

SCBWI
SoCal
NEWSLETTER



FALL/WINTER 2024



TABLE OF CONTENTS

page 3.....Fall Harvest Writers' & Illustrators' Day Conference
 page 10.....SCBWI SoCal Busy Bees
 page 12.....Member Good News
 page 13.....Grammar Nerd
 page 14.....Tim's Quotes
 page 15.....Success Story - Illustration and Holiday card Niche
 page 19.....LA chapter Holiday books Niche
 page 21.....Volunteering for SCBWI
 Page 22.....Newsletter Staff



SCBWI SoCal
MEET & GREET
LOCAL CHILDREN'S BOOK AUTHORS
 Saturday, November 23th from 1:00-6:00 pm

Barnes & Noble Victorville Mall
 14400 Bear Valley Rd.
 Victorville, CA 92382

Come check out some awesome children's books and meet the authors who wrote them.

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators



SCBWI The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators
2025 New York Conference
 REGISTER EARLY! JANUARY 31 - FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Pre-Conference Options
 a Four of Colorists Press - One-on-One Manuscript Reviews
 Social Media & Website Consultation - Portfolio Showcase

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31
 Meg Medina
 Lasso Perry, Koko Hsu, Tiff Liao, Suzanne Kaufman, Elin Estrada Koly, Debbie Balgobin-Gil, Sandra Brown, Mike Brown, Dorothy Pizer

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1
 Sarah Baker, Wendi Gu, Andrea Pinkney, Francesca Sullins, ToMika Crooks
 Social Meetups, Special Offer: A Night at the Society of Illustrators

Sophie Blackall
 Kol Drozdzewski, John Stepien, Sherron Rodriguez, (Lila Green, Sara Sargent, Sharon Miller, Susan Campbell Bartoletti, Padma Venkatraman)

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2



FALL HARVEST WRITER'S & ILLUSTRATOR'S DAY HYBRID CONFERENCE

Written by Carlene Griffith

According to participants, SCBWI's SoCal chapter's FALL HARVEST WRITER'S & ILLUSTRATORS DAY HYBRID CONFERENCE at Cal State Fullerton on October 5th, 2024, has been described as was a smashing success.

Out of the 38 survey respondents, 81.6% (31) found it excellent, 15.8 % (6) found it good, 2.6% (1) found it fair. (No, I will not give out names.) But ZERO found it poor. I think those numbers speak for themselves, but don't ask me; I'm biased. However, in- person attendee and San Diego's Co-Regional Advisor, DEBRA SCHMIDT, said "The upbeat, positive and inspiring tone of the conference was the best part for me. From the warm welcome to the ice breaker games to the informative speakers, the whole conference was the best I have attended in 10 years."

JESSICA COOPER said, "The best part of in-person conferences, for me, is always making connections with peers in the industry and getting the opportunity to speak with Art Directors and Agents in person. That being said, my favorite thing about this conference specifically was the notable effort that SCBWI SoCal went to make the event feel special, and welcoming to all attendees; from the handmade photo booth to the friendly interactions and welcoming vibe they created, I am always impressed with the SCBWI SoCal team!"



We, the SoCal team, are so grateful to all our volunteers who share their time and talents to make these events possible. This year's planning committee members consisted of BEV PLASS, Regional Advisor, her Co-Assistant Regional Advisor's, CARLENE GRIFFITH and JODI RIZZOTTO, and Co-Illustrator Coordinators HEATHER SOODAK and SU MOON. Chapter volunteers included: LORI POLYDOROS, TIM BURKE, KELLY POWERS, ANNE DAWSON, SHIHO PATE, CRYSTAL SCHRECK and of course the Cal State Fullerton's student volunteers.

The day's event started out with nametags distribution, coffee, tea and a fun photo booth put together by Shiho Pate. She used the design by this year's art- banner winner, RICARDO AGUILAR, as inspiration to create the fun display for photo-taking. Everyone loved it.

"Shiho did an amazing job making this year's and last year's Photo Booths," said JOY WANG. "It made our event memorable! I know how much love and labor she put into making them."

The meeting started off with a fun icebreaker, a get-to-know-you game led by Kelly Powers, which many felt gave them an opportunity to meet new people. JESSICA COOPER said, “I had such a fun time with the personality- trait icebreaker exercise and got to laugh and meet quite a few people that way. It was a fun activity.”

MARIE CHAN said, “I loved the icebreaker that Kelly prepared. That took a lot of work to make all those surprise envelopes, so I appreciated all the thought that went into that activity and how we could use it to apply to our writing.”

This year’s presenters included several industry professionals. The faculty included: COURTNEY DONOVAN, Jr. Agent at Writers House; JOLENE HALEY, Agent at Donald Maass Agency; LYNNETTE NOVAK, Agent at Seymour Agency and MALLORY GRIGG, Senior Art Director at MacMillan Children’s Publishing Group. Each gave individual presentations, Q&A sessions, paid pitch sessions, and participated in First Page reviews of randomly selected attendees’ submitted manuscripts and illustrator one- sheets.

MEGAN WOODWARD, who attended on Zoom, said, “I loved hearing agent’s’ reactions to first pages. It was both enlightening, in that it revealed issues I might not have considered, and encouraging in that I now know I’m doing many things right.”



ANN DAWSON said, “The feedback from the guests during the First Pages was invaluable. Going to make my grass purple next time!”

