



Issue 6

November 2021

Don't follow the path. Blaze the trail.

—Jordan Belfort

Three Self-Publishing Tasks I Skipped (Early On) and Regret

By Amanda Zieba



Self-publishing is amazing for a dozen different reasons, but what it usually boils down to is complete control of the creative process.

When I was pitching my book [The Birthday Cache](#) to agents, I was told that it was a fun concept, but way too short. They wanted me to add 20,000 words, or maybe even 40,000. As an in-the-trenches middle school reading teacher (with plenty of students who didn't love reading), I knew there was a place for my short book. I knew there were readers who wanted it and teachers who would utilize it for small group instruction (RtI, in teacher-speak for those educators out there). I knew this would be especially true if I created educational materials to go with it. So I said, "No thank you," to the plans of the agent, and set out to publish it on my own.

From the Editor



Fall is dazzling us with its brilliant gold, orange, and red hues, and the chilly nights are reminding us winter is on its way. If you're like me, when

the days shorten and the temps drop, my creative juices get flowing. Perhaps it's because my life slows down, a form of quasi-hibernation. Sitting at my computer with a warm cup of tea just seems right.

Eventually, our creative expression needs to be shared. What better time to focus on indie-publishing? That's what we've done this issue:

Successful indie author and writing coach Amanda Zieba shares indie-publishing advice she's accrued through trial and error in her

This is just one example of thousands of reasons why you might want to self-publish your book.

Before we continue, I want to be 100 percent transparent and say that it has been much easier for me to sell my self-published adult titles than my kidlit titles. Adults are more willing to take a chance on a local writer who is otherwise unknown.

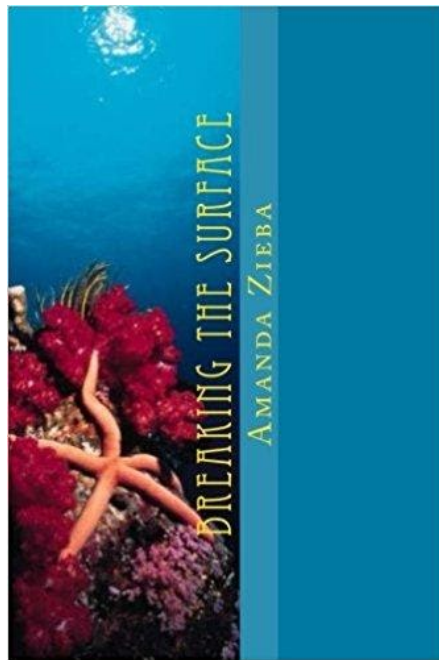
But when people purchase books for kids, those parents, educators, librarians, and grandparents want the BEST. They want household names and starred reviews and shiny awards stickers on the front. I don't blame them one bit. So in order to compete with that, you need to bring your A game when self-publishing.

Not sure what that means?

Here are three A game tasks I skipped early on in my self-publishing career (and regret).

1. Hire a Copy Editor

No, having your grammar nazi auntie look over your manuscript is not enough. Your friend who is a high school English teacher won't cut it either. You need to *hire* a person whose



Breaking the Surface using the Cover Creator Software via KDP.

article "Three Self-Publishing Tasks I Skipped (Early On) and Regret."

Author Valerie Biel, Eric Hoffer Book Award Winner and Kindle Book Award Finalist, demystifies the publishing process and spells out publishing choices authors have in "Publication Pathways: Understanding Your Options in Today's Publishing World."

Illustrator Rebecca Hirsch encourages visual creative expression in her thoughtful article "Draw What You Like and Find Your Creative Voice."

Enjoy these and so much more in this fall edition of Creative Tap!

*If you have a dream,
there is a chance to
turn it into reality
with a good plan of
action and when
coupled with a
burning passion, there
is hope that it will turn
out.*

*- Catherine Pulsifer,
Living the Dream*

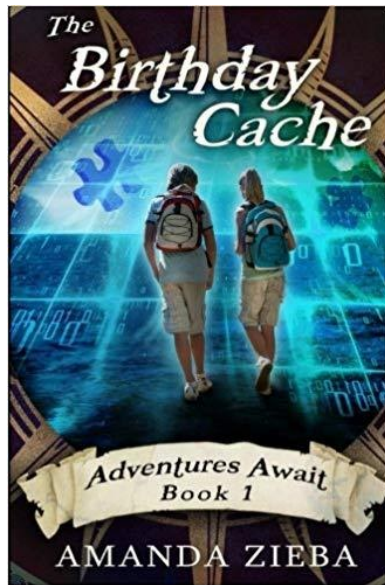
professional training and responsibility it is to find and eliminate or fix grammatical errors and typos. And don't even think about

“just doing it yourself.” When looking at your own writing,

your brain sees what it wants to see, what it thinks you wrote down, or what it thinks you meant to type. If you choose any of these routes, I almost guarantee that you will miss mistakes that need to be corrected.

