Inez has kept it through two moves and had now shared it with me.

Upon opening the lid, I began to understand why someone uninterested in cooking would keep a recipe box. On the underside, I was greeted with a label reading "West Suburban Temple Har Zion Sisterhood." This wasn't just a simple recipe box. What's more, the recipes



Greetings!

inside fed more than physical appetite. These were not just the recipes of a community. Rather, this box housed *a recipe for community*.

Fascinated with the contents, I brought it to a Monday night [SCBWI-IL Power Hour](#) and shared it with the host, North Suburban Network volunteer and friend Anny Rusk. Anny is one of a handful of volunteers who have been working steadily throughout this pandemic to maintain outreach with online programming and gatherings. *Power Hour* provides dedicated time to work on your own project for 60 minutes in community and silently, as a way to stay accountable and to keep motivated along with fellow members who share a common goal! Every week, participants stay a few minutes after to chat and share successes of the hour or to ask questions of the regional volunteer hosts like Anny. Coming together with live, online programs has become a new staple in our regional diet.

As I read through Goldie's recipe cards for Anny, I stewed on how and why the sisterhood came together and collected these *Mrs. Mazel*-era recipes with vintage ingredients like *Mar-parv* (advertised as a kosher margarine), liquid Sucaryl (a low-calorie sweetener), gelatin, and condensed milk. I imagined the scenes around their dinner tables and their lives and legacies beyond those tables. Do other member-families like ours still make "Libby Sokol's E-Z Beef Stew," "The Sisterhood Cha-nukah Dinner Brisket," or "Swedish Meatballs, a favorite at the Tabachnik's"? It felt reverential to say the members' names aloud and a privilege to read the recipes that shaped suppers and special occasions. Will our consciousness live on in the stories we create for the next generation? Will our recipe for community continue to feed and sustain our Illinois Region for years to come?

TUCCI TIME

In 2021, on a pre-vaccine Valentine's Day, I was making homemade focaccia to celebrate when I stumbled upon the first episode of a show that ended up making our subsistence on at-home date nights palatable. Stanley Tucci's *Searching for Italy* became a favorite for its look at how the food of a people influenced a nation. I also loved being a voyeur in the fields, vineyards, and alleyways where foods were sourced and sold.

As the focaccia baked in my own oven, Tucci spoke of how an early form of pizza, fried in hot oil and created to combat the cholera pandemic in a bygone era, nourished the world through that pandemic and has through this one as well. I looked forward to weekly "Tucci Time," a vacation for my mind that fed my love of food and travel.



This makes me wonder about how we feed, or nourish, our creative selves too. What keeps your projects palatable? How do you break a large task down into manageable and edible bites, so you don't quit? What SCBWI community programs can you use to motivate your process and satisfy your storytelling? Besides our weekly Power Hour, [network programs](#) offer snack-sized tastes of kidlit craft and industry. Starved for a creative getaway with friends? Regional events like our up-coming [Riverside Writing Retreat](#) provide course after course of meaty offerings in a setting where you can relax and recharge with industry professionals—and to help you make your work a feast for your readers.

"THE NEW NEEDS FRIENDS..."

One of my favorite Pixar animated films by creator and director Brad Bird is 2007's *Ratatouille*. In the movie, a much-feared food critic is surprised to find himself championing the unconventional in a world where tradition is the recipe. Over the last two years, our region has had to pivot from our tried and tested



Greetings!

programs, substituting (as we sometimes have to do with recipe ingredients) Illinois Interactive for Prairie Writer's and Illustrator's Day and Words on the Web for Words in the Woods. Even now, when we can, with caution, begin to come together in person, it's not the same. Perhaps it never will be—but maybe that's a good thing. As we change formats and put different things on the menu, we're still focused on the same key ingredients: opportunity and community.

Our Illinois Region will be welcoming new volunteers in the coming months—no such thing as too many cooks! Under the leadership of [Sarah Baker, SCBWI's new international Executive Director](#), we believe the organization will change for the better. Just as when trying new foods and unfamiliar cuisines, there will always be critics, but as Ratatouille's Anton Ego says, "The new needs friends."

HUNGRY FOR MORE

In the end, I suppose Goldie's sisterhood came together for the same reason we do within our re-gion: to create a recipe for community. We expect our membership to be open to trying a new menu of programming, leadership, and gatherings that elevate our creative cuisine with a blend of opportunity and community. And, to echo Anton Ego, I hope our region's fresh possibilities will leave you "hungry for more." 🌻

DEBORAH TOPOLSKI dedicates this article to *Prairie Wind* Creative Director Amy Alznauer, with abundant gratitude for her years of service. *The Prairie Wind* warmly welcomes Shirin Shamsi to the role beginning with our next issue. We are all excited that she will have a seat at the table to create her own recipe for the ongoing success of this fruitful literary magazine. Connect with Debbie at Illinois-ra2@scbwi.org.



Illustrator in the Spotlight

MATTHEW CORDELL: A WORK IN PROGRESS

by Matthew Cordell

Are you an illustrator or an author/illustrator? And what is your preferred medium to work in?

I write and illustrate my own books, and illustrate the books of other authors too. I've dabbled a bit here and there with my illustrations, but for the most part my pictures are created traditionally, on paper, drawing in pen and ink and painting with watercolors.

Tell us a little about your beginnings and journey as an illustrator.

As long as I can remember, I've loved to draw. Drawing has been the one big thing I've done consistently throughout my life. When it came time to think about a career, I knew I wanted to do something creative, so I settled on work in graphic design and after I finished college I continued to draw and paint in my spare time. In my early twenties, I started dating a writer and school librarian, Julie Halpern, (in the years that followed we would be married!) who suggested the two of us collaborate on a picture book idea and we would try to get it published.

Picture books were something that had not been on my artistic radar for many years—since I was a child myself. Honestly, I wasn't sure it was for me, but Julie soon won me over by reminding me how special picture books were and are. I conjured up some artwork to accompany Julie's manuscript, and we submitted our proposal to 20 publishers. In the months after, we slowly received 19 rejections. The last one, from Houghton Mifflin, was a "maybe."

In time, that "maybe" became a very fortunate "yes" and our first picture book, *Toby and the Snowflakes*, was published in 2004. The process of making this book and working with a publisher was so incredibly gratifying to me that I wanted to make a change and make this my life's work. It took a lot of patience, hard work, and self-motivation, and after about four more years of pounding the pavement, I took the plunge to become a full-time illustrator and eventual author too.

Please share an illustration and give us a brief step-by-step of your process.

This is one of my favorite spreads from *Cornbread and Poppy*. This piece, like almost all of my work, is created at 100 percent



and traditionally, on cold press watercolor paper, drawing in pen and ink and coloring with watercolors.

Before any final art, I always sketch out my pages in pencil on inexpensive paper—the kind you'd run through a copy machine. I usually sketch one illustration in bits and pieces and scan all the pieces into my computer, assembling in Photoshop for a final composition. Once sketches are approved by my publisher and I'm ready to begin final art, I tape a printout of the sketch to the back of my watercolor paper and trace it, more or less, using a large light table. I try to keep the final drawing light, fresh, loose, and free. I don't like to get too tight with the drawing or the painting when I color the pieces. In fact, I go through a lot of wasted paper whenever I get too calculated and controlled with the drawing. Loose and expressive drawing and painting is what I'm most excited by in the work of others, and that's what I hope to do in my own work too.

Please share an instance in which the seed of an idea or experience (though small at the start) took root and grew to become one of your books or illustrations.

I keep a sketchbook for things unrelated to the contractual work on my desk and try to use it as often as possible. I like to draw things as they pop into my head, just for fun. One day, some years ago, I drew a picture of a girl in a red coat standing in a snowy field staring down an ominous, large adult wolf. There was no story or meaning in particular, I just had that image in my head and wanted to commit it to paper. I liked how it turned out—it was quite dramatic and the approach was a bit different from how I usually draw and paint. I shared it on social media and received a surprising number of positive comments, mostly in the form of "Is this for a book you're working on?" It wasn't, of course, but the more I looked at it, I wanted it to be.

I had no idea what the story was, so it was essentially starting from ground zero with not much of an idea. I thought it



Illustrator in the Spotlight

might help to read about wolves, because I knew very little about them. I thought they were aggressive, bloodthirsty animals because of the way they are portrayed in old children's stories and still are throughout pop culture. I learned that wolves are not this at all. They hunt animals to live, never killing more than is needed. And they are especially timid and untrusting of humans because of the way humans have treated them—and hunted them—throughout the world, throughout history. And I realized this would be my story. Stereotypes and misperceptions. And two very different beings helping each other in some way, when they needed it the most. It took a lot of work and research, and a long time and help from author and illustrator friends, but that sketchbook drawing eventually did become my book *Wolf in the Snow*.

What inspires you creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?

I like people and things that readily acknowledge the

flawed existence that is this life. Humility, humor, self-deprecation. I like art of all kinds that is surprising and unconventionally beautiful. A messy, scratchy drawing. A busted singing voice. A guitar played with feedback. Stories about unsung heroes or quiet, contemplative, unusual characters and places. And the natural world. I love seeing and knowing there's a world that exists completely outside of—sometimes despite of—our human lives.

What three words best sum you up?

Imperfect, messy, unshaven 🌟

MATTHEW CORDELL has illustrated many books for children including *The Only Fish in the Sea* and *Follow That Frog* by Philip Stead. He has written and illustrated numerous picture books himself including *Hello, Neighbor!*, *The Kind and Caring World of Mister Rogers* and *Wish*. Matthew's books have been recognized as Best of the Year selections by the New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Boston Globe. His first wordless picture book, *Wolf in the Snow*, was awarded the 2018 Caldecott Medal. Matthew lives in suburban Chicago with his wife, author, Julie Halpern, and their two children.