The faculty presentations covered a variety of topics from querying, to creating your author platforms, to resurrecting your dying manuscripts and finding your artist’s niche. Many first timer conference attendees, newbies to the publishing world, and those currently in the depths of the querying process appreciated Courtney Donovan’s speech, THE QUERY: WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL QUERY PACKAGE.

First- time attendee CHARLOTTE VAN RYSWYK said, “Her presentation was clear and detailed, and did not go too fast.”

STEVE RAMPTON said, “I’m brand- new to this world, so it was a big help to learn about the submission process.”

In Courtney’s talk she reviewed the querying package elements and broke down each aspect of the query letter. To summarize, even though what’s considered a ‘good’ query letter is subjective, there are some generally accepted standards and best practices that every author should know and include in their querying package.



Jolene's Hadley's presentation, CRAFTING SUCCESS: BUILDING YOUR AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR PLATFORM, and Lynnette Novak's EDITORIAL FIRST AID-- CPR FOR YOUR DYING MANUSCRIPT presentations were both very well received." LEE WARDLAW said, "Lynnette's and Jolene's programs were fantastic. Lots of great info delivered in a clear, articulate manner with useful examples and tips."

At the beginning of Jolene's talk, she presented the question, "Does every author need a social media platform?" Her answer was, "No. Not really. Kinda!" In today's world of AI and social media, it's important to promote yourself and your brand. Like it or not, the days of authors sitting at home turning in pages while the agent and publishing houses handle all the marketing and publicity are over. Authors must now be their own promoters. The first step in doing that is identifying what your brand is, having a website, and knowing who your target audience is.

JEAN GRABOW said, "Marketing is important, and we rarely hear about it at conferences.

LEE WARDLAW added, "I've been in this business since 1986 (when my first book was published) and am changing the types of kidlit I'm writing/publishing now. So, changing my brand is critical to better promote myself and my new books."

KELLY said, "Jolene's presentation on marketing was something new and fresh. She made a lot of good points and informed us of free resources available."



Illustrators were pleased to hear from Mallory Griggs during the break-out session, and loved her presentation, DISCOVER YOUR PUBLISHING NICHE: UP PACKING FORMATS, DEFINING CATEGORIES, AND FIGURING OUT JUST WHERE YOU FIT IN.

Attendee Jessica Cooper said, "Mallory Grigg gave insights into the variety of genres and different entry points for illustrators to work in the children's book market that I found so valuable, and she was open to questions in a way that, I think, was appreciated by all who attended the session."

Ann Dawson said, "Mallory's talk really reminded me that I need to be more analytical in my thinking. She really explained the art that publishers require for different ages."

Shiho said, "I learned from Mallory that there's way more to book category than I thought. I was particularly so excited about activity books and what to add to my portfolio for it."





Illustrators also had the privilege of hearing from award-winning illustrator BENSON SHUM, whose picture book titles include MOONCAKES MEAN FAMILY, ANZU THE GREAT LISTENER, and GO TO SHEEP.

Shiho felt Mallory's and Benson's presentations had the most impact on her because, "They are so in tune with the publishing world right now. They didn't just talk about themselves, but how their way of approaching bookmaking impacts the publishing world. I love information that is current."

LISA JOHNSTON HANCOCK said, "Benson's presentation gave me some great ideas for how to add more emotion to my characters and how to work with color palettes when putting a dummy together."

When asked what the best part of the conference was for her overall, attendee C. SONBERG LARSON said, "I loved the agents' presentations and the panels throughout the day. They were warm, encouraging, and insightful. I really appreciated the resources that were included in their presentations."

TERRI VITTERS said, "I was very impressed with the speakers this year. The agents were very professional and generous in sharing their knowledge, and the writers were very motivating."



Our esteemed author presenters included: MONI RITCHIE HADLEY, whose picture book titles include THE STAR FESTIVAL, ANZUE AND THE ART OF FRIENDSHIP, and MISO MAGIC; REX OGLE (with an array of book titles in all genres, such as FREE LUNCH, BLINK, and FOUR EYES); and LAURA SEGAL STEGMAN, whose books are written for author of middle grade graphic novels with titles that include SUMMER OF L.U.C.K., THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS, and READY OR NOT. They all did an amazing job.

Many found Moni's talk, called PATH TO PUBLICATION, FINDING THE MAGIC, very inspirational. Marie Chan said, "Moni Ritchie Hadley's presentation really encouraged me to persevere in my writing. Her story of her writing journey inspired me." Her message to never give up, presented uniquely through her original poem, was incredibly creative. She generously shared it with us to include in this newsletter along with her drawings. You can find it on page 21.

Rex Ogle's speech on TOUGH TOPICS: APPROACHING DIFFICULT SUBJECTS FOR READERS had a profound impact on several attendees, including myself.

Attendee KRISTEN JENSEN DODGE said, "The presentation by Rex Ogle really resonated with me and inspired me! He was so authentic and present and since I love writing about tough topics, I got so much from his talk!"



FALL HARVEST



NANCY BRASHEAR said, “Encouragement and inspiration were great take-aways. I was impressed by the vulnerability of Rex Ogle when he talked about using his painful childhood to write his heart. Later, I ran into him in the hall, and we had a good talk about using honesty to reach readers. He was very encouraging. I also was encouraged by Laura Stegman at lunch. It’s so valuable to have these wonderful authors speak to us as a group and individually, and I returned home inspired (and I needed some inspiration to get going again!). Thank you.”

RILLA JAGGIA, a Zoom attendee, said, “I could relate to his (Rex’s) journey and struggle. I appreciated his candor and encouragement.”