A copy editor is a small- to medium-sized investment based on your manuscript page count. Depending on who you hire, you can expect to pay around \$1.50 to \$3.00 per double spaced page. Writing a check for a few hundred dollars might sting in the moment, but fielding emails about the typos people found in your book will hurt a lot worse than money well spent. Trust me. I've been there.

Hiring a copy editor was a step I skipped early on, and one I will NEVER skip again. In fact, I might



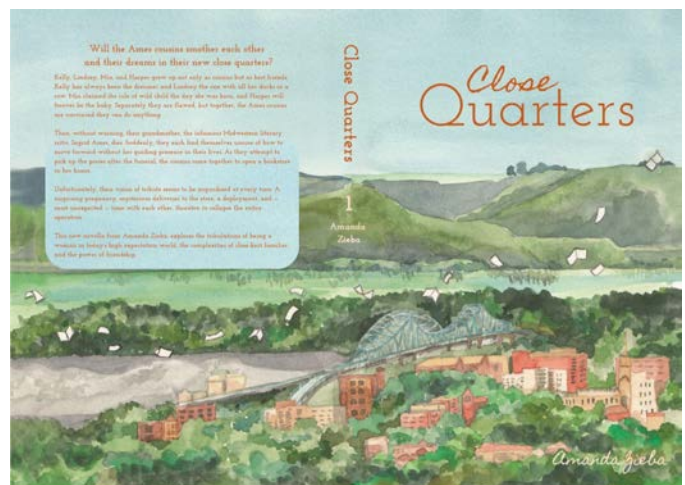
The *Birthday Cache* cover was designed by someone hired via Fiverr via KDP.

even hire two copy editors from here on out—one for the initial go through and a second with fresh eyes for the final polish. This perfected presentation of your story will make all the difference when you are trying to establish yourself as a real deal author.

2. Invest in Book Cover Design

If you choose to self-publish on Amazon through Kindle Direct Press (as I do), they give you a very basic cover creator tool you can use to design your book cover. When I first started, this is what I used. I didn't know any better!

After a while, you'll start to recognize book covers that were created using this option. There are only so many layouts, font choices, and color palettes. What this does for people in the book world is communicate that you took the most basic route to the finish line. You still got the job done, but not in a way that helps your book stand out in a unique or good way. Despite the saying, we all judge a book by



Critique Groups: Making Them A Safe Place To Grow

by Sue Twiggs

In the current market nonfiction and informational fiction books are in high demand and come in all subjects and structures.

Parents and teachers ask for them and publishers are eager to purchase these manuscripts. With the rising demand for these genres throughout all age groups, research and back matter have taken on increased importance for children's writers. Because of this, members of critique groups (CG) are more likely to be exposed to fellow writers' source information and their experts.

Trust continues to be the backbone of a successful CG. Trust that the manuscript is kept confidential and stays within the group, trust that a story idea won't be copied or imitated. Let's extend that trust to include a writer's research and chosen experts.

It's fine to utilize sources gleaned from the bibliography of a published book. That's considered a compliment. But

its cover. So take the time, effort and money to get a good one! Now, I design my book covers on Canva either using art from places like Shutterstock or by using commissioned art, like the watercolor painting in the *Close Quarters* book cover below.

For more information and tips on designing book covers, check out this video: [How to Design a Professional Book Cover: The Word Nerd's 8 Questions to Ask in Your Creative Process](#)

3. Intentionally Build a Market

Even before you write the words Chapter 1 in your notebook or on your screen, think about who is going to buy this book. Who, upon seeing your (now beautifully designed) cover and reading the blurb, will jump up and down and fight their way to the front of the line to purchase your story? Who is going to tell all of their friends about it and recommend it to their local library? What kind of teacher is going to buy full class sets of the book to use with their students? Which organizations will be excited about this book's topic, characters, setting, or theme? To successfully sell a self-published book, these are questions you need to ask yourself before you even write the book.