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Tales from the Front

by Michael Leali

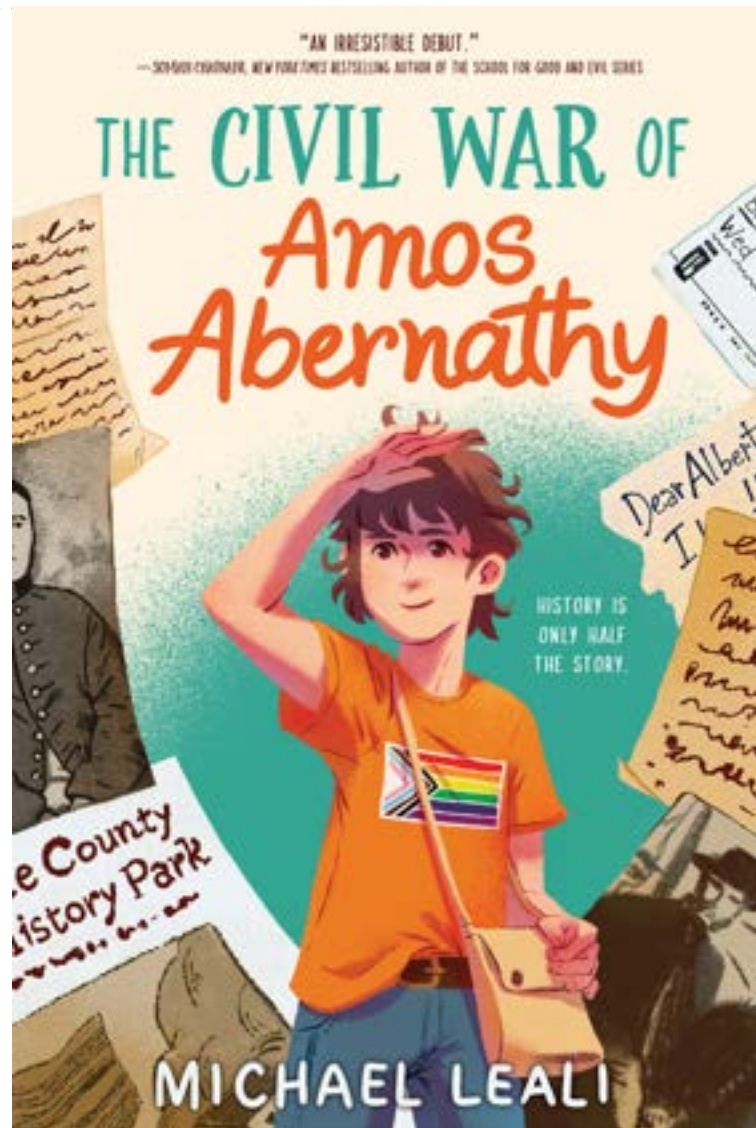
As I draft this article about my writing journey, copies of my debut middle grade novel are stranded somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean, pushing back my publication date by two weeks. I'm not alone in this predicament, but it doesn't negate the heartache of tardiness. Of course, the books will eventually make their way to shore and into the hands of readers, but the anticipation—the delay of that potential—reminds me of where I was at only six years ago when I began to take my writing career seriously.

It was late 2016 and I was in my third year of teaching high school students Broadcast Journalism, English, and Creative Writing. Because I only know how to burn the candle along every possible surface, I was also co-directing our theatrical productions, running Drama Club, organizing the daily announcements through our Broadcast Club, planning a student film festival, and serving on multiple district and building teams. In short, I was doing what teachers do best: everything, all at once, all the time. The problem was that I was burning out and feeling increasingly stuck.

Despite all the good happening in my teaching career, I was feeling unfulfilled because I was giving up, more and more, on chasing one of my longest-held dreams. I'd always wanted to become a published writer. I'd given countless hours to stories that never have (and never should) see the light of day. They brought me joy, but it wasn't enough. I wanted to see my stories on bookstore and library shelves. I wanted to give someone else the reading experience so many authors had given me. In those early years of teaching, I stole minutes to draft on the weekends, between grading and set construction, and in the dark morning hours before I left for school. Unfortunately, this wasn't getting me where I wanted to be. I was derelict, barely treading water.

When you're stuck, you have only so many options: Continue treading until you drown or find a piece of driftwood and paddle to shore. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that reaching this breaking point could be an opportunity instead of an obstacle.

So I did something exciting and terrifying. I applied to the



Vermont College of Fine Arts' Writing for Children and Young Adults program, was accepted, and then I quit my job. I didn't know what the murky waters ahead held, but I knew that if I didn't feverishly swim toward this dream now, I probably never would.

Those years on my way to earning my MFA were full of opportunities that wouldn't have existed had I not leapt into the wake. While in grad school, I continued to work fulltime, but in different capacities. At first, I was a teaching assistant in a program for junior high students with behavioral and emotional disorders. I loved that job and grew substantially as an educator. At the end of that year, though, another opportunity presented itself: to become the children's manager at one of my favorite independent



Tales from the Front

bookstores. So I hopped from my driftwood and into this newfound dinghy, wiser but still excited and a little bit scared.

Working in a bookstore showed me an entirely new side of the book world. While I continued navigating my own writing, I engaged with readers and writers in ways that challenged what I thought I knew and opened me up to so much more. After a year of working in bookselling, and as I neared graduation from VCFA, a new ship came sailing by: a marketing specialist position at a local publishing company. I never thought I'd get the chance to work in publishing—only people in New York do that, I thought. Yet here was my opportunity. Now, more accustomed to taking leaps of faith, I applied and got the job.

I graduated with my degree in Writing for Children and Young Adults a little over a month into my new publishing job, and once more was challenged and forced to grow while simultaneously pursuing my writing. I polished a manuscript after graduation, queried agents, and was quickly (and fortunately) offered representation. I was over the moon. In the fall of 2019, we went on submission with a middle grade manuscript I'd written in my final semester, and then everything seemed to slow...until it came to a screeching halt in March 2020.

I took this time of stillness and uncertainty as an opportunity to explore. A new story percolated. Three aspects of my identity kept rising to the surface: my time as a young historical reenactor, being a white, cisgender gay man, and my years being homeschooled. Suddenly, the concept for *The Civil War of Amos Abernathy* was born. The story came quickly, and the more I researched and dove into my own memory, the more I realized that this was the story I needed at that moment. It was cathartic, to write something so close to my heart, all that joy and pain I'd felt as a young person.

While my first novel on submission didn't get any bites, *The Civil War of Amos Abernathy* sold within a month of going on sub. Not only that, but I landed a two-book deal with HarperCollins. My second novel, releasing summer 2023, is that first book my agent and I sent out. Only now, that novel is a completely different version of itself, and all for the better. The waiting made it so.

Through the process of writing *The Civil War of Amos Abernathy*, I found that I missed working with children. I was writing for them, but I wasn't around them. It was time for me to abandon ship and return to the classroom. Finally, at long last, I felt like I was getting closer to shore, to achieving what I really wanted.

But that's the thing about life. The shore is always just out of reach, and maybe for good reason. We swim, we tread, we catch a new wave, but no matter how far we sail, there is always more of this great, blue expanse. I think this is what makes the voyage continuously exciting and terrifying. There is always further to go. Sometimes we ride the waves, and sometimes we're forced to float, but the journey is always at hand.

While I cannot wait for *The Civil War of Amos Abernathy* to finally arrive, I have to believe that this moment of stickiness is for a reason. That this pause has potential. That it's an opportunity for growth. If you're feeling stuck, I hope this comes as some encouragement. Is this your time of anticipation? If so, seek new opportunities. Open yourself to experiences you hadn't considered. You might just discover the very best of yourself and your writing along the way. ✨



MICHAEL LEALI is a writer and educator living in the suburbs of Chicago. He earned his MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts. *The Civil War of Amos Abernathy* is his debut middle grade novel. Visit him online at www.michaelleali.com.

Creative Sparks

HOMECOMING by Patricia Hruby Powell
an excerpt from her YA novel in progress

“Mom, I’m not a baby.”

“I know, Sweetie,
I just thought you’d like a party
for your birthday. Invite Antonio.”

“Mother!
What? With cake and balloons?”
I’m already sorry.
She didn’t deserve that.

“Just give the boy a chance to explain himself.”

Nothing to explain.
He ghosted me.
Well, he texted “Happy 16th” a couple weeks ago.
Otherwise.

Nothing.
I stand at the sink and dig into my granola.
My mother gives my shoulder a little rub
and goes to the table where her music is laid out.
Why am I so bitchy?

“Sit down to eat. At the table.”
She gestures to the chair
across from her.

I continue standing.
Give him a chance?
I’d listen to Antonio.
He rolls his r-r-r-r-r-s.
Mar-r-r-tina, he calls me.
He moves like a puma.



When he dribbles the ball down the field
he’s smooth like

like

like

he’s pouring honey over the ball
and it’s the honey that moves it along.
When he kicks the ball into the goal
he’s a dancer—probably better than I am.
Definitely better than I am.
The fans jump to their feet and scream for him.
I’m still waiting for my first standing ovation.

Liliana strolls into the kitchen
looking rested and fresh
always long and beautiful. And tan.
She says,
“You know, you’re looking good, Sis.
Curvier than before.”



Creative Sparks

HOMECOMING by Patricia Hruby Powell an excerpt from her YA novel in progress

Ack!

“Curvy?! Liliana! Is that a cut?”

“No, you look more grown up.
Really.”

Curvy?!

My sister hugs me and whispers in my ear
so Mom doesn’t hear.

“Come with me to Zella’s party tonight.
Antonio will be there.
At least you can talk to him.”

I whisper back

“You said he was with Angela.”

“She’s a cow.

You’re better.

Show up and remind him.

I’m going back to school.

This is our last chance to hang together.”

I hug her hard.

I miss her when she’s gone.

Just Mom and me.

I love my mother

but she hovers a bit.

“What’s up, my two Lovelies.”

Mom envelops us both in her strong piano-playing arms.

She’s small but she’s mighty.

“I won’t ask what you’re discussing,
but I sure do wonder.”

She can’t reach the top of either of our heads
for kisses like she once did.

So we both kiss the top of her head.

I have to stand on my toes,
but my instep and arch
have been made especially strong
this summer.

Dance camp.

Not ballet.

Not competitive.

Real art

at the University of Wisconsin.

All day every day in the studio

my dream

to one day dance with—I don’t know—
Alvin Ailey.

I’d have to be brilliant

to be the one white dancer.

And I’m not.

Not yet.

I love the Ailey company

ever since I saw *Revelations*.

An ancient piece but still gripping

inspiring, so meaningful.

“Wading in the Water”

I’m ready to be baptized.

In the river.