The Zoom part of our conference was managed by SoCal member Crystal Shrek. Crystal has become an invaluable volunteer, having shared her technical skills with us for the last couple of years, making Zoom an asset to our conference. Zoom online attendees couldn’t say enough about how well everything went for them. When asked what she liked best about the conference, KRISTINE CARTER Zoom attendee said, “Oh my goodness, so many great things; it would be hard to say. However, as a Zoom participant, I found that the group camaraderie among our participants was fantastic, and the Zoom moderator went over and beyond in helping with any technical questions and giving our questions to the presenters.” She further shared her experience, “I admitted I was nervous when my first page was critiqued live, and my Zoom pals cheered me on. Our Zoom group shared social media contacts and now follows each other. Love that my writing community grew as a result of the conference. Probably the best Zoom conference I’ve been on.”



KRISTEN JENSEN DODGE said, “I loved interacting in the chat with folks on Zoom. I was so disappointed to not be able to be there in person. That had been my plan, so that interaction was lovely!”

Which goes to show you how vital these conferences are for children’s book writers. Whether in person or on Zoom, we need our community, and this conference gave newbies and seasoned authors a chance to catch up with one another, through mingling and lunch gatherings. I love what banner winner RICARDO AGUILAR had to say on the subject:, “While I still have to put in the effort and hard work, I feel what I took away from the conference will take my creativity to new heights. It was also really nice to see people in person. I feel so much of our time is spent alone; it was nice to change that up.”

MEGAN WOODWARD said, “I truly love kidlit people! You all give me the warm fuzzies, (even through Zzoom.) What a wonderful community we are all fortunate to be part of.”

That’s where LAURA SEGAL STEGMAN’s talk, on **CONNECTING WITH OTHER WRITERS: FOUR TIPS FOR BUILDING A NEIGHBORHOOD**, really came into practice, right there at the conference. She gave some great tips and advice to the introvert on how to reach out and make friends in the kidlit community, in person and online. Plus some good resources on how to engage carefully online within legit author communities, and find your people.



After perusing the beautiful portfolios and published author displays, getting our newly purchased books signed, taking group photos with critique partners and new writing friends, and feeling inspired to go home and write/illustrate our #1 bestselling children's book, the evening was topped off by Bev Plass and Heather Soodak announcing the contest winners of the day.

In the Picture Books Manuscript category, the First Place winner was MARIE CHAN, with her book titled BROKEN MADE GOLDEN. first place and Runner-up was CARLENE GRIFFITH with her book titled MILLY'S MAGICAL MUSIC.

In the Middle Grade Manuscript category, the First Place winner was JODIE RIZZOTTO, with her book titled HARMONY AND HER BIG GHOST BROTHER, and Runner-up was JESPER WIDÉN with his book titled SAGA OF NORRLANDIA.

In the Young Adult category, the First Place winner was RILLA JAGGIA's book titled THE INITIATE'S DAUGHTER. and Runner-up was NANCY BRASHEAR, with her book titled LUCAS AND THE SPEAKEASY QUEEN.

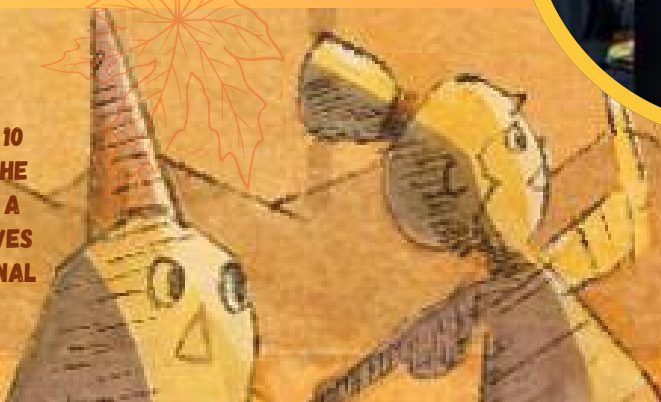
In the Picture Book Dummy category, the First Place winner was GAIL A. BUSCHMAN'S with her Illustration titled BEE WILD. and Runner-up was SU MOON'S with her book titled VLAD IS MAD.

The Illustrator Portfolio category's, First Place winner was RICARDO AGUILAR and Runner-up was HAANA YOO. This year's contest opened up to allow art student volunteers to display their portfolios. The Cal State Student Portfolio winner was GRACIE TANCRE.

Like I said in the beginning, 2024's conference was a smashing success, and I can't wait until 2025 to do it all over again.



CARLENE GRIFFITH IS THE AUTHOR OF THE 10 MINUTE PLAY FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES AND THE ROSE MAIDELAIEN SERIES. SHE HAS BEEN A PROUD SCBWI MEMBER SINCE 2018 AND SERVES AS SOCAL'S CHAPTER CO-ASSISTANT REGIONAL ADVISOR AND NEWSLETTER EDITOR.
WWW.CARLENEGRIFFITH.COM



SOCAL BUSY BEES



SCBWI SoCal published chapter members have been busy bees! August and September were eventful months with book festivals and book signings for our traditional and independently published members.

BARNES & NOBLE MEET & GREET

August 31, 2024, Barnes & Noble Victorville hosted a Meet and Greet featuring several of our SoCal members authors and illustrators giving them an opportunity to promote their books. Barnes & Noble Victorville loved having them so much they've invited them back again for another book signing November 23rd.