Let's use my book *The Birthday Cache* as an example. Here is the blurb:

While twelve year old Mason Miles and his parents love their nomadic lifestyle living and working across the nation in their RV, his twin sister Molly is craving a normal life and scheming to put a stop to their endless road trip. For their twelfth birthday the twins open a GPS receiver and fall in love with the sport of geocaching. When they stumble upon a mysterious puzzle cache will their travels become interesting enough to change Molly's mind? In this first installment of the geocaching series Adventures

using the resources and the experts of an unpublished book may feel like theft to the author. This differs from studying published stories, known as mentor texts. They are used to teach a story's heart, structure, characterization, voice, plot, or pacing.

Critique groups must be considered "safe" places to share unfinished stories. They are embryos, creations in process. The stories and those who create them are vulnerable. You may wish you'd written the story yourself, as Jill Esbaum once told me. I considered it a compliment coming from a seasoned kidlit writer.

How can you be sure you are protecting your fellow writer's work?

- Remember to *emulate* not imitate.
- Follow the Writers' Golden Rule: *Treat your CG partner's story as carefully as you would treat your own.*

Await, author Amanda Zieba weaves an exciting middle grade story full of geocaching adventures: geography, technology and national landmark content; and family fun.

Who might be instant fans of this book? Geocachers, families who camp or RV, families with twins, homeschoolers, mystery fans, and geography/social studies teachers. These niche audiences have allowed me to sell my book on an international level through Geocaching.com (<https://shop.geocaching.com/default/kits/geocaching-books/the-birthday-cache.html>), speak and sell at geocaching events, speak and sell at educational conventions, and more.

Without the thoughtful inclusion of these niche audiences and specific content, my sales of this book would be much, much lower. Identifying who you want to buy the book before it's written and intentionally building a story your audience will like is a great step to take toward self-publishing success.

Before I go, here's one final note about the benefits of self-publishing. You can re-do and re-publish your books at *any* point in time. It's something I've been thinking a lot about. Remember that book *Breaking the Surface*? The one with the basic cover I mentioned earlier? That book, along with its sequel *Bridging the Tides*, was my first go at solo-self-publishing—without the guidance of anyone else. These two books contain good stories, but they were poorly published. The execution is way below industry standard. It was the best I could do eight years ago. However, it was through publishing these two "crappy" books that I learned all I know now. As soon as I can scrape up enough

You can re-do and re-publish your books at any point in time.

If you are a member in a CG, please discuss and reach consensus as a group on the guidelines above.

Partner critiques have helped me improve my craft through multiple revisions. Whenever I'm stuck with a story (feeling like a dead battery on a frigid winter day) my CG offers suggestions and I am recharged.

For a revised list of the CG guidelines please refer to the sidebar on the SCBWI-WI home page.



Sue Twiggs, a published poet and picture book writer, is our SCBWI-WI Critique Group Coordinator. Always looking for ways to help others, Sue is the co-founder of Pathway Partners, a youth careers mentorship program and enjoys helping SCBWI-WI writers reach their full potential through our active online critique group program. If you are looking to join a SCBWI-WI critique group in your genre or have questions or concerns about critique groups contact Sue at setwiqgs@gmail.com

time and energy, I plan to re-do and re-launch them.

If you'd like to learn more about the process of self-publishing, check out my YouTube channel [Take Action Author Plan](#) for free video content. If you're ready to take the full plunge in the self-publishing, you'll want to look at my course: the Take Action Author Plan found on my website [WordNerdopolis](#). The course walks you through the process step by step, including a case study of how much each step cost me to self-publish *Close Quarters* (the first book in an adult series about cousin's who open a bookstore in honor of their grandmother) and also how much I earned from that book in one year. Two further modules include Book Marketing 101 and The ABC's of Authorpreneurship: 26 Lessons on Leveling Up your Author Career.

Do you want to know the best thing about a story? Everyone has one to tell. And that's why, as a word nerd, Amanda has the best job in the world. Amanda has written eleven books for a variety of ages and genres and now coaches people through the process of self-publishing and with the goal of sharing her knowledge with others so that they can achieve their publishing goals faster and with less frustration.

