



# SCBWI

## NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2020 ISSUE 3

Art by Marcela Cespedes

marcelacespedes.com



For more info on Marcela Cespedes, please check out our very illustrative interview with her on page 4 -5

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**LOCAL ARTISTS FEATURED ON EVERY PAGE**

# Tiffany LIAO

Senior Editor Henry at Holt Books for Young Readers

By E.L. Tenenbaum

*Ms. Liao was gracious enough to give us an over-the-phone interview about her wish list, her perspectives, and her view on the current situation. Disclosure: The words below are Ms. Liao's, but some answers have been spliced for the sake of space and flow.*

## Is your online manuscript wish list current?

I'm happy to speak to, generally, what I tend to gravitate toward, which is perennial.

I'm a big lover of sci-fi and fantasy. I love transportive world building. My list does skew more heavily toward YA. I would say about seventy-thirty YA-middle grade with the occasional picture book. My picture books tend to have a pop culture focus, and I'm much more selective on the picture book end.

For middle grade and YA, I always strive to publish inclusively, so I'm looking for fresh perspectives of stories that reflect the world around the readers we see every day.

What I love so much about working, editing, acquiring and publishing children's books is that children and teens are very exacting readers. Their baseline is that they must be entertained, and I love that challenge. It's got to be a thrilling

story. It's got to be an entertaining story. It's got to be one that grips you. But are there layers there that can resonate with the reader, that can grow with the reader, that can reveal new meanings upon multiple re-readings? That's the kind of book that I always strive to acquire.

*(Note: on subjective preferences: Ms. Liao is NOT looking for books about cyberspace or horses.)*

## Does that mean you want something with a message, even if it's subtle?

Not necessarily a message but a point of view, a strong perspective, ideally one that we maybe haven't seen before that's adding to the conversation in some way.

A light-hearted romantic comedy can have that emotional heft to it. A dragon-fantasy-adventure can have some emotional weight to it. So, it's



Art by: Gina Capaldi

About the Artist: Read more about Gina on page 22.

ginacapaldi.com

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# Tiffany LIAO

CONTINUED

## Some top pet peeves are\_\_\_\_\_.

Especially in middle grade, when a protagonist is too precocious or too cute, I think that speaks to the author not quite leaving their adult perspective yet. Kids don't think they're cute, they think they're incredibly serious. Sometimes too snarky, which could be pretty tough for an editor to connect to or for a reader. Sometimes when I see something that is so heavy on that kind of voice it feels like the author has not quite yet gotten to know, or has not quite yet immersed themselves, in the character's perspective and is relying on preciousness or cutesiness or whatever to take the place of a deeper characterization.

## I'm a sucker for\_\_\_\_\_.

I love clubs, secret societies, anything that has that kind of intimate, sometimes claustrophobic feel. I really love anything that's like a world in miniature. I love the idea of a microcosm that's very contained, I think that's very appealing to kids. Anything like a microculture, or a niche, or a subculture, I find fascinating—not even necessarily whatever that hobby or passion or subculture is—it's more that there's a group of people or subculture that's so devoted to it and that kind of passionate intensity and earnestness tends to be very interesting.

Sisters. I always tend to gravitate toward sister books.

## Any tips for unsigned authors?

Read, read, read. Read what is working in the market right now. Read what is popular, not so much to mold or shape your voice or to write in such way that doesn't feel true to you, but if something has reached that broad success or has reached that critical acclaim then it's tapped into something that has very broad appeal, that resonates with a lot of people, which is ideally what you want for your book.

I really recommend trying to retroactively take apart why a book is so resonant. Try and figure out what the beating heart of those books are and how you can identify that in your own story. Read constantly. Read outside of your comfort level. Read the books that wouldn't necessarily be the ones that you would gravitate toward to get a sense of why they are resonating and how to replicate that in your own book and try to clarify that in your own vision.

more about balancing out those things, which is why I call it a Trojan horse, where there is something that stays with you, but, again, first and foremost it has to entertain.