Attending members included: Carlene Griffith (Event Coordinator) Tom Brosz, Judy Campbell-Smith, Stacia Deutsch, Christian Kueng, Rodolfo Montalvo, Kathryn Otoshi, and Rene Spencer.



LA KIDS BOOK FESTIVAL

September 9th, 2024, Several SoCal and LA chapter members met up to attend the LA KIDS BOOK FESTIVAL in West Hollywood, CA. With the summer's heat wave boiling over, event organizers Boonie Hyde and Brett Glatman were on the phone with the city the night before working out the last-minute details trying to keep the event from postponing. Fortunately, they were able to get some extra rooms in the city's activity center to accommodate those more heat sensitive vendors and attendees needing coverage during the day's event. It was a very hot day with temperatures in the 100's, but we survived and there were many who stopped by the booth to check out and purchase books.



Attending members included: Carlene Griffith (Event Coordinator) Helle Brisson, Judy Campbell-Smith, Rene Colato Lainez, Tim Cummings, Janie Emaus, Christina Forshay, Ruthie Briggs-Greenberg, Sarah Kott-Tannenbaum, Andra J Loney, Josh Oaktree, Jennifer Palmer, Shiho Pate, Molly Ruttan, Antoinette Simmonds, D.J. Steinberg, and Jessica Woo.



OC CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVAL

September 22nd, 2024, SoCal and LA chapter members teamed up again to attend the annual OC CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVAL held at Orange Coast College. It was a fun day of book selling and signing.

Attending members included: Judy Campbell-Smith, Marie Chan, Kim Davis, Ali DeMoro, Moni Richie Hadley, and Katrina Tangen's family.



If you hear of any events our members can attend to promote their books, please let us know so we can get the word out!



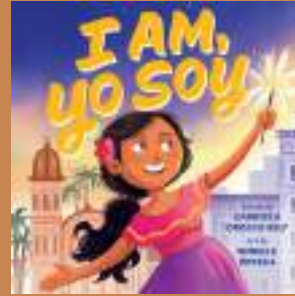


MEMBER NEWS

By Desi St. Amant



Laura Stegman is excited to announce that all three parts of her middle-grade trilogy—SUMMER OF L.U.C.K., READY OR NOT, and THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS have been released as audiobooks by Tantor Media. They are narrated by Lindsey Dorcus



Gabriela Orozco Belt is excited to announce her new book release: I AM, YO SOY. It is illustrated by Mirelle Ortega and will be available on March 25, 2025.



Desi St. Amant just published her debut graphic novel, THREE BEE HONEY: FORAGING FOR FRIENDSHIP. Illustrated by Jon St. Amant, this is the first book in a series.



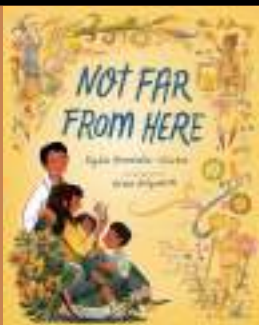
Glenda Galvan-Garcia's debut book, THE WHOLE ENCHILADA/LA ENCHILADA ENTERA, Came out October 1, 2024. Illustration by Claudia Navarro



Nandhini Parthib's self-published picture book, PURPLE SPINACH DINOSAURS! is now available.



Anandamayi Baker recently published an award-winning children's book, BEE-COMING STRONG.



NOT FAR FROM HERE by Nydia Aremedia-Sanchez debut picture book released October 1st, 2024



Dan McCauley's THANK YOU NIGHT Came out October 2024.

Illustration by Tara Hempstead
<https://www.tarahempstead.com>

If you are a SoCal member who has good news to share - we'd like to celebrate you by announcing it on social media and our website. You must be a SCBWI SoCal member and "follow" our SoCal region on SCBWI.org. Check out our SCBWI SoCal regional page for more information.



KILLER FIRST LINES

NEWSLETTER FALL 2024



(Full disclosure: occasionally, I've gone onto the second and third sentence to really capture the Killer pizzazz.)

Made the circuits. The thing in the Circle changed shapes, finally making itself look like a lady dog of attractive person and very friendly disposition.

—Roger Zelazny, *A Night in the Lonesome October*

Senior year was always destined to be a dumpster fire, but today takes it to a whole new level.

—Amelia Diane Coombs, *All Alone with You*

Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the Western Spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun.

—Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

It's my best idea yet. Coop's got a huge grin on his face as he wrestles his ice skate onto his left foot. It came to me last night when I was launching a mud missile.

—Don Calame, *Call the Shots*

I'M ELBOW-DEEP IN some dead lady's clothes when a customer bowls a perfect game.

—Amelia Diane Coombs, *Keep My Heart in San Francisco*

It's no fun riding to school with Stepmonster—not with Chauncey screaming his lungs out in the back seat.

—Gordon Korman, *The Unteachables*

Most people in America cannot pronounce my name.

—Sarah Weeks, *Save Me a Seat*

Pa was taking too long to cut the boys' throats.

Margaret Owen, *The Merciful Crow*

REBECCA ROUDABUSH HAS COOTIES.

I'm not making this up. We've run tests.

—John David Anderson, *Mrs. Bixby's Last Day*



THE GRAMMAR NERD

The LIST/SERIES Comma Rule:

Use with any kind of list/series of three or more items.

Situation 1: a, b, and c

I need pens, pencils, and paper.

He drank the water, ate the bread, and belched like a tugboat foghorn.