Amanda is a board member of her local writing group (Mississippi Valley Writers Guild), and also a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. She lives in Holmen, WI with her husband and two sons. Learn more about Amanda's work and connect with her via her website [WordNerdopolis](#). Amanda can also be found on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/amandazieba/> and Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/wordnerd_amandazieba/

Did you know?

The 2015 sci-fi movie *The Martian* starring Matt Damon is based on a book originally self-published by indie author Andy Weir. (AskAlli Team. 2020, June 22. Facts and figures about self publishing: The Impact and influence of indie authors. *Alliance of Independent Authors*.)

The fastest growing segment in the book publishing industry world-wide is self-publishing (*Report Buyers*. 2019, January. Book printing market: Global outlook and forecast 2019-2024.).

Podcasts Worth a Listen

Searching for self-publishing support and advice? Here are two podcasts worth a listen:

The Creative Penn hosted by Joanna Penn

Joanna Penn is a successful indie author and self-publishing coach. Her website made Scribendi's [The 30 Best Writing Websites for 2020](#) and Writer's Digest's [9 Best General Resources Websites for Writers 2021](#). Looking for indie publishing tips? Check out her podcast [The Creative Penn](#).

AskALLi Self Publishing Advice hosted by Orna Ross and other members of the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) team.

You don't have to be a member to subscribe and listen, just tune into the weekly podcast [AskALLi Self Publishing Advice](#).

Draw What You Like And Find Your Creative Voice

By Rebecca Hirsch

Meryl Streep once said: "What makes you different or weird, that's your strength." In my opinion, we don't spend nearly enough time celebrating our inner weirdos. It can be especially hard when you're trying to figure out where your art fits in the world.

If you're a kid lit illustrator today, you've likely had your work evaluated and critiqued numerous times, and have probably heard advice similar to the following:

"Draw for the market you want to sell in."

"Make sure your style fits what's currently popular."

"Don't have more than one style in your portfolio."



This is all good advice, but how often have you heard, “Draw what you like?”

This past June, I signed up for the Art Rep Day offered virtually by SCBWI’s North Texas chapter. Chad Beckerman, an agent with the CAT Agency, challenged us to come up with a list of 100 things we **like** to draw. I was nonplussed.

It was surprisingly hard to come up with a list of 100 things. It’s much easier to look up lists that say things like “100 things you should have in your portfolio” and try to figure out what you believe will strengthen your marketability. Mr. Beckerman has a different approach, however, and you can read more about it in an interview he did with SCBWI: <https://www.SCBWI.org/SCBWI-exclusive-with-chad-beckerman/>

The most interesting thing to me about making this list is I surprised myself along the way, remembering things I hadn’t drawn in years. I’d forgotten I like to draw spirals, and blankets. Loaves of bread.

Instruments. To be honest, some things I jotted down just to reach the magic number 100. That’s okay though, because I can always go back and change things as ideas come to me. Not only is the list an important reminder that I have more ideas in my mental paintbox than I thought, but I’m finding it serves as inspiration when I’m trying to figure out what to do next.



I selected “instruments/ books/ kids” from my list and created my favorite piece from the summer. Just for the sheer joy of creating. It can be easy to forget that while trying to navigate our way through the publication waters; that illustration shouldn’t just be work. It can be easy to lose sight of that while we endeavor to get our art noticed.

We are told to find our “style”. What better way than to find it while drawing what we enjoy? So if you’re struggling to connect to your creative energy, or find yourself staring at a blank page with your inner well tapped dry, make a list.

Find your visual voice.

Embrace your weirdness.

Draw what you like.

Creative illustrator Rebecca Hirsch won the SCBWI-WI illustrator competition at the 2017 fall conference and is the recipient of the 2019 Marvelous Midwest conference People’s Choice award. A long time member of SCBWI-WI. Rebecca encourages other illustrators in her volunteer role as Illustrator Coordinator. Check out Rebecca’s art work at [R Hirsch Illustration](#).

Publication Pathways: Understanding Your Options in Today’s Publishing World

By Valerie Biel

The great news about publishing in 2021 is that there are so many paths available to make our published books a reality. The not-so-great news is that it can be hard to sort through the options and what you need to consider before deciding which route is best for your publishing goals and skill set.



