

Illustrator's Corner

by Erika Wilson, Regional Illustrator Coordinator

Hi everyone!

I hope all of you have had productive, creative summers here in gorgeous Montana!

This summer, I have been working away on illustrating my second picture book--Skedaddle--written by Jacqueline Leigh. I am illustrating this book digitally, and I get a ton of questions about my tablet and software, so I thought I would share a bit about my tools of the trade. I work mostly in Procreate on my iPad Pro, with an Apple pencil. I love Procreate because it is inexpensive and VERY user friendly! I am always willing to answer questions or give lessons on Procreate to anyone who would like to try it out before making the investment in an iPad Pro of their own. I will have mine with me at our workshop in

Helena, so if you would like to experiment on it--please ask!

I hope you all are enjoying our gorgeous new header artwork done by Laurie Muggli! It looks fantastic on our website and our Facebook page, and I am working right now to design a fun SCBWI Montana button with her illustration, so we can WEAR her artwork proudly, as well! Congratulations again, Laurie, and great job on your illustration!

In other exciting news, I am opening a small printmaking studio in Billings next month! One of my goals for the space is that it be a regular meeting place for illustrators. I have some fun ideas in mind, like sketch nights and "talk shop" nights. I would really love to try some sketch nights with live children models, since we are usually drawing children in kidlit. (I have a rambunctious four-year-old who would give us lots of great live-action poses.) I will share more of my plans for events as I get the studio up and running this fall.

If you have any ideas for illustrator events you would like to see, or questions for me about any aspect of illustrating, please email me at montana-ic@scbwi.org. Happy drawing!

New Feature – PAL and FULL MEMBER INTERVIEWS

by Joann Howeth, Assistant Regional Advisor

Since our member base is spread across a large area, and we don't have many opportunities to get to know one another, your regional team has decided that our quarterly newsletter will now feature an interview with one of our published members.

Today I have the pleasure of interviewing Susan Adrian - author of YA novels - *Tunnel Vision: A Novel* and *The Dark at the End: A Tunnel Vision Novel*, and MG novels - *Nutcracked* and *Forever Neverland* released this summer.

In sound bites, tell us about yourself:

- Born and raised: *I was born in Los Angeles but raised in tiny-town northern California.*
- College and degree: *UC Davis, in English, of course. I got my Masters from Montana Tech in Technical Communication.*
- Family: *I live with my husband and 17-year-old daughter.*
- Currently reside: *Butte, Montana! I love Butte.*
- Day job: *I'm a scientific editor for the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, which is the geologic survey of the state. I edit, layout, and distribute all of our reports and other publications.*

- Hobbies: *Reading, cooking, and watching Netflix.*
- Favorite season: *Fall. I get so excited when everything starts to cool off, and the light changes.*

Your first book was published in 2015, and you've published four since – I'm impressed - it seems like you're really on a roll. How long had you been writing prior to this whirlwind of publication?

I had been writing for 15 years before I sold my first book. It certainly wasn't an easy process to reach publication, but to be honest—in spite of the fact that it looks pretty steady—it hasn't really been easy since either. But at this point I know I just need to keep my head down and do the work and trust my agent.

Have you always been a storyteller?

I think so. I had a poem published in the local paper when I was 10 or so. It wasn't very good, but even then, I was trying to translate what I saw of the world for other people.

I know you used to be a ballet dancer. Can you tell us a little about that? How has that experience translated into your current life as a writer?

I was involved in dance for a critical period of my life, from ages 8 to 16. I was very serious about it. I had class every day but Sunday, for at least three hours a day—plus rehearsals if we were doing a production. I thought I wanted to be a dancer professionally and was a member of the Sacramento Ballet Company. However, I'm just not really built for it, and I had to stop at age 16 because of injuries. Almost immediately I took that artistic energy into acting and did plays in high school. It wasn't until after college that I really started to even dabble with writing. I think the creativity is the same—it just comes out in different forms. Writing has worked out the best for me. ☺

What is the most rewarding aspect of writing children's lit for you?

Honestly, it's trying to put out into the world the same kind of magic I absorbed so greedily as a young reader. I hope that even a few kids enjoy my stories in the same way that I read and loved books. The books I read in childhood are the ones that have stuck with me the most throughout my life, and probably always will be.

What are the sources of inspiration for your books? For example, “Neverland” contains a lot of mythology - is that a personal interest or did you have to do specific research for that element of the book?

I did do a lot of research on mythology for Neverland, but I've always been interested in mythology, folklore, and fairytales. Those are going to be inspiring my books for some time to come.

Were there any unique challenges to writing “Neverland?” Or any of your other books?

Forever Neverland was very challenging because I wanted to be absolutely certain that I got the autistic representation right, writing from the first-person point of view of an autistic character. So, I did a ton of research from the perspective of autistic people, I had autistic readers, and I worked very hard on that. From the reviews so far, I'm really gratified to see that it seems to work well for most people.

What kind of a writing schedule do you follow? Are you a BIC writer like Jane Yolen who writes every day despite the weather?

I don't restrict myself to writing every day, especially on vacation—and I take days off when I need to have a break. But most days, I get up at 5:30 AM and I write until 6:45 AM. Then I turn it off, get ready, and go to work. I will sometimes write in the evenings if my family is out or busy, but most evenings are for spending with them. I think of myself as the tortoise: I may work slowly, but I am very steady, and I always make my deadlines.