For some inexplicable reason, this so-called OXFORD COMMA RULE is somewhat of a controversy. People! This is common sense, a made-up controversy—similar to those misguided souls who think a guitar can be too loud, or that you can give the martini one or two anemic shakes before pouring, or that milk chocolate is superior to dark chocolate.

USE a comma before AND/OR in a list of three or more. Period. End of discussion.
a, b, and c a, b, or c

Why? Because if you use the comma, you will NEVER run the risk of ambiguity or hilarious mistakes.

Oops: “This book is dedicated to my parents, Ayn Rand and God.”

“Among those interviewed were Merle Haggard’s two ex-wives, Kris Kristofferson and Robert Duvall.”

CORRECT: “This book is dedicated to my parents, Ayn Rand, and God.” (With a comma before AND, God isn’t one of the parents)

“Among those interviewed were Merle Haggard’s two ex-wives, Kris Kristofferson, and Robert Duvall.” (With a comma before AND, Kris and Robert aren’t the two ex-wives)

Don’t be like that guy with poor judgment whose last words were, “Here, hold my beer. I want to take a photo of that crocodiiii—...”

Situation 2: List in front of noun (never comma in front of noun)(reminder: a noun is any person place or thing)

... big, fat, hairy dude. ... large, expensive book.



Illustration by Carrie Schneider
www.carrieschneiderauthorillustrator.com

WRONG: ... big, fat, hairy, dude.
... large, colorful, expensive, book.
(dude is a person and book is a thing so they are nouns and therefore NO COMMA before them)

WRONG: He was an extraordinary, presumptuous, persnickety, student.
(student is a person so no comma before)

Situation 3: Two things joined with AND: (No commas! Only if the list is three or more items)

WRONG: I have a pen, and paper.

CORRECT: I have a pen and paper.

CORRECT: The ice cream was melting in the dish and dripping down its sides.

Situation 4: No commas with double "AND": I bought pens and paper and pencils.

WRONG: I bought pens, and paper, and pencils.

Situation 5: Two-Word team noun:

She’s a lovely golden retriever. (not a list—golden retriever is one thing)

... a deflated weather balloon. (not a list—weather balloon is one thing)

Tim Burke

is a past Regional Advisor, SCBWI SoCal chapter member volunteer, and author of the Grammar Nerd and Killer First Lines newsletter columns. Represented by Jennie Kendrick at Red Fox Literary, he writes MG and YA novels, though he has also sold stories to the national adult crime fiction magazines, Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine and Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine. His debut MG novel, Troll Tails, is out on submission (fingers crossed, y’all!). You can contact him at tim@timburketales.com and visit his website at www.timburketales.com.



NO PLAN B

by KENZIE RAPOSO

I am a full-time freelance illustrator and the sole breadwinner for our (almost) family of four. My husband became a stay-at-home dad three years ago because art can indeed pay the bills! Please don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

That being said, I'm a rather headstrong and driven illustrator. I've known that I wanted to pursue this career since I was ten years old, even picking out my future art school at thirteen. (Hey, SCAD grads!).

Being certain about my career path also made me aware of something less desirable; I wasn't good at anything else. This may seem harsh, but it taught me that art HAD to work for me - because there was no "Plan B." It was sink or swim—and knowing that made my path forward clear.

I graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design in the fall of 2011, and when I began searching for jobs, I had only one requirement: it needed to involve drawing. I didn't care what I was drawing, I just wanted to spend my days moving a pencil across a page or a stylus across a screen.

My first job was as an in-house illustrator and product designer for a home décor and gift company based in the Southeast. It was an incredible opportunity straight out of art school.

In this role, I created repeat patterns and characters for holiday products and taught myself hand lettering. I learned the entire product development process and traveled to Asia to check on samples. I even attended design shows in Paris and Germany for trend research. I consider myself lucky to have gained this experience at 22 years old — it was foundational for my career.

After four years with the company, a recruiter from Michaels HQ contacted me. I joined their team in 2016, where I began illustrating characters and patterns that would appear on products in their stores.

One spring, I traveled to New York City to purchase artwork for Michaels' art department at two trade shows: Surtex and Blueprint.

Here, I experienced a profound realization while sitting down at an independent artist's booth to buy artwork: I didn't want to be an art buyer or a product designer. My real aspiration was to be the freelance illustrator who was sitting across from me.

I then set a personal goal: selling and licensing my artwork to companies and eventually working for myself. Throughout the rest of the trip, I took notes, detailing how much a piece of art sold for, what a licensing contract looked like, and how they designed their booths. This idea burned inside me for two more years before I 'took the leap' into a freelance career.



Kenzie Raposo is a professional freelance illustrator based in Southern California who specializes in nature-inspired greeting cards, children's books, and surface design. She has over 10 years of experience specializing in greeting cards, picture book illustration, and product design for the gift, home decor, and retail industry. Kenzie lives in Lake Arrowhead, California and Atlanta, Georgia. She enjoys hiking, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, roasting coffee, and pouring latte art in her kitchen.

As I write this, it sounds braver than I felt. I wish I could say that I ‘boldly quit my job and dove headfirst into my dreams,’ but it rarely happens that way. Sometimes you get pushed off the ledge.

In 2018, I began a design position at Nestlé’s headquarters in California, but the office soon relocated. I transitioned to a remote contractor role, which resulted in my hours dropping from 60 per week to just 10.

Faced with two choices—panic or revisit my dreams—I chose the latter. Sometimes, when you find yourself in a low place, the only view you have is up.