Thirteen years ago, I attended my first writing conference, jumping into a world I realized quickly I knew nothing about. I diligently took notes on simple things like proper manuscript formatting and gripped my pen a little tighter as we moved on to point of view and story arcs. By the time we were on to synopsis writing, beat sheets, and editing, my palms were sweaty and my scrawl nearly illegible as I struggled to collect every single bit of info being thrown my way. Even so, I realized that the work of writing was far easier than understanding and navigating the business of publishing and book promotion. Determined to be successful, I immersed myself in this world.

Today, I'm not only an award-winning, bestselling independently published author, but with the knowledge I've gained (and my background as a publicity professional), I assist other authors with their publishing journeys and book marketing. However, because I've determined that independent publishing may not be the best path for all my stories, I also have an agent to help traditionally publish my middle-grade stories.

To help you decide what publishing approach works best for your story, let's take an honest look at the pros and cons of traditional and independent publishing. (Now, I know there's a third option—hybrid publishing—that employs some aspects of both models, but that is a

longer topic best covered in a different article.)

Traditional Publishing

Positives

Paid Advances: Most authors are paid an advance when a publishing house buys their work. (When acquiring a manuscript, publishers often

I realized that the work of writing was far easier than understanding and navigating the business of publishing and book promotion.

offer authors a monetary amount that's an advance against future royalties.) Advances vary in amount anywhere from a few hundred dollars to six figures based on the genre of the work, size of the publishing house, and the experience/past publishing history of the author. (NOTE: The author should *never* be asked to pay

costs if the company is truly a traditional publisher.)

Free Access to Professional

Team: When signing a traditional publishing contract, you should have access to a professional team to help make your book the best it can be, including an editor, cover designer, copy editor, publicist and more.

How much help depends on the size of the publishing company.

Instant

Prestige: Traditional publishing carries with it a certain amount of prestige and validation due to the rigorous selection process.

Access to Top Reviewers and

Book Prizes: Many national-level reviewers, such as Kirkus, the New York Times, and BookPage, as well as well-known book prizes are only open to traditionally published books.

Traditional Publishing

Negatives

Low Royalty Rate: The royalty rate, the amount you're paid for each book sale, is often much lower (usually in the 5-20% range) than what you earn with independent publishing. (And remember, if you have an agent, they will be getting a portion of what you earn—usually 15%.)

Slow Process: Securing a traditional publishing contract can take years. To successfully query the top publishers, you usually need an agent. Finding that agent can take many months. Then the agent takes over the querying process with publishers, which can also take many months. Once a traditional publisher acquires your manuscript, it can be another 12 – 18 months before your book hits store shelves.

Limited Creative

Control: With traditional publishing, an author has limited creative control. While your agent can assist overall

with any impasse over publisher changes that you're not comfortable with, once you sign with a publisher, your ability to assert creative control is limited—depending on the contract.

Varying Levels of Marketing

Help: Some publishers give excellent marketing support to their authors, but others only support their top-tier authors. Be prepared to learn about book marketing so you can jump in where your publisher's assistance leaves off.

Short Time to Gain

Attention: While the world of traditional publishing moves slowly at first, once a book is released there is a short time to gain traction. (Some genres have longer shelf lives than others.) The first three months after a book's release is typically the timeframe when you can expect support from your publisher. After that, they must move on to their new releases leaving

you, the author, to continue any marketing efforts.

Independent Publishing

Positives

As you would imagine, the independent publishing positives are largely the opposite of traditional publishing's negatives.

Higher Royalty Rates: If you self-publish your books, you may earn up to 70% of the book's retail price, depending on the format and publishing platform you are using.

Quick Process: The time it takes to publish

independently is far shorter than traditional publishing.

(However, I always caution indie pub authors to take the time for proper editing, formatting, cover design, etc.)

Complete Creative

Control: You make all the decisions about everything to do with your book. (Now, that might seem like a negative to some, but it is a distinct positive if you are more

comfortable controlling the details.)

Longer Time to Gain

Attention: An independently published book is not subject to the same limitations on gaining market attention quickly. Instead, indie pub authors can follow a steady promotional plan that may extend for many more months and even years.

Sense of

Empowerment: Choosing independent publishing empowers you to launch your career when you want to. It allows you to bypass the lengthy validation process of publishing industry gatekeepers and go straight to the ultimate gatekeepers—the readers.

Independent Publishing

Negatives

Upfront Costs/Hiring

Professionals: You need the advice and assistance of professionals (editors, cover designers, formatters, book

marketers etc.), but if you indie-publish, you are responsible for hiring and paying them.