Yes! ✨

PATRICIA HRUBY POWELL, was a former dancer/choreographer, trained in London, NYC, Philadelphia, and toured worldwide with her dance company One Plus One. She teaches Writing Children’s Literature annually at Judson University, in Elgin, Illinois. She has also been a storyteller and librarian. Her books include *Lift As You Climb*; *Struttin’ With Some Barbecue*; *Loving vs. Virginia*; and *Josephine*. Forthcoming are *Sunday Before Sundown*; *Cave of the Heart: The Story of Martha Graham*; and *Duck Duck Goose*. Visit her at <https://talesforallages.com/>

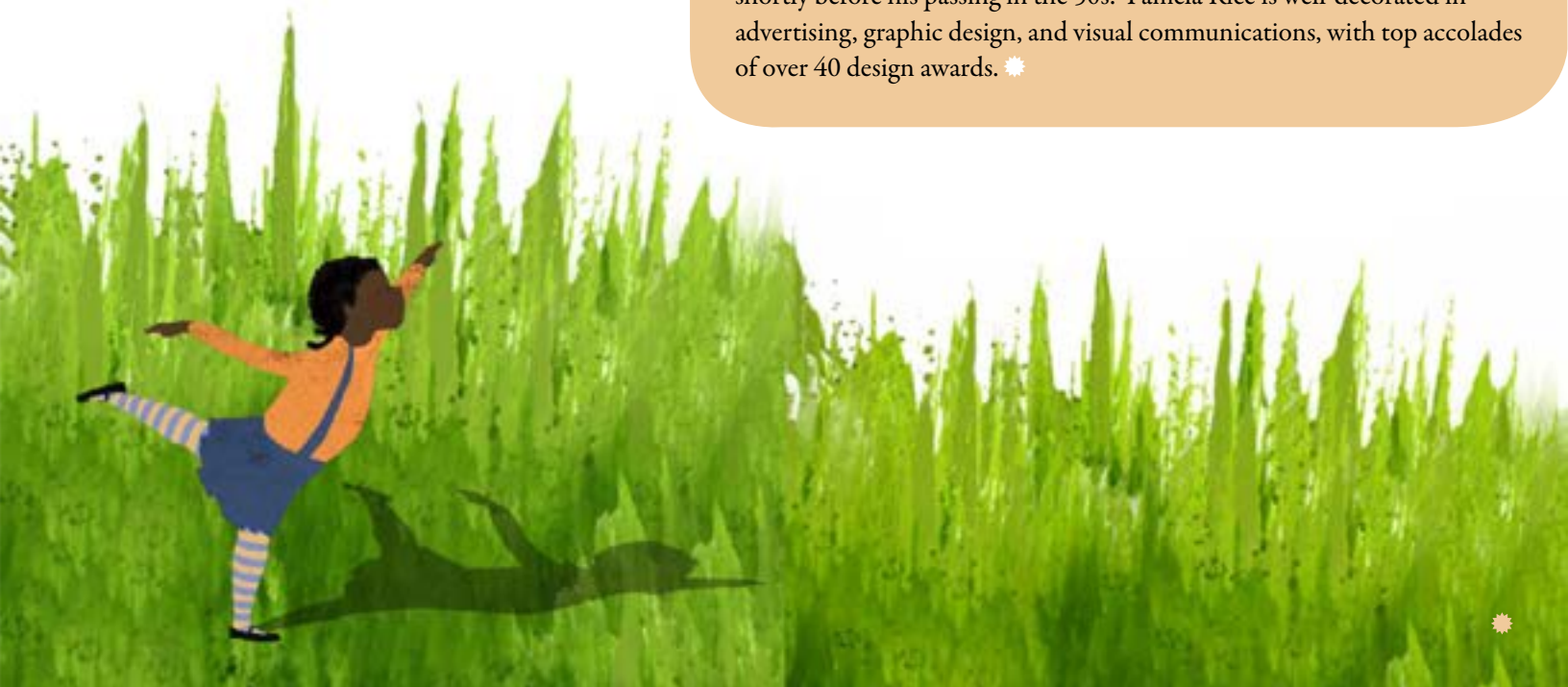
Creative Sparks

ILLUSTRATIONS

by Pamela C. Rice



Creating children's books is what PAMELA C. RICE enjoys and since August 2015 she has released over two dozen books. Each book is warmly illustrated by Rice and offers written artistic expression of her childhood experiences and inspirations that children will find fun, and adults will find imaginative and educational. Pamela grew up surrounded by creative art and design and believes that she is a person born to write and illustrate for children. Her father was hired as a designer/illustrator for Hallmark, shortly before his passing in the 50s. Pamela Rice is well-decorated in advertising, graphic design, and visual communications, with top accolades of over 40 design awards. ✨



Nevertheless...

SHE PERSISTED by Lizzie Cooke

It was a lovely, starlit night in August. I sat in a patch of dewy grass, my dog Luna beside me. She was a grumpy old lady and didn't object to the break in our evening walk. And I—I was allowing myself the rare moment to fill up on joy. After more than a year of querying, I had received a "yes." An agent liked my words. Loved them even. And he wanted to represent me.

That was August of 2015.

Seven years later, I am preparing to go on submission with my third manuscript and my second agent. I have yet to sell a book. Nevertheless, I remain optimistic. To quote the 2011 movie adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, this is no tale of woe. Rather, it is a story of the close calls and the small, precious glimmers of hope that define the life of a writer.

My first agent was a veritable fount of encouragement. After my initial manuscript, a young adult contemporary, failed to sell, he urged me to write another. I spent the better part of two years crafting a long, unwieldy draft, but the story wouldn't come together. It wasn't the right story. Or rather, I wasn't the right writer.

Around this time, I received an unexpected message via the contact form on my website. It was from an agent. She had read a previously queried manuscript of mine, a middle grade contemporary with magical elements, while working as an agency assistant in 2014. She still remembered the story, and now that she was an agent in her own right, she wanted to find out what had happened to it.

I told her that I had representation, but thanked her for the kind words, which gave me a new burst of energy. Then I showed the shelved manuscript to my agent. He thought it was delightful... but didn't know what to do with it. Given his focus on adult and young adult fiction, he wasn't well versed in the middle grade market.

After a difficult conversation about the direction of my career, we agreed to part ways. He generously volunteered to pitch my work to some of his colleagues, and I queried



a few other agents on my own. Four made offers of representation, including the agent who had reached out via my website. At last—a flurry of "yes's" after a disheartening dry spell of "no's."



Nevertheless, She Persisted

That was January of 2018.

I talked with each of the offering agents, and after a difficult decision—it was strange to be the person making a decision for once—I signed with Rachel Letofsky at CookeMcDermid. She was not the agent who had initially contacted me, but she won me over with her enthusiasm for my writing and her clear, compelling advice on how to clean up my dusty old middle grade manuscript. I spent a few months revising it, then we went out on submission.

And I got lovely rejection after lovely rejection. Rachel, undeterred, suggested we set the manuscript aside for a while and try selling it again later, perhaps as a second or third book. Then she waited patiently for me to finish the manuscript I had begun working on in the meantime, a quirky middle grade fantasy with dragons and witches and an ill-fated quest.

But I struggled to write. I was tired. And I was scared. I felt that this book had to be perfect. That it had to be *the one*. I could barely handle the pressure I put on myself. Meanwhile, the Earth turned and a new year dawned.

Soon it was March of 2020.

Like many, I struggled to find the mental space for creative work in this new, uncertain world. I was at a low point, ready to give up on my latest manuscript entirely, when I registered for the SCBWI-IL summer workshop, Words on the Web. I wasn't sure I wanted to attend. After all, it was yet another Zoom event in a time of endless Zoom events. But I did attend. And I found a warm, welcoming environment.

My critique group bonded quickly in our pre-workshop chats, and I was thrilled to win the Becky Mabry “Go For It” Scholarship—a much-needed boost of confidence. It took me another year to finish my book, but one of my critique partners from the workshop, Jeremy Simmons, faithfully read the manuscript chapter by chapter, holding my hand the whole way (in a metaphorical, socially distanced manner, of course).

At last, after getting the green light from my friend and fellow writer Rosaria Munda, I sent the manuscript to Rachel. She loved it. Yet I almost didn't believe her. After all the time I'd spent on the book and all the pressure I'd put on myself to get it right, I couldn't trust even the most glowing of responses. Only after my husband read Rachel's email aloud to me, with emphasis on all the positive bits, did I start to believe that she really liked it—and start to get excited for what was next.

As I write this, in May of 2022, I'm putting a final polish on the manuscript. I'm proud of this book and eager to send it out into the world, despite the unavoidable risk of rejection. Always, I hold fast to the accounts of venerable writers like Madeleine L'Engle and Beatrix Potter—and many of my own talented friends, such as Rena Barron and Ronni Davis—who persisted through years of rejection before finding their place on the bookshelves. I don't know what the future holds, but I'm sure of one thing—my story is not yet over.

To be continued . . . ✨

LIZZIE COOKE is a story writer, tree climber, and ice cream eater (on especially good days, all three at once). She co-coordinates the SCBWI-IL Food for Thought program and makes her home on the south side of Chicago with her husband, Michael, and dog, Tilly. You can find her online at www.lizziecooke.com.

Behind the Scenes...

THE SCBWI-IL 2022 ILLUSTRATOR MENTORSHIP

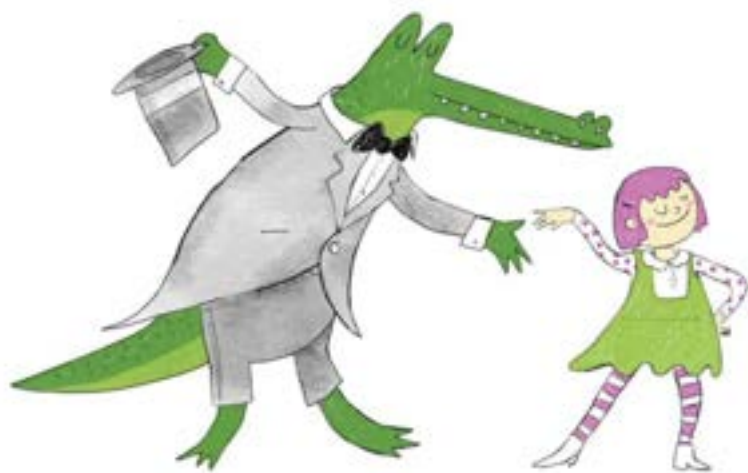
Insights from Denise Holmes and Erin Hookana

What's it like to be selected to mentor an aspiring illustrator? Or to be that mentee herself? Denise and Erin clue us in!

DENISE

I was so excited when I got the email from Rich Green asking me to be the 2022 SCBWI-IL Illustration Mentor. As someone who has a passion for illustrating children's picture books, I cannot imagine a better opportunity. Being able to share my knowledge with other aspiring illustrators is truly an honor. I accepted the job—and had a very difficult decision to make considering all the amazing applicants for the mentorship. But I kept coming back to Erin Hookana's *Gator & Girl* illustration, thinking, "This applicant has something I'm drawn to," and I know I can help her push this piece further.

Erin and I met on Zoom twice a month for three months, discussing what makes a good portfolio, agents, how to pick color palettes, the importance of having a daily sketchbook, and how to keep a healthy work/life balance. Erin spent a ton of time updating her website, working on improving and pushing her *Gator & Girl* piece, and discovering how to turn an idea/sketch into an illustration for the children's book market. She was incredibly eager to improve her work and took feedback well. I'm so proud to see the work she put into this mentorship; it shows in her final images! I



am more excited than ever to watch her career grow. Erin and I asked each other a few questions at the end of our mentorship and here they are:

ERIN

What made you decide to apply for the Illustrator Mentorship?

I was at a point where I was getting close to feeling good about my portfolio, but I needed some guidance in certain areas. In my case, it was background development and coloring technique as well as some self-promotion ideas.

What were your goals when you started?

My goals were to revamp my portfolio website, to get some feedback on my work, gain a better understanding of what makes a well-rounded illustration portfolio, and learn some next steps toward finding an illustration agent. Denise also gave me the assignment of making a three-panel sequence based on some characters I had already designed. This project helped me to focus on environment design and color.