I used my newfound time to create a licensable portfolio filled with bright, holiday-inspired illustrations and patterns. I spent the next six months creating artwork, booked a booth at the next New York design show, and launched my small independent studio that spring.

These trade shows kick-started my career and continue to fuel my success. The clients attending are top-notch, including art directors from Hallmark, Target, and TJ Maxx. I even reconnected with old ADs from Michaels. I built valuable contacts, sold and licensed my artwork, and secured freelance opportunities. Taking part in these shows was the best career decision I ever made.

Besides trade shows, I started listing myself on online illustration directories. My biggest project to date came from an inquiry I received through one of these directories.

A self-published author approached me to create the artwork for her 14-book children’s series and subscription service. The series follows a fairy who embarks on an adventure every full moon with a new animal friend. Each book focuses on a different moon, such as the Harvest Moon, the Hunter’s Moon, and the Cold Moon. When you subscribe to the series, a new book arrives at your doorstep just before the next full moon.



Exploring children’s book illustration has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my career so far. Now that I’m a mom, it adds an extra layer of significance to me. I am now working on book 9 out of 14. You can check out the series at www.fullmoonfairy.com.

Today, I’m living bicoastal! Part of the year, I work from my A-frame home in Lake Arrowhead, California, and for the other months, I draw from my condo in midtown Atlanta, Georgia.

I maintain a healthy mix of retail clients and work on children’s books. In fact, if you walk into a Michaels this holiday season and see a collection of North Pole characters covered in sprinkles—that was me! Or if you’re in Trader Joe’s this fall, flip over one of their greeting cards, and you might find my name on the back.

Freelancing isn’t for the faint of heart; navigating the financial ups and downs can be challenging. Some months, I stick to a strict budget and avoid eating out, while in other months, I book vacations. However, at the end of each year, I look back and see a healthy income, a wonderful set of clients, and a body of work of which I’m very proud of. This gives me the confidence to hold my breath, close my eyes, and jump again.

In the words of Jim Carrey: “You can fail at what you don’t want, so you might as well take a chance on doing what you love.”



WRITING FOR

Niche Holiday Market

by Janie Emaus

Writing for the holiday market has its perks and its downfalls. From mid-October to the end of December, it's a whirlwind of activity. I do book signings, story hours, holiday fairs, blog interviews and podcasts. I've gotten to know the booksellers at several local Barnes & Noble stores, many Indie bookstore owners, plus hundreds of wonderful children and their parents. It's rewarding, exciting and exhausting, all at the same time.

And then it's over.

For a few days, I'm on a high from the exhilaration of the previous months but as the New Year settles in, I feel a bit "down," much like the day after planning a huge event. And by February, I miss the excitement of the season.

And the sales!

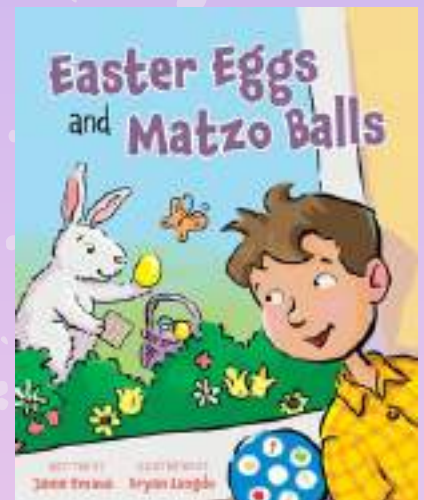
The biggest downside of a Hanukkah/Christmas book is, not many people buy them in the middle of an August heatwave.

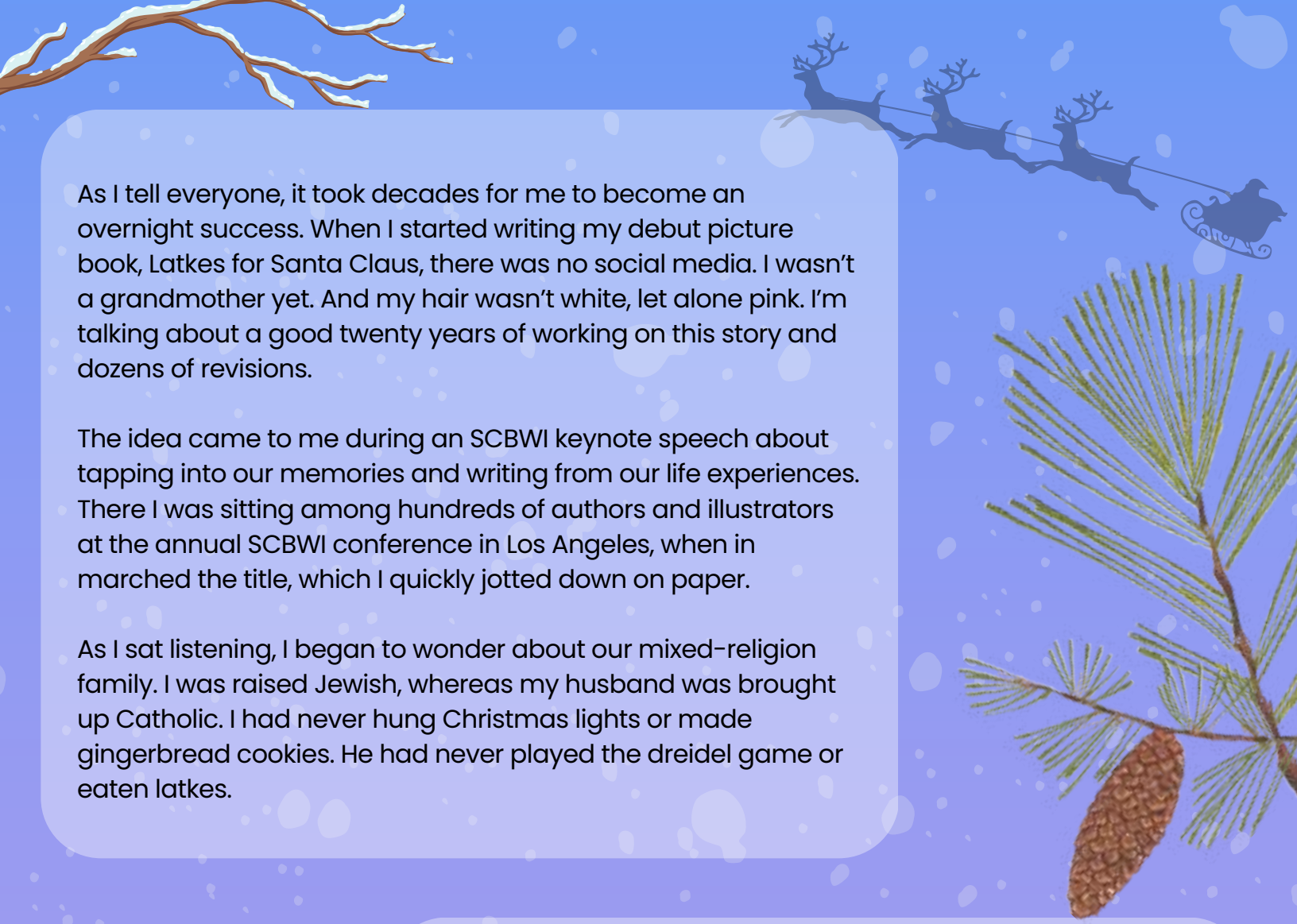
The biggest perk —if the book is successful, it will sell every year.