## What specifically do you mean by “transportive world building”?

It refers to my experience of being completely immersed in the story. I feel transported out of this world. It can be a fascinating fantasy world, but it can also be a really strong voice or a really strong point of view. A character whose perspective is so immersive that it feels like it colors your worldview. I tend to think it kind of wipes your windshield clear when you go back to reality. I call it being story-drunk.

## What are some traits you like to see in authors you work with?

My authors have something to say, something that they have to say. That's really an important distinction, with every story you just feel that this is a story they finally want to tell. When an author is writing with that kind of urgency, it definitely comes through on the page; it's magnetic, almost kinetic. You really can tell.

Authors who understand the role of the author and the role of the editor as a truly collaborative relationship, which is to say that my role is to clarify, polish, pare, strengthen, but ultimately I need to trust that the author has a very, very clear vision and has a real authority in the process.

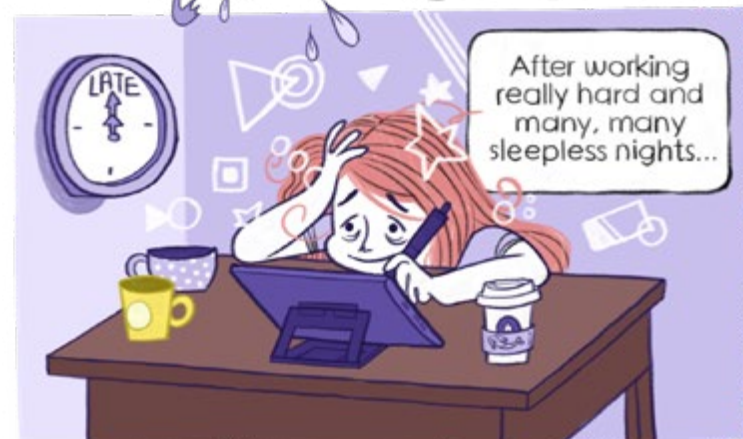
I might throw out editorial ideas [that] don't ring true. The author needs to know that and not just take every note. It's more of an understanding the spirit of the edits. I need them to understand the ripple effects of that change. If it's not the right move then how else can they address it that still feels true to their vision?

FEATURED ILLUSTRATOR

# Marcela CESPEDES

Interview by Gina Capaldi with Illustrations by Marcela Cespedes

Marcela Cespedes was the portfolio winner at the 2019 SoCal Writers and Illustrators Day. She was an art director for national and international agencies such as McCann Erickson, Young & Rubicam, and many more. Major campaigns included Coca-Cola, Cadbury Adams Brand and Colgate-Palmolive.



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Marcela arrived in California with her master's degree from Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) to become a freelancer. She is currently a published children's book illustrator working for clients such as Nickelodeon, Disney and Penguin Random House. She is also the Art Director of the SCBWI SoCal Newsletter.



LEARN MORE ABOUT MARCELA AT [WWW.MARCELACESPEDES.COM](http://WWW.MARCELACESPEDES.COM)



# SOCAL *Spring* MEMBER NEWS

By Desi St. Amant

Art by Jon St. Amant

About the Artist: Jonathan St. Amant is a middle school art teacher and aspiring graphic novelist with a particular interest in video games and sci-fi and fantasy stories. [jonsaintamant.com](http://jonsaintamant.com)



*My Name is Zuma* (Xlibris Publishers) is Isaac Osa-Brown's first published picture book. The story explains how it feels to live with Autism. It is a children's book, but could also be helpful for any adults dealing with a child on the spectrum. Isaac earned his master's degree in special education at California State University Dominguez Hills. He has published several newspaper articles focusing on special education. Isaac lives in Long Beach, California, with his family. This book has been published and is available in print and digital formats.