Did you achieve what you set out to accomplish?

Yes! But there's still more work to do. Denise has helped me



Behind the Scenes: 2022 Illustrator Mentorship

to plan out the next few months as I work on reaching the larger goals. I finished my three-panel sequence during the three months, but now I'm going back in and reworking some pieces in my portfolio, and next I will be starting to reach out to some illustration agents.

How did I do as a mentor? (no pressure)

Great! It was an awesome experience. I especially appreciate how open and honest Denise was about her experiences as an illustrator and working for herself. I feel like I got a realistic idea of what it's like to be a full-time illustrator with a busy life, as well as some honest feedback about my work.

What was your favorite part of the mentorship?

I'm so happy with how far I came in three short months! I came out of the experience with some new work and a better understanding of the industry. I also really enjoyed spending time with Denise!

Was there something you learned that you wouldn't have without doing this mentorship?

Denise challenged me to come up with my own signature color palette. In the past, I always just grabbed colors I liked and there was no consistency. Now that I have set base of colors to work with, I can see that my body of work is looking more cohesive.

What would you say to those who are interested in applying next year?

Get clear about what you would hope to get out of the experience.

What are your next steps, now that the mentorship has ended?

Once I'm finished updating my website with my new work, it's time to start looking for an agent. I'm also working on a manuscript that I hope to get published.

DENISE

How did it feel to be asked to be the 2022 SCBWI-IL Mentor?

Shocking! Exciting! A complete honor!

What were your goals when you started?

I knew I wanted to find an applicant that I connected with. Someone who shared my love of characters and playfulness. I did hold myself to high expectations and took this role very seriously. I wanted to make sure that we had a clear goal to work on over the course of our time together, which was to update the Gator & Girl into an amazing final piece of art for her children's book portfolio. We also worked on updating her website, finding ways to create personal color palettes, how to incorporate environments and backgrounds



Behind the Scenes: 2022 Illustrator Mentorship



into her illustrations, and I encouraged Erin to start a daily sketchbook practice.

How does your experience teaching affect your illustration work?

Teaching and being a mentor allows me to share what I know and be challenged in ways that I otherwise wouldn't. It fuels my passion for creating work and it brings me joy to share with others the knowledge I've gained through the years.

Could you talk a bit about the importance of daily sketchbook time?

This is your "you" time. I personally would not have the style/voice I have today or the ideas I generate daily in my work without my sketchbook time. I am constantly pushing and teaching myself new things and recording them. I study other artists, I write down ideas and dreams, and I practice new techniques. Try drawing in your sketchbook every day, even if it's just for ten minutes.

What was your favorite part of the mentorship?

Getting to share my experiences and knowledge with Erin and in return making an awesome new friend!

Was there something you learned that you wouldn't have without doing this mentorship?

That a dedicated artist can do great things if they are working everyday toward a goal.

What would you say to those who are interested in applying next year?

Don't hold yourself back, thinking "Maybe next time." If you have applied before and didn't get in, apply again! Apply every time something comes up. The thing is, you never know what people are looking for. You might not get it this time, but there's always next time. Keep making work and keep being part of this amazing community.

What are your next steps now that the mentorship has ended?

I didn't realize just how much I loved being a mentor. It feels really good to be at a place in my career where I can share my knowledge with others. I'd love to do this again! ☀

ERIN HOOKANA is an illustrator and graphic artist based in Chicago. She earned her BFA in illustration from the College for Creative Studies in Detroit. After that, Erin lived in New York, where she worked as an illustrator and graphic designer in the fashion industry until moving back to the Midwest in 2012. Currently Erin is working to update her portfolio, fleshing out a book dummy, and starting to seek representation.

DENISE HOLMES is an award-winning children's book illustrator and educator living in Chicago with her husband, her daughter, and her tiny dog Mochi. Her illustrations are inspired by the magic and wonder of childhood, depicted through playful colors and whimsical characters. Denise's work can be found in over a dozen picture books, magazines, and greeting cards. She teaches illustration part-time at Columbia College Chicago and leads drawing workshops for kids and adults. You can see more of her work at [nisecmade.com](https://www.nisecmade.com).

Writing About...

DEATH AND LOSS FOR CHILDREN *by Malcolm Newsome*

As adults, we know intellectually that life isn't all sunshine and rainbows. So why is it that we often still struggle to address difficult topics—particularly death and loss—with children?

This past April, my eight-year-old son and four-year-old daughter were playing in the yard. What started out as a typical romp around the yard quickly morphed into a major ordeal when they found a newborn baby squirrel lying on the driveway. Right after, our dog led them to another one. By this point, they were sufficiently alarmed but also sufficiently curious. So they ran inside to sound the alarm and rushed back outside with their proverbial detective hats to scour the yard and see if there were more.

They found two more. For a total of four. All of them holding on for dear life.

The children went into full protection mode so that the baby squirrels would have a chance at surviving. They found a small, empty cardboard box and got an old towel to use for bedding. After that, they figured out how to gently lift the baby squirrels into the box. The kids were thrilled that they had done their part now that the squirrels were safe and secure.

Now they needed to figure out how to keep them that way.

After several calls to nearby organizations, we learned that none of them were interested in nursing baby squirrels back to health. So, unless the squirrels were found and rescued by their mother, they would certainly die.

By now, my daughter was distraught. She could hardly bear the thought of any further harm coming to these cute, innocent, defenseless baby squirrels. We had no choice but to prepare her for the inevitable. We just needed to figure out how to communicate it.

And this is where picture books about loss come in.

TALKING ABOUT LOSS

The story above is one example of how commonplace it is for children to experience loss. But, unfortunately, it's all too common for those experiences to go without any explanation.

And, seemingly, one of the least often explained is the loss of an unborn or stillborn child.

I recently read *Can't Hurt Me* by David Goggins. One of his quotes really struck me. He said, "From the time you take your first breath, you become eligible to die."

Those words caught me off guard. I had to pause for a while to think about how true that is. As I reflected, though, I realized that, as much as that statement rings true, it's a partial truth.

Countless parents lose a baby before it takes its first breath. These losses are often overlooked when it comes to the topic of death. I believe that's a result of the fact that society has made us feel that it's taboo to talk about them.

The problem is, if the unborn or stillborn aren't talked about, children miss out on an important reality that affects tens of millions of households throughout the world each year. As a result, they may grow into adults who also have gaps in their understanding. I was one of those adults.

FINDING A WAY

My wife and I already had children. So when we learned we were going to have another, we shared the exciting news that they would have a new sibling. We built excitement and anticipation. We shared ultrasound pictures. We discussed what it would be like to have a new baby around. So when we lost that baby and had to break the news to the kids, my wife and I were ill-prepared.

We needed words. So did our children.



Writing About Death and Loss for Children

I found it hard to process my own confusion and grief. It was only because of what we went through that I discovered just how many others have similar experiences. I felt so foolish that I'd previously had no idea of how many people are impacted by such a loss.

Fortunately, some friends offered up advice and resources as well as their love and support. While all of the support was great, none of the resources I encountered referenced how to help children navigate the loss as well.

A picture book about coping with the loss of an unborn sibling could have been the bridge my family needed to help us through. And knowing how it felt to not have such a book gave me the desire to create one.

ADDRESSING GRIEF IN PICTURE BOOKS

As I prepared to write a picture book on this topic, I thought long and hard about how to best address it. Ultimately, I arrived at three nonnegotiable elements.

First, the story needed to be told from a child's perspective. I was concerned that a third person narrative would make the experience feel too distant for both children and adult readers. I wanted to ensure the narrator was talking with them rather than at them—to remind readers they're not alone.

Second, the story *had* to be hopeful and restorative. I took this so seriously that I refused to share any early drafts with my critique partners until I felt like the hopeful beat was clearly present. And, even then, I was still hesitant because I didn't want my words to open any wounds without properly attending to them.

Third, the baby needed a name. Many pregnancies end prior to the unborn receiving a name from their families. As such, they remain nameless—making it more challenging to talk about them. And one thing I've seen time and time again is that a beautiful thing happens when we are able to name our grief.

As I wrote and rewrote, I found that having these anchors helped me stay focused on my ultimate goal: taking care of the reader. Which is essential when writing on difficult topics.

I remain convinced that well-written picture books on death and loss will help our children grow up to have a deeper level of awareness, empathy, and humanity. Along the way, we may be able to help furnish the words that will help bring about healing and restoration. ✨



MALCOLM NEWSOME is a children's book author. His forthcoming picture book, *Dear Star Baby* (Beaming Books, April 2023), is written as a letter from a young boy who is processing his wonders, wishes, and sadness after the loss of an unborn baby sibling. Visit www.malcolmnewsome.com for more information.

Voices of Change

QUEER KIDS DESERVE QUEER JOY by Nathan Lyon

I believe in the magic of writing.

When I decided to become a writer, it wasn't because I thought I was a master of the written word. It wasn't because I had accrued a slew of English degrees. Magic led me to my writing.

In the winter of 2014, my first main character introduced himself to me in a dream. Or, in all honesty, he appeared in that hazy time somewhere in between being asleep and fully awake. It was a moment of what Elizabeth Gilbert calls "big magic." In those few fuzzy minutes, this main character told me his name and age, he told me he loved to dance hip hop, and he told me he was undeniably queer. I immediately knew his story needed to be told and it needed to be told to young readers.

GROWING UP WITHOUT QUEER BOOKS

When I was young, I never read a single middle grade book featuring gay or queer characters. In the '90s, LGBTQ+ picture books, such as *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite, did exist, but none of them ever made their way into my hands. Back then, middle grade books about LGBTQ+ characters were extremely rare. I'd be hard-pressed to name many middle grade books published before 2010 that featured gay, lesbian, bi, or trans characters.

My moment of "big magic" combined with the lack of LGBTQ+ kidlit motivated me to get started on my first manuscript. I knew that queer kids deserved to see themselves in the pages of the books they read, and even in 2014, there weren't nearly enough books on library and classroom shelves that reflected their identities. So I got to writing. I collected craft books, read kidlit blogs, and planned out my first attempt at writing a middle grade book.

I loved getting to know this queer kid as I wrote his story. He absolutely had a little bit of me in him, or honestly, more than a little bit of me in him. Unfortunately, that might be where I went wrong. Don't misunderstand me, writers have to draw on their personal experiences. We've all heard



"write what you know" more times than we count. It's essential advice.

QUEER PAIN

But there was an inherent problem with me relying on my memories of being a queer kid in the '90s when writing my book. When I reflect on being a gay boy growing up, there's a lot of pain and confusion there. As a kid, I was ashamed of being gay for so many years. It was something I needed to ignore and hide. Like many LGBTQ+ kids, I had to deal with teasing and bullying. During my formative years, I was rarely proud to be gay. I rarely felt what I now refer to as queer joy.

This isn't meant to be a pity party. I'm just stating a fact about my childhood and a fact that many LGBTQ+ people my age know to be true. I feel incredibly fortunate that I've worked through the pain from my childhood and that my adulthood is bursting with queer joy.