The competition is fierce for year-end holiday stories. For every new book we see, dozens have been rejected. So if you're planning on writing a seasonal story, keep in mind: December does not have a monopoly on the holidays. There is a holiday almost every month.

I'm fortunate to have *Easter Eggs and Matzo Balls*, a blended Easter/Passover story to fill the spring gap.

I didn't set out to write holiday books. At the time I knew nothing of the holiday book market. And least of all, how hard it would be to sell a blended holiday story.






As I tell everyone, it took decades for me to become an overnight success. When I started writing my debut picture book, *Latkes for Santa Claus*, there was no social media. I wasn't a grandmother yet. And my hair wasn't white, let alone pink. I'm talking about a good twenty years of working on this story and dozens of revisions.

The idea came to me during an SCBWI keynote speech about tapping into our memories and writing from our life experiences. There I was sitting among hundreds of authors and illustrators at the annual SCBWI conference in Los Angeles, when I marched the title, which I quickly jotted down on paper.

As I sat listening, I began to wonder about our mixed-religion family. I was raised Jewish, whereas my husband was brought up Catholic. I had never hung Christmas lights or made gingerbread cookies. He had never played the dreidel game or eaten latkes.



When our daughter was little, we lit the menorah for eight nights, decorated a Christmas tree, sang carols, ate lots of latkes and opened an exorbitant number of presents.

Had our daughter been confused? Was it all about the gifts? Would Santa like something other than cookies?

I don't remember who was speaking, but I remember thinking I had a unique idea. So unique it was sure to be picked up by a major publishing house, hit the *New York Times* bestseller list and help put my daughter through college.

I was so wrong!





After the conference, charged with energy and conviction, I did what any good mother would do and searched the bookstores (remember, this was before online shopping) for blended holiday stories.

Not finding any, I did what any good writer would do. I created a story for my title.

It didn't take long to discover why there were no comparable books on the market. According to the dozens of publishers and agents I queried, there wasn't a market for them.

But I didn't give up. I believed in this story. I submitted it to agents and editors. I received rejection after rejection. Revised and submitted again. Eventually, the world changed and along with it the book market.

I participated in a Twitter Pitmad event on a Thursday, and received a "like" from my editor that afternoon. I sent her the manuscript and was offered a contract on Tuesday, the following week.

The book came out in 2020. Not the best year for a debut, but it has continued to sell every holiday season since publication. At my book events, so many parents tell me they wished they'd had this book when they were growing up.

My takeaway from this is simple.

If you're planning on writing a holiday book, write from your experience. You'll be surprised how many readers will relate to your story. And don't give up.

I'm hoping my books have long lives. My daughter is way past college age now, but maybe the sales will help my grandchildren with their education. If not their tuition, then perhaps at least a few textbooks.

Happy Holidays!



Janie Emaus is the author of the blended holiday picture books, *Latkes for Santa Claus*, a finalist in the 2022 International Book Awards, and *Easter Eggs & Matzo Balls*. As well as the novels, *The Advice Columnist* and *The Time Traveling Matchmaker*. She is a frequent contributor to AARP. Her award-winning essays, stories and articles have been published in numerous magazines, anthologies, and websites. To learn more about Janie visit her at www.janieemaus.com.



VOLUNTEERING FOR SCBWI

BY ERNESTO CISNEROS

When I first started pursuing a career in publishing (about 20 years ago), the process seemed daunting and impenetrable. Agents, editors, and the many steps from manuscript to finished book felt like a mysterious, guarded pathway that I was eager, yet nervous, to navigate. I never imagined that volunteering with the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) would be the key to unlocking these mysteries and helping me find a successful path forward.