Limited Access to Prestigious

Awards and Reviews: Some of the top book awards and reviewers do not accept independently published work: however, there is a growing list of award contests that accept independently published books and even some that only allow indie published submissions.

Perception of Quality: While this is changing, there remains a bias against indie published books as they are perceived to be of a lower quality. In all fairness, many authors rush to publication with poorly edited and designed books with cringe worthy covers that do taint the entire world of self-published books. For those who take the time to do it right, an indie published book should be indiscernible from a traditionally published one.

Sole Marketer: Indie authors are completely in charge of their book's marketing and promotion. Doing this well is imperative for success, but it requires the dedication of many before and after the book launch. This eats into creative writing time immensely. (Although, many traditionally published authors also have minimal marketing assistance from their publishers.)

Don't forget to check out the indie-publishing resources found on the SCBWI website:

- "The Indie Author: Self-Publishing Magazine"
- *The Book: the Essential Guide for Publishing for Children 2021*

CAN'T WE BE BOTH?

Yes!

Many authors successfully publish books in both ways, including some who gained a lot of attention (and earnings) for their indie published books and later signed lucrative traditional publishing contracts: Amanda Hocking, Hugh Howey, E. L. James, Andy Weir, Meredith Wild and more.

Some top-tier authors have done the reverse, leaving their traditional houses to publish (at least some of) their titles independently; David Mamet, Nathan Bransford, Eloisa James, Claire Cooke, Fred Waitzkin, Maryanne Vollers, Amanda Hocking (who switched back) and more.

For more in-depth help, check out my Independent Publishing Blueprint course [HERE](#).

Valerie Biel is a successful YA author and indie publisher. Her acclaimed Circle of Nine fantasy series received five stars on Reader's Review and was a 2015 Kindle Books Award finalist. For more info on Valerie, check out her website, [Welcome to Valerie Biel | Valerie Biel](#)

Illustrators' Gallery Spring Challenge

Create an illustration based on the spring theme: "I am seeking. I am striving. I am in it with all my heart." - Vincent van Gogh

Submission Guidelines:

- Send a JPEG of your artwork to Sandra Nicholas at nichols.five@hotmail.com
- Type "Illustrators' Gallery" in the subject line.
- Include your name, description of your artwork including medium, and how the illustration relates to the theme.
- Include a three-sentence bio describing your artist journey, accomplishments, and goals as well as your illustrator website if you have one.
- Share one unique interest or fact about yourself.
- Submit by Sunday, February 21.
- NOTE: Artists retain all rights to their artwork.

Upcoming Events

If you haven't done so already, check out the FREE SCBWI Digital Workshop 5.1 series happening now through December 2. Just log onto SCBWI.org and click events.

WOW (Women on Writing) offers several digital courses that start upon registration. Our own Amanda Zieba offers "Story Seedlings: Daily Prompts, Weekly Feedback, and a 5,000 Word Critique". Look for this and other open digital classes including "Simplify Your BookWriting Process with a Book Style Guide" by professional editor Bernadette Geyer at WOW! Women on Writing Workshops and Classes [WOW! Women On Writing Workshops, Classes, and E-Courses](#).

Ready! Set! Write!

"THE DEEP ALONE" By Valerie Biel

Dread and determination urged her down the path to the small crossroads store closest to their cabin.

Her dad went the same way, waving his hat to her as he disappeared into the trees. He should have been back in a day. She'd notched seven ragged marks on the railing of their tilting porch, waiting for his return and pushing away increasingly terrible thoughts.

The fear ran deep and cold—from her skin to her bones to the blood that pounded too loudly in her ears. She knew only something truly bad would have kept him away.

Being alone in the forest was fine. This was her home. But being alone in the world was completely different. Neither of them deserved that.

Her pace slowed as the wind-whispered woods switched to the distant rumble of logging trucks. She crunched across the store's gravel lot and up the rickety steps, the screen door's harsh squeak announcing her arrival.

The man at the counter stared before his face softened. Her heart grasped what that look meant.

"You must be Red's girl. I was fixin' ta git ya from the ridge if ya didn't come down. Sit a spell. The news ain't good."



Thank you to the authors who submitted entries based on the photo prompt from the Spring 2021 newsletter.