But after years of writing my first middle grade book about a gay kid who loves to dance, I realized a lot of that personal pain of my own had seeped into his story. Honestly, his story was overflowing with pain. He was constantly bullied



Voices of Change

and teased by his peers. His own father hated him for being queer. This character, who came to me in a moment of magic, was constantly questioning his value and his worth. All of this made for an interesting and dramatic story. My friends and critique partners couldn't help but root for him.

WHAT ABOUT QUEER JOY?

But my gay character deserved better. He deserved to experience a whole lot more queer joy than my story gave him.

More than that, the potential young readers of my book deserved queer joy too. If my book made it out into the world and into the hands of LGBTQ+ kids without that joy, they would've been inundated with pain and self-doubt. Sure, like any middle grade book, this story had a happy ending. But there was a whole lot of suffering along the way. It's hard enough to be young and queer in this world. LGBTQ+ kids don't need more pain in the books they read. They need books that fill them with hope and pride for who they are.

It took me a long time to come to this realization. I'm grateful for gay friends who asked me tough questions when I talked about my writing. I'm also super grateful for my Pitch Wars mentor, who constantly pushed me to bring more hope and joy into my writing, despite my stubborn inclination to stick to the pain for the sake of drama.

Two years ago I made the tough decision to set this book aside. But I still believe in the magic that brought this main character and his story to me. One day, I will return to this book. Before I do though, I need to make sure I'm ready to embrace his story in a way that centers on joy. My character's queerness would need to bring him far more happiness than pain.

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

As I reflect on my journey, I can't help but wonder about other kidlit writers who are part of marginalized communities. When transgender or non-binary writers create characters, is it hard to know how much transphobia to include in their stories? Would ignoring transphobia be a dishonest way to write about the trans experience? Or is it more important to center joy?

Do BIPOC writers face a similar struggle? Is it hard to know how to balance the realities of racism in our world with the need for readers to see Black and brown characters experiencing joy? What about Muslim or disabled or immigrant writers? Do you ask similar questions?

To be abundantly clear, I do think there are a lot of fantastic middle grade books that touch on topics like homophobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, Islamophobia, and more. I think of Kacen Callendar's National Book Award winner *King and the Dragonflies*. It's a beautiful, vital book, but King does experience a lot of homophobia and racism. *Amina's Voice* by Hena Kahn comes to mind, in which her family's mosque is vandalized. It's another powerful story that also touches on pain.

I have a lot more questions than answers about how queer and other marginalized writers might balance pain and joy in their writing. But, in the end, it comes down to the potential readers of our books. Writing for kids and teens is a big responsibility. Especially when we are writing about identities that have been historically excluded from kidlit books. Keeping kids in mind as we write seems like good advice. ☀



NATHAN LYON is a teacher, advocate, and pre-published middle grade writer. He believes in the power of kidlit to make our world a more equitable place. He serves as a member of the SCBWI-IL Equity and Inclusion Team. You can find him on Instagram [@mr_lyon_4th](#) and Twitter [@nathanwlyon](#).

Shop Around the Corner

BOOKIE'S by Paula M. Karll

Education opens doors of opportunity and books allow children to explore and learn through identifying with characters and content. Representation is important in books written for children, and I believe it's important that we celebrate things we have in common while embracing our unique individuality positively. As a member of a diverse family, I emphasize the importance of love, kindness, and inclusiveness. Reading is one of the very significant ways that I have connected with my family and my community. When I received an invitation from the *Prairie Wind* to be this season's contributor to the "Shop Around the Corner" column and feature one of my local independent bookstores, I was elated. Bookseller Carrie Bertz was so helpful in connecting me with Bookie's Bookstore owner Keith Lewis and making this collaboration grand!



Tell us a little about the name of your local bookstore.

When the store opened in 1989, its name was The Bookie's Paperbacks & More. It was heavy on the paperbacks and light on the more.

When I took over the store in 2015, I went to Book Expo, and it became obvious that having the word "paperbacks" in the store's name gave it a pretty heavy connotation that this was a used bookstore with wall-to-wall Harlequins. I started working almost immediately to shed this part of the name because everyone just called it "Bookie's" anyway, so I decided to just shorten it.

How did Bookie's get its start?

In 1989, Larry Kroff opened Bookie's on the corner of 103rd and Western Ave. His mission was to supply the South Side of Chicago with gently used books, providing a cozy, labyrinthine storefront with books from every genre imaginable. The issue was that the tiny store on 103rd wasn't what I really wanted in my neighborhood. I wanted something that bridged the gap between the old space and the closed-down Borders. In 2006, Kroff sold the store to long-time employee Allison Platt, who began stocking a

larger selection of new books and updated the store with a more modern aesthetic, which nearly doubled the clientele and made Bookie's a household name for Southside residents.

Paula adds:

Keith Lewis became the owner of Bookie's in January 2015. Two years later, in July of 2017, he expanded Bookie's by moving it to a new storefront right around the corner on Western Ave. He expanded even further by opening a second location in Homewood in August of 2018.

What are you looking for in the books you choose to put on your shelves?

We look for unique diverse books that you generally won't find in your big box stores. We want people to be able to find a book in our store that they feel represents and reflects them. While we can't carry every book, we do try to provide a broad title list in many genres.

Do you interact with local authors (readings, events, etc.) and, if so, what is the best way for authors to connect with you? And do you ever sell books by self-published authors?

It's important for authors to know there are alternatives



Shop Around the Corner



to self-publishing through Amazon. We try not to stock books published through the company that would rather see us and all other competition gone. We do readings and events with local authors. Information about current events can be found on our website and social media. We do have criteria for stocking local authors.

For more information, contact authors@bookiesbookstores.com

Is there anything else you'd like a community of authors, illustrators, and children's book lovers to know?

Bookie's prides itself on providing diverse new and used books and gifts for readers of all ages on the South Side as we have for over 33 years. 🌟

PAULA M. KARLL is an award-winning children's author, an avid educator with over 10 years of experience working with grades K through 12, and the founder of "Donate Knowledge," a new not for profit (NFP) 501 (c)(3) organization created to donate books to less fortunate communities and to promote and foster literacy and inclusion-awareness.

Having earned a master's degree in special education, Paula is a mentor, motivational speaker, children's literacy advocate, and a diverse-learner educator and strategist. Paula is a member of the [CEC](#), a member of the [BCALA](#), and a member of SCBWI.

Illustrator's Tips



ART BLOCK: TIPS FOR UNCLOGGING THE BLOCK! *by Krista Heij-Barber*

When thinking of ideas for this issue's Illustrator's Tips, I thought to myself, What is the biggest hurdle I have had to overcome as an illustrator? ART BLOCK. As artists we've all encountered it at one time or another. It can be anything from not having an idea of what to draw to difficulty deciding how to approach a composition or feeling unmotivated. Here, I will share a few ideas that have helped me tackle the block and in turn have allowed me to create some illustrations I'm most proud of!

of the many drawing prompts available online or on social media. Another idea is to keep a page in a notebook or on your phone with ideas or prompts that you randomly thought of. Then when you are "out of ideas" you always have a stockpile of prompts to reference. Just use these as idea sparkers and see where they can go. Don't start with anything but a fun sketch in mind and see where you end up.

JUST DRAW. MOVE THAT PENCIL!

I know, that sounds easier said than done. When I started out in animation school, we would draw sheets of circles as warm-ups. Just circles, all different sizes and even using both hands. At first I thought these little exercises were silly. Then I realized they were much more than a warm-up. Just the idea of putting something—anything—down on the page is helpful. Sometimes those circles became different shapes and then so much more. Suddenly, dancing characters I didn't even know were in my head emerged on the page. They weren't fantastic drawings but they were there and they gave me the feeling of accomplishment that's needed when starting any work.



TAKE A BREAK

Step away, physically. Take a walk or a hike. Go sit in the sun. Read a book. Craft. Woodwork. Take an online class. Try something that you've always wanted to explore. Sometimes just stepping away physically can allow you to come back with a new view on things.

STOP THE COMPARISON

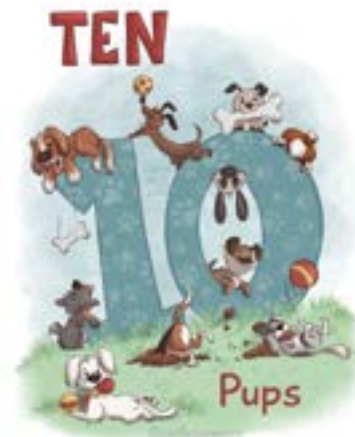
These days it's so difficult not to compare our work with that of others. Social media platforms are a way we survive sometimes, a way to connect and a way to learn. However, comparison can be a creativity killer. Try looking at others' work with new eyes. What can I learn from their work? How can we support each other? As artists we need to build each other up and not tear ourselves down.

USE DRAWING PROMPTS AS IDEA SPARKERS

What to draw is usually the first hurdle when sketching or looking for an idea for a portfolio piece. Try using some



Illustrator's Tips



CREATE AN ART SERIES

What do I mean by an art series? A compilation of various art pieces that either tell a story or, once compiled, create a fun complete set. For instance, I decided I wanted to do an alphabet series. I created three or so a week and tried not to pressure myself. I just wanted to have fun and grow my portfolio. I enjoyed the alphabet series so much I decided to do a numbered flash card set next.

BE INSPIRED BY YOUR FAVORITE ARTISTS

There are many ways to do this. Study them. What works for them? What do you like about them that sparks interest for the viewer? How can you use that in your work? Be inspired, don't copy. It's about adding to who you are, not trying to be someone else. A fantastic Instagram hashtag is #dtiys — Draw This in Your Style. #dtiys offers a way to look at an artist's drawings and make them your own. It's also a fantastic outlet for just simply drawing and not having to come up with an idea from a blank page.

REORGANIZE YOUR OFFICE/WORK SPACE

I know this one can sound far-fetched but it works for me sometimes. Even as a kid I found myself needing a change of

pace, sometimes moving my bed and desk around at 10pm, much to my parents' dismay.

Today, I still love moving my office furniture around every now and then. Even though I'm limited to only a few layouts, it kind of clears out the mental cobwebs and resets the creativity.

PARTICIPATE IN AN ART CHALLENGE

An art challenge can be anything from the ones promoted on social media to a "personal" challenge. Online you can find monthly challenges such as #mermay and #inktober to name a few. If you're interested in daily prompts, here are two fun pages:

- Making Art Everyday (Instagram) - [@bardotbrush](#)
- Doodle-a-Day (Instagram) - [@ellolovey](#)

I decided a few years ago to try my hand at a "Christmas Countdown Challenge," which would be a daily drawing for most of December. I chose a character I loved to draw, my little Gingerbread dude, and a drawing prompt list provided online. For the most part, this was a fun experience. I didn't finish all the 24 days that year, but that's okay. I explored my drawing style and some Procreate brushes. The next year or so I went back and finished the set just for fun. I'm happy with it and have gotten so much interest and so many compliments on it.