Here's a two-parter:

For some writers, the revision process can be a love-hate relationship – how do you feel about it?

In general, I like revision an awful lot more than first drafts. I write without an outline or plan, so first drafts are really me bumbling my way through the story. Once I have that down, then I have something to work with.

And would you describe your agent, Kate Testerman (who some of us will remember meeting in 2014 at our regional conference) as an editorial agent – that is, does she guide your revisions?

Kate is not a super editorial agent, at least with me. She will usually give me a few notes, but in general we prefer to leave that to my editors. She is, however, the most supportive agent you could ask for, and extremely knowledgeable about children's literature and the market.

And finally . . .

What advice do you have for the rest of us who are hoping one day to be in your “ballet slippers?”

The best advice I ever received regarding writing was from Diana Gabaldon, and I've passed it along ever since:

1. *Read*
2. *Write.*
3. *Don't stop.*

It's the "don't stop" part that throws people sometimes. As long as it gives you happiness in some fashion to write, don't stop. Persistence is the key to nearly everything, including publication. Tell your stories, and good luck!

Thanks for your time, Susan, and congratulations on your wonderful new book!

SCBWI Summer Convention in LA by Precious McKenzie, Regional Advisor

The annual summer convention in Los Angeles was inspiring. Illustrators, writers, agents, and editors all came together to share their expertise with us. We had six people attend the convention from our region. I think we would all agree that we learned a lot and that we met many new friends during the convention. From the delightful keynote addresses to the educational workshops, we immersed ourselves in the kid-lit publishing world.

One of the many benefits of the LA Convention is the opportunity to have your work critiqued by an agent or editor. Based on my experience with this critique program, I can say that it was a positive, helpful experience to have this one-on-one time with an industry insider. Another benefit of the LA Convention is that attendees are able to submit their manuscripts to the agents and editors who were there—a by- pass from the slush pile!

The next SCBWI Summer Convention will be in LA on July 24-27, 2020.

The Kate Dopirak Award application opens on September 1, 2019. The award is given to the author of a promising manuscript. The award covers the full tuition of the LA Convention. For more details, visit <https://katedopirakaward.com/>.

Reflections from Conference Attendee

by Tiffany Spire

Hello Everyone!

As you all know, SCBWI is an amazing resource. The annual conferences are part of what makes this organization so valuable. Precious highlighted above some of the great aspects of the LA conference. I'd like to add some thoughts compiled from feedback given by some of our own Montana members who attended this summer.

The conference provided:

- inspiring and thought-provoking keynote speeches
- craft-specific workshops for each part of the writing journey
- up-to-date information on what's happening in the industry
- a chance to form relationships with writers and illustrators from around the world
- relevant advice from industry experts

And finally, a quote from our own Joann Howeth which I think beautifully sums up how most of us felt.

*...it's a completely delicious experience to find yourself surrounded by "like-minded" people who all possess the same deep desire to write for those little people we're all so fond of. And on top of all that - it's FUN! It's a whirlwind experience and every year, I return home exhausted - yes - but always **always** reinvigorated, encouraged, and excited!!!!*

I'd like to continue this column with more resources for us children's book makers. For instance, at the conference I learned about the podcast, *Writing for Children*. I have been listening to it (and learning from it) almost daily since I returned from Los Angeles.

If you know of a resource for writers or illustrators that you have found to be really helpful and would like to share it with others, please email me about it at tiffany223@gmail.com.

Upcoming Events and Announcements

by Precious McKenzie, Regional Advisor

Our Powerful Picture Books Writing Retreat with Kelly Bennett is fast approaching! Kelly is an award-winning author and a fabulous instructor. Plus, she is offering to do paid critiques for retreat attendees. This is a great chance to take your picture book manuscript to the next level! There's still time to register at <https://montana.scbwi.org/events/picture-book-writing-retreat/>. Join us in Helena on September 21!

Newsletter Coordinator Position

Please welcome Tiffany Spire to our regional team of volunteers. Tiffany will be coordinating our quarterly regional newsletter and contributing a column. Thank you, Tiffany, for taking on this big job!

Regional Hobnobs and Critique Group Meetings

All Hobnobs are free and open to the public. Encourage friends to drop by and see what SCBWI is all about.

Missoula

September 11, 12-2 pm, University of Montana's UC Center, Main Floor Atrium, Hobnob. ARA Joann Howeth will be there to recap the SCBWI Summer Convention

Bozeman

September 5, noon to 2pm, Country Bookshelf, Hobnob

October 3, noon to 2pm, Country Bookshelf, Hobnob

November 7, noon to 2pm, Country Bookshelf, Hobnob

Billings

September 17, 5:30-7pm, This House of Books, Hobnob

October 15, 5:30-7pm, This House of Books, Hobnob

November 19, 5:30-7pm, This House of Books, Hobnob

Your Regional Team Is Here For You

Reach out to them if you have any questions or if you would like to start up a critique group.

Regional Advisor: Precious McKenzie, montana-ra@scbwi.org

Assistant Regional Advisor: Joann Howeth, montana-ara@scbwi.org

Illustrator Coordinator: Erika Wilson, montana-ic@scbwi.org

Newsletter Coordinator: Tiffiny Spire, tiffiny223@gmail.com