Valerie Biel is an award-winning young adult novelist, book marketing professional, writing educator, and author coach. Her writing is often inspired by her travels, and she dreams of finding the perfect cottage on the Irish coast where she can write and write. An empty path through woods (such as the one in the photo) is bound to pique her imagination as she always wonders who (or what) might have walked there before. Valerie's fallen in love with writing flash fiction and has used it as a jumping off point for longer works.

“LEAVES” By Kirsten Mikutis-McCollum

We walked across the bridge, and he giggled with glee as he looked at the fish in the stream, his blue eyes sparkling with excitement. As we headed up the path, he bolted, his blonde hair bobbing in the breeze.

Turning to me with his infectious smile, “Look, I’m Iron Man!” as he stood in a power stance while balancing on the fallen tree.

Crunch went the leaves as he jumped off and kicked through them, which quickly led to collecting.

I said, “Don’t grab the ones with holes and dirt.”

“But I love those, they are just as beautiful as the perfect ones!”

His little hands were so full, the leaves were falling everywhere. I gazed with wonder at his innocence and his love of all things nature, never discerning: good, perfect, best, just loving it all unconditionally.

“Time to go home buddy. We will be back.” I just laughed and smiled as he raced toward me, full of joy, the sun’s rays shining through the trees, glistening on his golden hair.

This was to be my forever perfect afternoon spent with my little brother. My sweet brother who minutes from now would become my Forever Angel.

Retired teacher and SCBWI-WI member, Kirsten wrote “Leaves” in her daughter’s voice based on the memories her daughter shared of her trip to the park with her brother Bailey, minutes before he left this earth.

Kirsten’s children are her inspiration to write, illustrate, and publish stories centering around love and kindness in the hopes of helping others cope with loss and celebrate life.

Kirsten is the founder of the Heartprint Heroes program for elementary students, a kindness program honoring her son Bailey and his legacy of kindness. To access the Heartprint Heroes program and download a kindness tracker, go to Bailey’s Heartprints [Random Acts of Kindness Campaign](#).

“LOST...AGAIN” By Pat Severin

The photo inspired a scenario in which a young woman whose judgement is clouded by her immense inferiority complex, finds herself lost in a compromising situation but, upon realizing a young man’s ulterior motives, manages to extricate herself from it...only to find herself lost again.

It was late in the day. The sun would soon be going down.

It’s bad enough that I’m lost. It’ll be dark soon. Think of something quick! No phone, no flashlight and not even a compass! How did I get myself into this position? He seemed so sweet, so kind, but, as usual, I fell for it. How could I have been duped so easily? Because you’re so desperate for a man’s attention, that’s how. Desperate is right!

Oh, great, now I’m talking to myself, as if that’s helping. Who am I kidding? I don’t know these woods. I don’t even know where I am!

“Char,” he had said. “I’ve got to go to my cousin’s to pick up her broken radio. Mr. Fix-it, that’s me. She lives about sixty miles from here. It’s a beautiful day and such a pleasant drive. Why don’t you come with me, keep me company? It’d be fun.”

Oh, it was fun, alright. Pulling off the road because you wanted to *talk*? I opened that door and ran like a bat outta...! Sure, Char, you got away from him, but now what? Now what?

Pat’s been writing poetry for the past 60+ years and has self-published four poetry collections. She shares her poetry on her blog, Poetically Speaking. A former elementary teacher, Pat spent the last ten years writing children’s stories primarily in rhyme. But it wasn’t until she joined SCBWI-WI and participated in two critique groups that she tried her hand at writing prose. Her goal is to publish a children’s book one day. In 2021, Pat discovered the power of her poetry to sustain those going through difficult times. She finds sending weekly poems to comfort individuals facing terrible health challenges personally rewarding.

Ready! Set! Write! Spring Challenge

Create a story opening or scene based on this photo prompt:

- Send writing submission to Sandra Nichols at nichols.five@hotmail.com
- Type “Ready! Set! Write!” in the subject line
- Include submission as MicroSoft Word attachment
- Submissions must be between 150-200 words
- Include your name and a three-sentence bio describing your writing journey, writing accomplishments, and goals, and how the photo prompt inspired the scene.
- Share one unique interest or fact about yourself.
- Submit by Sunday, February 21.
- NOTE: Authors retain all rights to their writing.