Illustrator's Tips

WHAT WORKED THE BEST FOR ME?

I would have to say a combination of "Creating a Series" and "Participating in an Art Challenge." I really had fun with all of the sets I created and am super-proud of them. Even though I didn't complete one of the sets the first time around, it allowed me to just draw and find my love for art again and "unclog" the block. I love creating these sets/series and am eager to find time to do another soon.

If you would like to see more of the completed sets, please check them out on my IG [@drawn_by_krista](#) and my website at [kristaheijbarber.com](#) ✨

"overwhelmed"



KRISTA HEIJ-BARBER is an illustrator, designer, and independent business owner based in the suburbs of Chicago. Born and raised in Canada, Krista studied at Sheridan College and began her career in animation. Soon after college, she was accepted into the prestigious [Animation Internship Program](#) at the [Walt Disney Animation Studios](#) in Florida. Krista spent nine years there, where she had the joy of animating on classics such as *Mulan*, *Lilo and Stitch*, and *Brother Bear*. Soon after the Florida Studio closed, she began her freelancing career. Since then, she has had the opportunity to work on various art projects as a character designer, storyboard artist, and a magazine illustrator. Krista has her own line of rubber stamps for [Whimsy Stamps](#) and runs her own online store, where she sells her artwork in many forms, from stencils to art prints. Krista is definitely influenced by her spirited and comical children and dog Buster. You will often see them pop up in many of her artworks!

You can find her at:

IG- [@drawn_by_krista](#)

Portfolio- [www.kristaheijbarber.com](#)



#365 doodles with JohannaFitz
#kristaheijbarber



Day 19 : Toadstool

#365 doodles with JohannaFitz

Writer's Tips

by Patricia Hruby Powell

HOW TO GET STARTED AND KEEP GOING

In this column I'll specifically address writing a novel, but it could be helpful in writing a picture book or even nonfiction. Here are some ideas for how to get started and how to continue.

WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW (TO SHOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE)

What could you write about? Ask yourself these questions:

1. What do YOU want to say?
2. What do YOU *have* to say?
3. What do you have to say that might change someone else's world?
4. What is your personal manifesto?
5. What do you dream about?

Maybe these questions are different ways of asking the same thing. But one may spark your deepest answer. Since I'm using my work-in-progress as an example, I'll say that personal health is a mainstay of my life. To answer the third question: I might be able to help a young person suffering from anorexia nervosa work toward recovery.



Author (about 105 pounds at age 21) as the Creator in Sara Henning's, Zappo the Clown at the Howff Theater in London

TAKE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE

Perhaps you want to write a story based on your own or your child's experience, or kids in your classroom—the classroom of your childhood or the class you teach now. I recently started writing a memoir. A life is a long and unwieldy “story,” and I came to realize that there were multiple plots and stories to be taken from my life. But it took me weeks and months of writing that memoir to arrive at that realization. Then I had to decide which experience to fictionalize and plot for the novel I'd work on. Which experience from *your* life might you fictionalize?

I was anorexic for the decade of my twenties—the most intense decade of my professional dance career. So I'll use my knowledge and experience of anorexia and the dance world (where anorexia is rampant) to write a YA novel in verse. The characters will be composites of people I know. Who is your main character?



Anorexic girl



Writer's Tips

MAIN CHARACTER

My main character, Martina, is an aspiring dancer. Luckily for her she lives in an environment that allows her to be a serious and committed dancer in her high school years. Unfortunately for her, she becomes anorexic at sixteen. Whereas I suffered the disease throughout my twenties, Martina will become considerably healthier after one year. This can happen, especially if the young person finds a mentor.

I ask myself, *What if* my experience had occurred five years earlier and in contemporary times? And now I build a plot around that.

PLOT ELEMENTS TO PLAN

I recommend you *plan* the following components of your story. Your character must have a:

- Goal (internal): Your character must want something
- Obstacle (external): Something must stand in your character's way
- Change: Your character(s), who must solve their own problem(s), must change from the beginning to the end of your story. How?

My example:

Goal: Martina wants to be a dancer. Specifically, to be a dancer in a prestigious company. So did I.



Alvin Ailey's American Dance Theater performing Revelations

Obstacle: It's a hard world overall. But let's break it down. Martina has become anorexic, which is life threatening. What is external about being anorexic? The dance world expects a certain body type and Martina aspires to that body

type. So, firstly, societal expectations. And the other side of the coin? Her mother is aghast as she watches her daughter diminish. So, secondly, hiding her disease from her mother. And everyone else.

Change: My character is going from being an instrument (a dancer in someone else's traditional work) to becoming a creator. A choreographer. Instead of standing in front of a mirror all day taking only traditional classes, she begins to make site-specific works with dancers in trees; dancers in fields of snow; dancers in pools.



Slender dancer

RESEARCH

In my experience all books require research.

For this novel, I must learn contemporary high school culture. I start by talking with high school teachers I know and I expect to progress to meeting and knowing contemporary high school students.

I'm out of touch with the dance world, so I met with the head of the University of Illinois dance department, who is a good friend. I found out about the academic dance world, which feeds the professional dance world. Most students



Writer's Tips

aspire to be in a prestigious dance company. Few will succeed. I'll be talking to my dance friends, who might also know young dancers. Eventually I'll find my way to the sort of young dancer who aspires to dance like Martina does. I'll meet fascinating people along the way. Yahoo! Who do *you* want to talk to?



High school hallway

MORE PLOT ELEMENTS AND STORY COMPONENTS TO PLAN

Inciting Incident: I'll use a version of the same incident that started my anorexia. A thwarted love relationship. That universal experience should attract teen readers. The boy/man in my novel must be pretty spectacular in order to send the protagonist into an emotional tailspin. My boyfriend was a member of the London Contemporary Dance Company. Martina's will be a high school soccer star, perhaps from Argentina or somewhere in Latin America.

The Climax: Martina will hit rock bottom in a scene that will land her in the hospital. She'll see her potential death and this will give her the will to recover. But all along there's been this thread of her creating site-specific dances that she videos and posts on TikTok. (Yep, I'm going to have to research and learn TikTok). So Martina's road to health—her new mode of creating—will be evolving at the same time that she's diving deeper and deeper into diminishing herself—that is, both losing weight and her declining self esteem. The outcome of your novel must evolve from the action of the entire novel.



Downtown Champaign, Illinois

Setting: I'm using my present home location, Champaign-Urbana, because I know it so well and because it has a prestigious dance world right in town. Setting can be the hardest part to create authentically. The more knowledge you have of a place, the more authentic your story can be.



University of Illinois Quad – Champaign-Urbana, Illinois

JUMPING IN–DISCOVERY DRAFT

You can start writing before knowing all the above components if that's how you have to work. That is, you can just start figuring out these things as you write your *discovery draft*. But I've learned from experience that I need to *plan* before I jump.



Writer's Tips



*High school soccer player –
a good model for Antonio*

So let's get writing. Start with the inciting incident, the point at which everything changes in the life of your protagonist. That needs to be close to the beginning. For my novel, Antonio (the boyfriend and soccer player) has ghosted Martina while she was away at dance camp. Martina returns home to her supportive sister, Liliana, who is visiting from college. Liliana convinces Martina to go to the last party of the summer before school starts. Antonio will likely be there with his new girlfriend Angela. Will Antonio realize his mistake? He's essentially a nice guy and he's sorry and wishes he weren't hurting Martina. But he is hurting her.

Here's the place to introduce Martina more fully and flesh out her character.

I'll give her some of the qualities of my sixteen-year-old self. Innocent, determined, excitable, impressionable, resourceful, naïve, shy—and an aspiring dancer. How can I show those characteristics? In action and in dialog. At the party, Antonio and Martina go outside to the garden, where a few kids are retching in the bushes. Antonio compliments Martina's new curves (which disturbs Martina). And worse, Antonio tells her that Angela needs him more than she does. (And that comes from my experience when I was 20). Martina wrestles with what the heck "She needs me more than you do" means. Martina walks/runs home, alone and devastated. She wants to disappear, be gone, be done. At this point Martina's anorexia begins to kick in.

A word about anorexia. It's about control. If you can't control your life or your future, you can still control your weight. I'll have Martina go from 129 down to 97 pounds in a year. Pretty much what I did. It creates a handy structure on which to hang my story. Every book is different and requires its own structure and figuring this out is a big leap into the actual writing.

MAKING THE NOTE DRAFT

I wrote the first scene—the party scene—to feel that I was underway. I then started inserting stuff that would happen throughout the year, including that rock bottom scene. I wrote about Martina's supportive friend, Celeste, who is dealing with a problem of her own. Since I'd been thinking about my story for weeks, I had lots of ideas and loads of notes. On my Note Draft, I write enough to remind me what I was thinking; and maybe some good descriptions or snatches of dialog.

I inserted the numbers (her weight each time she weighs) and then figured out the dates that corresponded. Where weight loss is considered, you can lose about a half pound a week; at least that's a healthy and effective way to whittle away pounds. And Martina does care about health. You must be healthy to dance. There are some blips and bounds (getting stomach flu which to an anorexic individual might be uncomfortable, but it takes off pounds fast, so it's a victory). Lots of other unhealthy mindsets will be woven into the plot. What Martina sees as victories, the reader will



Writer's Tips

see as horrors. I'll give readers insight into the disease and those who suffer it and how difficult it is to reverse.

The single-spaced Note Draft is presently seventeen pages long. I expect it to grow a lot. Three times that? Maybe more. I might write fleshed-out scenes along the way.

THE REAL FIRST DRAFT

As I write, I'll use the following information, some of which is detailed in my earlier "Writer's Tips" columns. <https://talesforallages.com/writing-tip-1-show-dont-tell/>

Show Don't Tell

- Word (Banks) –
 - especially great verbs
 - pithy details
- Sensory details – senses chart
- Metaphors, similes, personifications
- Dialog
- Scenes

Here are some useful pointers to build your plot. In each scene your main character must:

1. want something
2. be foiled (by something or someone)

which thickens the plot.

Each scene must have these elements

1. Physical (action)
2. Mental (emotion)

which builds the spiritual line or theme of your story.

Each scene should advance at least one of the following:

1. exposition (information about plot)
2. world building
3. character development

My work-in-progress, as yet untitled, will be a YA novel in verse, as noted above. The first scenes I've written are awful because this is a first draft. And that's okay. I'm getting the plot down on the page so I'll have it clearly established before I get too lost in writing to be able to find any plot at all. Because for me, plotting is the hardest part of writing. And if I just write blindly scene by scene I get entangled and lost and there will be no plot. And by golly, I'm determined to make a plot. This time.