Demystifying the Publishing Process

Through my volunteer roles with SCBWI, I gained invaluable exposure to the publishing world. I interacted with industry "gatekeepers"—agents, editors, and experienced authors—and found that they were not as intimidating as I had initially feared. Volunteering placed me in settings where I could approach these professionals in a relaxed and collaborative environment. Over time, I grew comfortable speaking with them, and this comfort translated into confidence when it was time to present my own work. The publishing process no longer felt like an impenetrable wall but rather a series of steps that I could navigate with purpose and direction.

Building Lasting Connections and Friendships

One of the most rewarding aspects of volunteering was the chance to build relationships. I expected to make professional connections, but I hadn't anticipated making close friends within the industry. SCBWI's supportive community brought me together with like-minded individuals who

Ernesto Cisneros is the nationally acclaimed author of *FRÉN DIVIDED*. He was born and raised in Santa Ana, California, where he still teaches reading and writing to local students at an inner-city intermediate school. He holds an English degree from the University of California, Irvine; a teaching credential from California State University, Long Beach; as well as a Masters in Fine Arts in Creative Writing from National University. www.ernestocisneros.com @Author_Cisneros

understood both the challenges and joys of writing for young readers. These friendships became a crucial support system. Not only did they provide encouragement, but they also offered perspectives and advice that enriched my own understanding of the craft. Some of these connections have led to invaluable mentorships, collaborations, and a sense of belonging within the children's literature world.

Learning Essential Skills: Time Management and Multitasking

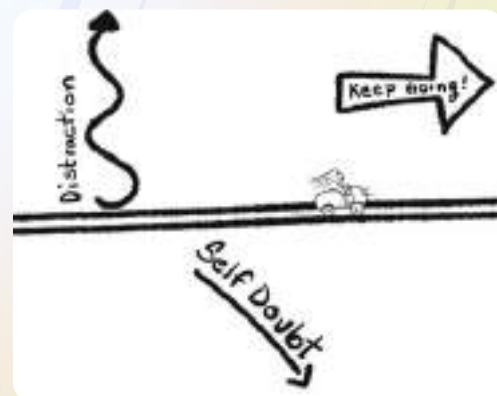
Volunteering with SCBWI taught me skills that go beyond the world of writing. In balancing my roles with SCBWI, writing projects, and personal life, I quickly learned the importance of managing my time and handling multiple responsibilities simultaneously. SCBWI events and tasks often required me to juggle different roles, meet deadlines, and coordinate with other volunteers. This experience helped me grow more organized and adaptable, skills that have been essential in keeping up with the demands of a publishing career.

Paying It Forward

Now, as I reflect on how far I've come, I recognize the importance of giving back. Volunteering allowed me to gain industry insights, develop confidence, and build a network of friends and mentors. I continue to support SCBWI and its mission because I believe in helping other aspiring writers find the support and guidance they need. I highly recommend it.

HOW DOES A WRITER STICK TO THE ROAD?

By Moni Ritchie Hadley



(Must be read in your best Jane Yolen voice!)

How does a writer stick to the road?

Does she cry?

Does she claim it's not fair and implode?

Does she throw out her notebook?

Does she hurl her new pen?

Is she late for her group,
time and time again.

When she gets a critique

Does she aim for payback?

Does she sink to new lows
binging
tik tok
and snacks

Does she put off revision

rearrange her work-station.

Does she down a pink cocktail
for new inspiration?

When there's a rejection

Does she point and blame
like a sorry loser after a game?

Does she claim that first draft
was ready to go.

Does she gripe and complain
how publishing's slow.

Does she quit?

Nooooo!

- A writer makes plans to write every day.
- She helps her friends with their rhyme and wordplay.
- She sends her first pages and waits for feedback.
- When rejections come in, she builds a nice stack.
- She listens and reads and shoots for that star
- She writes those stories she thought up in the car.
- And a writer knows there's no true "the end."
- So, go work, go work
- My writer friends.



NEWSLETTER STAFF

CHAIR: BEV PLASS

As a writer and speech-language pathologist, she creates materials and stories that get kids talking! Email: socal-ra@scbwi.org Website: www.beverlyplass.com Twitter: @PlassBev

ART DIRECTOR: TAMMY DO

Known for her whimsical, playful, and vibrant art style, Tammy creates characters that are not only imaginative but also brimming with personality. Website: Tammydoillust.com

PROOFREADER: CHRISTINE HENDERSON

A two-time Author of the Month for her stories in Highlights magazine, Christine Henderson is currently revising her first middle- grade novel. During the school year, Christine works as an instructional aide for the Corona-Norco school district. Twitter @cm_henderson.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: CARLENE GRIFFITH

Carlene Griffith is child at heart and loves all things writing, theater, and playing pretend. Email: cgriffith7338@gmail.com, Website: carlenegriffith.com, Twitter: @authorcgriffith

MEMBER NEWS COORDINATOR: DESI ST. AMANT

Desi St. Amant is a high school English teacher and an aspiring middle grade novelist. Website: www.desiwrites.com Email: dstamant07@gmail.com Twitter: @desistamant

WANTED: Children's Illustrations and articles pertaining to our region or children's book writing in general for upcoming issues. If interested please contact Carlene Griffith @ socal-ara@scbwi.org

UP COMING EVENTS



FOLLOW US AT SCBWI SOCIAL CHAPTER @SCBWI.ORG AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA @SCBWI_SOCAL