PAL Updates from Sandy



Priceless Volunteer Efforts and WSRA No Go

My thanks to members JoAnn Early Macken and Laureanna Raymond-Duvernell for joining me to host our first in-person SCBWI-Wisconsin appearance since the Covid-19 pandemic arrived. We shared members' work with attendees at the open-air annual MILWAUKEE GREEN SCHOOLS Conference. More than three hundred area educators and others attended.

SCBWI-WI members sharing their time, energy, and enthusiasm to support fellow members' books make outreach appearances possible.

SCBWI-WI will not be attending what has been our major

annual outreach event for the past decade. The Wisconsin State Reading Association (WSRA) Conference will resume, in-person, in February, 2022. However, due primarily to Covid concerns, we will not take part.

WSRA's 2022 conference will be an indoor event requiring multiple volunteers. The patterns/trends of the Delta Covid variant (and others arising as I type this) does not inspire confidence that attendance would be as large as in the past and raises the possibility the in-person event might not occur. SCBWI-WI is not willing to put members/volunteers at risk by exposing them to attendees who have

traveled throughout the entire state.

We will remain alert for safe opportunities to engage with public audiences in the upcoming year and beyond.

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PAL Release Fliers: Help Us Help You

The Call for SPRING 2022 releases is underway. Why so early you ask?

Most people don't realize the publishing world works far into the future to allow for quality production, strategic timing, and marketing opportunities with various shifts and delays always possible. For most publishers, titles are prepared for marketing and review many months before the official release date.

Pre-orders are sought to indicate potential sales, determine print runs, and to trigger the digital algorithms that suggest which books are going to sell well or not. While all of this makes commercial sense, it may feel a tad crass and definitely puts creators in the awkward position of self-promoting. Here's where SCBWI-WI members can help.

PAL promotions volunteers work within that system and provide you with support for your efforts. That timing allows us to organize and publicize your PAL level book titles even before your book's actual release date. Our goal is to produce professional quality releases, with supportive materials and opportunities to help you share your news.

Your responsibility is to communicate quickly and accurately about your books. After that, take every opportunity to share the materials and appearances with your network, with our first-of-month listserv news, with Liza Wiemer to share on social media, and by participating in our monthly ZOOM PAL sessions.

That's why "The CALL" for next-season releases is issued so far in advance.

Check your email for the call for SPRING 2022 releases sent by our RA, Deb Bushman. If you have a confirmed book release planned for the spring, congratulations! Please read the detailed directions carefully and follow them thoroughly. If you have questions, reach out

to me directly for help, especially if yours is a debut release and the process is new to you.

What are the simplest ways we can help each other? Share member publication news on your social media outlets AND (drum roll please) attend a ZOOM PAL celebration.

These monthly get togethers are informative and fun.

What better way to learn than to ask questions of those whose work is being published.



Our monthly ZOOM PAL celebrations continued for those with FALL 2021 releases.

OCTOBER RELEASES:
(October 13)

Karla Manternach *Meena Lost and Found* (MG novel)

Pat Zietlow Miller *What Can You Do With A Rock?* (PB)

Dr. Susan Berk Koch *Chemical Reactions!* (Elem/MG Nonfiction)

Shannon Schuren *Where Echoes Lie* (YA Novel)

NOVEMBER RELEASES:
(November 16)

Barbara Joose *JUST BE CLAUSE* (PB)

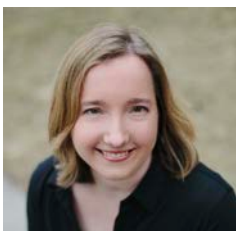
Barbara Joose/Renee Graef *THE FISHERMEN, THE HORSE, and the SEA* (PB)

Rochelle Melander- *MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD* (Elem/MG Nonfiction)

Jamie A Swenson- *WE WANT SNOW! A Wintry Chant* (PB)

Details about **upcoming PAL sessions** with links to registration, are announced on listserv, on social media, and are posted on our calendar by the first of the month. **See you there!**

Passionate about children's literature, Sandy Brehl shows boundless energy in her behind the scenes effort to promote SCBWI-WI authors and illustrators. Author of *Odin's Promise*, Sandy is the unofficial Cheerleader for SCBWI-WI.



Newsletter Designer Erica Dimka has been a writer for as long as she can remember, from short stories for her dad to news articles as a former journalist and copy editor. Now, in addition to teaching English, Erica loves writing YA fantasy and science fiction, as well as traveling and hiking. A member of SCBWI since 2017, she enjoys connecting with other authors.