Unfortunately, I can't give you a template for making a novel, but I hope this sets you on a path to write a novel—or other long piece. And very good luck to you. ✨

PATRICIA HRUBY POWELL, a former dancer/choreographer, trained in London, NYC, and Philadelphia and toured worldwide with her dance company, One Plus One. She teaches Writing Children's Literature annually at Judson University, in Elgin, Illinois. She has also been a storyteller and librarian. Her books include *Lift As You Climb*; *Struttin' With Some Barbecue*; *Loving vs. Virginia*; and *Josephine*. Forthcoming are *Sunday Before Sundown*; *Cave of the Heart: The Story of Martha Graham*; and *Duck Duck Goose*. Visit her at <https://talesforallages.com/>

Writer's Bookshelf

THREE BOOKS FOR WRITING REHAB

Reviewed by Traci Dant

Two years ago my 5-year-old daughter and I were walking through a parking lot and she was struck by an SUV. The accident broke her tiny bones and shattered her emotions. We spent months seeking healing for her body and spirit.

Every loud noise terrified her.
She refused to walk through parking lots.
She couldn't sleep alone.

Watching her struggle with trauma and anxiety plunged me into an abyss as a mother and a writer. I'd been through creative deserts before. But this was different. Not drought but famine. Not a bad day but a dreadful season. My muse had disappeared when the SUV struck my child.

"Are you writing?" friends would ask. But I was not writing a bit. Before the accident I was in the middle of a project I loved. I was writing a novel about my mother's near-death experience with polio. The project had been affirmed by my writer's group and had won a work-in-progress grant. But I could not write a word. I felt frozen and disconnected from myself. Like the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*.

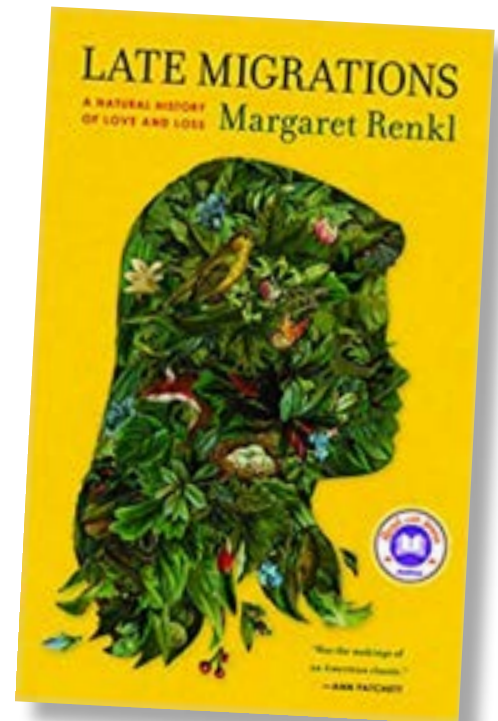
That terrible season in my life has passed. I have been able to write again, even if in fits and starts. But the return was only possible because I realized I needed to start small.

I needed writing rehab.
I needed to stretch, to practice, to re-focus on the basics.
For me, the basics were: falling in love with words again, restarting a writing routine, and remembering the goal of publishing.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH WORDS

One of my wounds from this time period was a damaged attention span. I had trouble finishing a magazine much less diving into a book. Writing a novel seemed like an impossibility.

When I confessed my troubles to my former writing instructor, she sent me Margaret Renkl's *Late Migrations*. Renkl's book is a beautiful meditation on nature and family. Each chapter is



no more than three pages. Each one is a deep dive into a small thing—like a snake hunting in the grass.

Renkl writes, "I suddenly realize that something extraordinary is happening right before me, a great serpent slowly on the move and all the songbirds aware of its presence and calling to each other and telling each other to beware. The miracle isn't happening in the sky at all. It's happening in the dark weeds of an ordinary backyard, among last year's moldering leaves and the fragrant soil turned up by moles." Because Renkl's pieces were short, I could handle the reading. It was like consuming a meal of tapas instead of one big entrée. After weeks of not reading, within a few days I had consumed a whole book again. And the beauty of the language and the simplicity of the narrative reminded me of why I love words in the first place.

A WRITING ROUTINE

When it came time to resume a writing routine, I immediately thought of Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*. It was one of the first books on craft I bought as a graduate student. Her advice is as good today as it was then. Lamott stresses that every writer must have an appointment in the desk chair whether the muse comes to visit that session or not.



Writer's Bookself



But just as rehab after an injury is painful—sitting at one's desk after a long time away is painful too. Lamott says, "Yet somehow in the face of all this, you clear a space for the writing voice, hacking away at the others with machetes, and you begin to compose sentences. You begin to string words together like beads to tell a story."

THE GOAL OF PUBLISHING

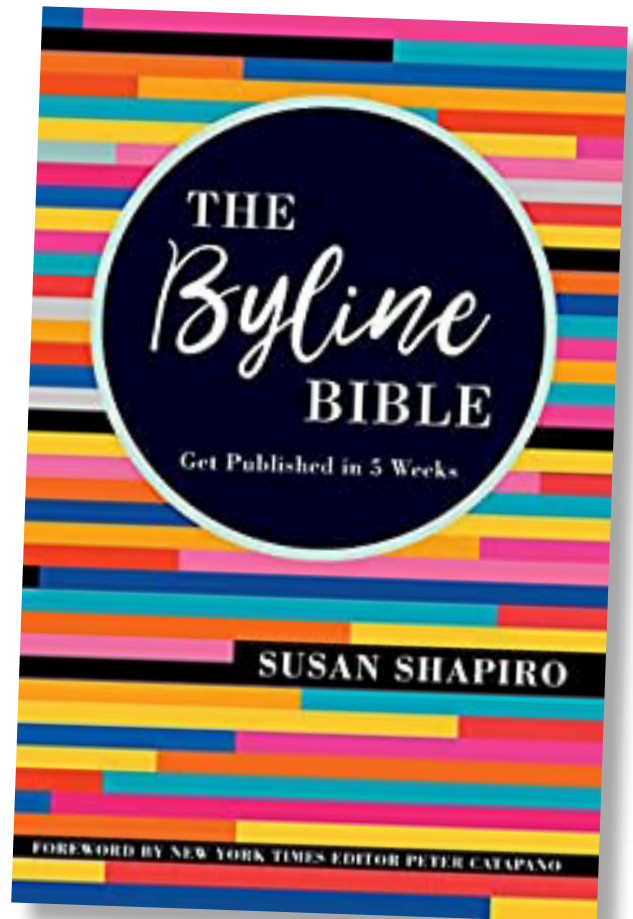
During my long season of not writing fiction, I found I was able to write a little if I wrote about what was happening to me. As I was dabbling in nonfiction, a writer's group colleague introduced me to *The Byline Bible* by Susan Shapiro. Shapiro says, "The best way to break into publishing is with a great three-page double-spaced personal essay. There's nothing more engaging than an intimate tale told with insight, humor, or candor."

Since I had nothing to lose, I took Shapiro's advice. I wrote about the accident and how we struggled through it. I wrote about connections between my hibernating polio project and our current pandemic. Then I polished up those essays and sent them out into the world.

Shapiro's work was good medicine for me. Because the essays had lower stakes than my novel, I was able to overcome the writerly disease of perfectionism. I was able to think about publishing instead of hiding my work in my laptop.

Sending work out again was a marker of progress. A sign of healing. Just as my daughter regained the ability to walk

in a parking lot or to sleep through the night on her own, I had regained something essential as well. I had regained the courage to publish. I was not fully healed, but I was well enough to be brave again. ☀



TRACI DANT is a fiction writer and poet. She holds a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Washington University in St. Louis. Her first book for children, *Some Kind of Love: A Family Reunion in Poems*, was a Chicago Public Library Best of the Best selection. Her novel in progress, *Polio Summer*, has been recognized with a grant from the Sustainable Arts Foundation and was awarded a Many Voices Outstanding Manuscript Award by SCBWI.

Mentor Texts

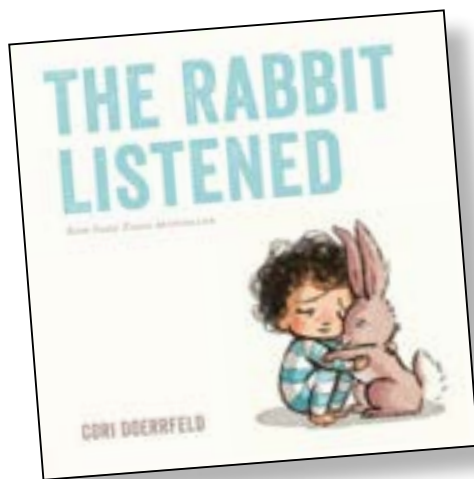
THINGS I LEARN FROM CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

by Gauri Dalvi Pandya

I amusingly refer to myself as a forty-one-year-old “groan-up.” And the older I get, the more joy I find in children’s picture books. Even though I read them to my daughter, the pictures and the words speak to me. And I am reminded of some things I have forgotten while “adulthood.”

To find joy in the little things
The sense of re-igniting the wonder
To pause and listen

In a world full of noise, the following picture books especially give me hope. They are not just mentor texts in the sense of great writing and illustrating; they also carry forgotten wisdom for groan-ups like you and me.



THE RABBIT LISTENED

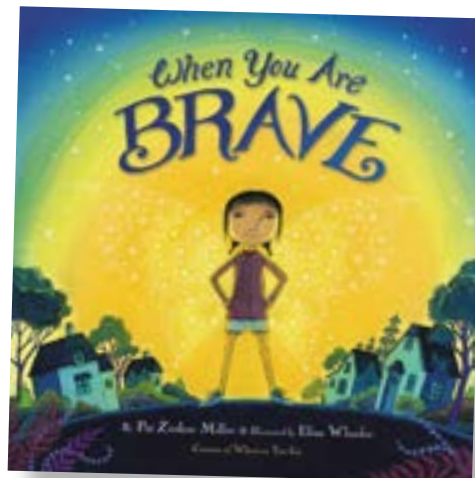
by Cori Doerrfeld.

In our over-connected but emotionally void world we have forgotten to listen.

When someone opens up to us about something broken, we often rush to give advice because we think that we always have clarity on what others should do. And we forget that maybe all one really wants is to be heard—without advice, solutions, or judgment.

This is the story of Taylor, who builds something special, something spectacular. But when bad things happen that destroy his creation, Taylor gets upset. One by one his friends arrive to help. Bear advises him to be angry. Hyena tells him to laugh about it. Ostrich asks him to pretend like nothing’s happened. Snake tells him to become vicious and destroy someone else’s work. And then arrives Rabbit, who just listens to Taylor. He listens to it all. No advice, no judgment, no solution. And just by feeling heard, Taylor finds new energy to rebuild.

That is the power of listening. And on some days that is all that matters.



WHEN YOU ARE BRAVE

written by Pat Zietlow Miller and
illustrated by Eliza Wheeler

“Some days when everything around you seems scary, you have to be brave.”

That is how this wonderful book about being brave begins. It made me wonder. “Bravery” is a relative term. What I consider brave might not be the same for you. Tasting a new dish, getting out of your bed, or packing your belongings and moving to a new country are all acts of bravery. If you think about it, we are all born brave. Remember that little child who took her first step? What an act of bravery, wasn’t it?

But as we get older, we forget how to be brave. We fear failure. We become scared to make mistakes. We worry more about “What if things go wrong?”

But what if things go right?

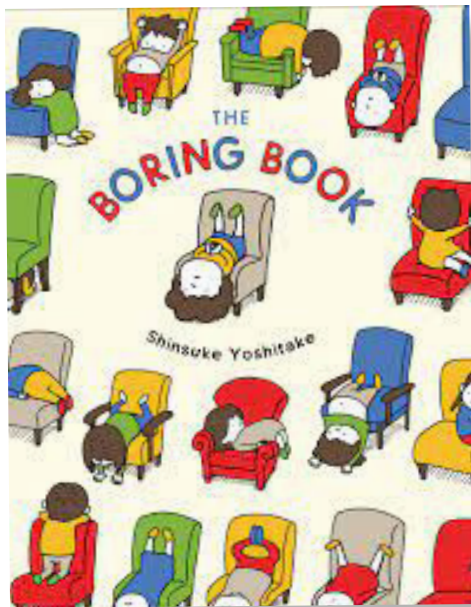
This book reminds us of the light within all of us that might shine brighter on some days and flicker on other days, but



Mentor Texts

we do have the power to turn that light into a flame. The illustrations depict the journey of a girl who is moving to a big city with her parents. Saying goodbye to her neighbors and worrying about making new friends, all she sees is a dark road ahead. Until she breathes deeply and looks inside herself.

No matter where we are, no matter what we're facing, all we have to do is to think of that light within us. It might seem smaller in the beginning but that light is waiting to turn into a flame. As this book shows, we all have the sparks of courage within us. All we have to do is to remember to turn on the light.



THE BORING BOOK

by *Shinsuke Yoshitake*

Have you felt bored at any time today? When was the last time you allowed yourself to be bored?

This “boring” book is a wonderful reminder to welcome boredom into our busy lives.

As adults we are always in search of the next exciting thing. And mostly we end up scrolling on our phones looking at someone else's exciting adventures only to search for the next exciting thing once again. We have forgotten that boredom is inevitable, boredom is essential.

This is the story of a little kid who is bored. Bored of his toys, bored of his books, bored of watching TV. And then he questions boredom. What is boredom? Can the world always be divided into boring and fun? Who came up with the word “boring”? Was he bored when he came up with the word “boring”?

The character talks endlessly about boredom, eventually making it sound like a lot of fun.

Boredom is beautifully unpacked in this book, reminding us that it is not just a stagnant state of mind but an opportunity for a new experience. Boredom doesn't want to be cool; it wants you to do things that you think are cool.

Stare out the window.

Look up at the sky and spot different shapes in the clouds.
Walk barefoot on the prickly grass.

Get bored so that everything after that becomes exciting.
Get bored and you might learn something new.

Isn't that a wonderful thing to do? 🌟

After working as a writer for over a decade in the advertising industry in three countries (India, Malaysia, South Africa) GAURI DALVI PANDYA is now an aspiring children's picture book writer. Her most recent moments of pride were when she won the 2021 SCBWI Many Voices Prize and was a 2021 [#PBPartyFinalist, hosted by Mindy Alyse Weiss](#). Gauri currently lives in Chicago, where she is mostly exploring the busy lanes of life through the eyes of her child. She has a podcast on Spotify called “Things I Learn from Children's Picture Books,” and you can also find her on Instagram at [@giddymum](#), where she posts about her life as a parent.

Diversity Network

SCBWI-IL DIVERSITY NETWORK by Donna Beasley

“Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.”

—Vernā Meyers, Inclusion strategist and cultural innovator

ABOUT OUR NETWORK

The SCBWI-IL Diversity Group strives to be a helpful and collaborative space for multicultural authors and illustrators to share their work, network with each other, provide peer critiques, and educate in the areas of writing, marketing, and the publishing of children’s books. Covid has of course cramped our style for meeting in person and we have met via Zoom for the past two years.

Our meeting location is in Hyde Park. We started out meeting monthly. Now that we meet on Zoom the meetings are quarterly. About 80 people belong to the Diversity Group. Generally, five to 25 people attend our quarterly meetings, the number varying by interest in the topic. One benefit of meeting on Zoom is that our members in the suburbs or on the northside can participate more often.

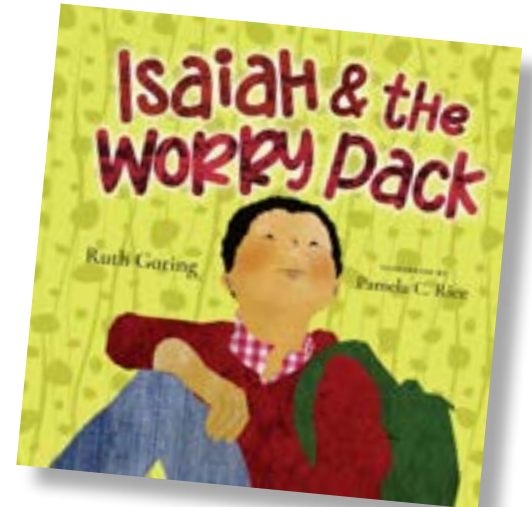
WHAT WE DO

Some of the educational workshops we’ve hosted include “How To Build Your Author Platform,” “Kindle Vella Workshop,” “How to Self-Publish Your Children’s Book,” and “How to Market Your Book on Social Media and Amazon.”

We’ve also done some networking events that include a “Fiesta Meet and Greet” for new members, our December pizza party, guest experts, and my personal favorite, launch parties for our group member authors whose books are just published.

Some of the books our members have published in the past year include:

- *Isaiah and the Worry Pack* by Ruth Goring and illustrated by Pamela Rice
- *My Mama is Flying that Plane* by Donna Beasley and illustrated by Edwin Harris, Jr.
- *Aren’t You Supposed to Be in the Zoo?* by Nitsana Lazarus and illustrated by Indol Studios



Diversity Network

CHALLENGES WE FACE

One of the biggest challenges we've had with the Diversity Group is with our on-site meeting locations. We started out meeting on the University of Chicago campus but had to move when our U of C host changed positions and no longer had access to the space. We then met for about a year in the community room of Treasure Island grocery store in Hyde Park. When the store closed unexpectedly, we began meeting at the University of Chicago Polsky Entrepreneurship Center—until Covid closed it down. We'd like to go back to in-person meeting this September and are currently looking for a new meeting location. Until then, we'll continue meeting on Zoom.

COMMUNITY WE SUPPORT

We also participate in local book events in the Hyde Park Area, like the Middle Grade Mayhem program put on by the Hyde Park SCBWI-IL group. And most recently we had our first in-person event in two years, Words and Wine, hosted by both [57th Street Books](#) and [57th Street Wines](#). That event featured several local authors of both adult fiction and children's books. In 2021, after 33 years, the Hyde Park Children's Book Fair was forced to cancel due to Covid, but we hope it comes back this year!

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION EFFORTS

The Illinois chapter of SCBWI is working to make the children's book world more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. We recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and cultural and religious minorities. Two key programs are the Many Voices Work-in-Progress Mentorship and the Many Voices Manuscript Prize, which both recognize exemplary works from among SCBWI-Illinois' diverse and underrepresented creators. The winning applicant of the first one receives a six-month mentorship working with a seasoned author, illustrator, or author-illustrator. The Manuscript Prize winner gets a chance to have their work reviewed by a professional literary agent.

The most recent mentorship winners are Allie Ergang and Christina Leong for their manuscript *Willow's New World*. The Many Voices Manuscript Prize winner is Karen Su, for her first picture book. She received a written critique and a 30-minute Zoom with literary agent Charlotte Wenger from the Prospect Agency in Boston.

The SCBWI-IL Diversity and Inclusion team includes Urania Smith, Nathan Lyon, Alina Celeste, and Effie Koliopoulos. Donna Beasley is the Diversity Network Rep.

WHAT'S IN THE FUTURE?

We're anticipating getting back to live events in the fall. One of the top events requested by members is a workshop for illustrators looking to do either their first or their next book. It will feature a panel of illustrators talking about their work and the road to publishing.

We also want to grow our membership and plan to do more industry-related events to reach interested writers and artists. One idea we'll try this year is collaborating with our local library to do a joint event, an idea that's worked successfully for other SCBWI-IL networks.

You're invited to join us for any of our upcoming events. Our meetings are open to all SCBWI-IL members. ☀



DONNA BEASLEY is the SCBWI-IL Diversity Rep and the author of the children's books *My Mama Is Flying that Plane*, *Cowboy Blaze Barton's First Cattle Drive*, and *Kason's Kite*. She is also the publisher of KaZoom Kids Books.

Season's Crop

CLICK TO BE ADDED
TO A FUTURE
SEASON'S CROP

by Jenny Wagh

Picture Books

FICTION

*Adventures of Beanie the Spider,
Book 2: Beanie and the Kid*
Written & Illus. by Christine Banks
Bookbaby, April 2022
ISBN: 9781667833415

The End
by John Bray
Illus. Josh Cleland
Starry Forest Books, August 2022
ISBN: 9781951784126

How to Dress a Dinosaur
by Robin Currie
Illus. Alycia Pace
Familius, March 2022
ISBN: 9781641706438

NONFICTION

*Like a Diamond in the Sky:
Jane Taylor's Poems of Wonder
and the Stars*
by Elizabeth Brown
Illus. Becca Stadtlander
Bloomsbury Children's Books,
February 2022
ISBN: 9781547604272

*Nellie Vs. Elizabeth: Two Daredevil
Journalists' Breakneck Race Around the
World*
by Kate Hannigan
Illus. Rebecca Gibbon
Astra Publishing/Calkins Creek,
February 2022
ISBN: 9781684373772

*Blips on a Screen: How Ralph Baer
Invented TV Video Gaming and
Launched a Worldwide Obsession*
by Kate Hannigan
Illus. Zachariah Ohora
Knopf Books for Young Readers,
May 2022
ISBN: 9780593306710

Middle Grade

FICTION

Journey to the Parallels
by Marcie Roman
Fitzroy Books, May 2022
ISBN 9781646032181

Luna Garza: Accidental Detective
by PJ Gray
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May 2022
ISBN: 9781680219814

NONFICTION

*Maxine and the Greatest
Garden Ever*
by Ruth Spiro
Illus. Holly Hatam
Dial, Feb. 2021
ISBN: 9780399186301

Young Adult

FICTION

Little Girl Can Dance
by Tricia D. Wagner
Lyridae Books, Jan. 2022
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NONFICTION

Saturday at the Food Pantry
by Diane O'Neill
Illus. Brizida Magro
Albert Whitman & Co., Sept. 2021
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