*Efrén Divided*, a debut MG novel by Ernesto Cisneros, will be released on March 31st. Ernesto was born and raised in Santa Ana, California, where he still teaches. As an author, he believes in providing today's youth with an honest depiction of characters with whom they can identify. The real world is filled with amazing people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. His work strives to reflect that. *Efrén Divided* is available in print and digitally. [www.ernestocisneros.com](http://www.ernestocisneros.com)



★ **"HONEST AND TENDER: A MUST READ"**  
-KIRKUS (STARRED REVIEW)

★ **"HEART-WRENCHING REALISM"**  
-WEEKLY PUBLISHERS (STARRED REVIEW)

★ **"A MOVING NOVEL"**  
-BOOKLIST (STARRED REVIEW)

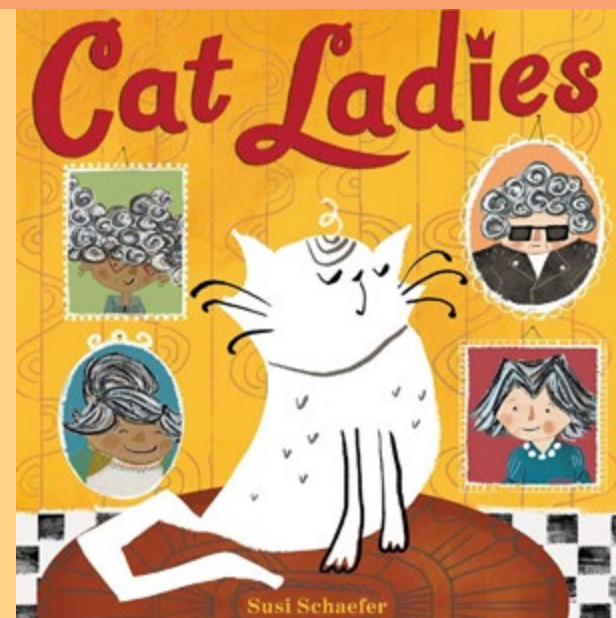
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# SOCAL *Spring* MEMBER NEWS CONTINUED



*Beyond the Break* is a funny and gorgeous YA debut about a girl experiencing her first love. Well, second, if you count her faith... and that's where things may get complicated. The author, Heather Buchta, graduated from Loyola Marymount University with a B.A. in communications, but she'll tell you the real B.A. in college is learning how to pay bills. She lives in the beach cities of Los Angeles, where she dotes on her dog and writes stories from her indoor porch. *Beyond the Break* is her first novel. It will be released in hardcover and digitally on June 2nd, 2020.

*Human Again* is a darker retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* from the prince's point of view. It's the fourth in E.L. Tenenbaum's *End of Ever After* companion series. The novels are (sometimes darker) retellings of familiar fairy tales, which explore the relationships between these famous royal couples. The fifth and final book of the series is expected for release this spring. *Human Again* is Esther's seventh published book and is available in print and digitally.



*Cat Ladies*, author-illustrator Susi Schaefer's picture book debut, will be released on April 7th. This witty story explores the loving bond between cats and their humans. Susi trained as a glass painter in the medieval town of Rattenberg, Austria, before moving to Southern California to study graphic design. She's the illustrator of *Zoo Zen* by Kristen Fischer. Susi volunteers for a cat rescue group and lives in North Tustin, California, with her family. Her book will be released in hardcover and digitally. <http://www.susischaefers.com/>

Desi St. Amant is a high school English teacher and an aspiring middle grade novelist. Send your member news to her email at [dstamant07@gmail.com](mailto:dstamant07@gmail.com).

## An Agent with an Eye *Lara* PERKINS, ABLA By Lindsey Algood

Lara Perkins is an Associate Agent and Digital Manager at the Andrea Brown Literary Agency. Lara represents award-winning authors and illustrators of picture books, middle grade, and YA fiction and nonfiction. Lara has a B.A. in English and Art History from Amherst College and an M.A. in English Literature from Columbia University. Pre-publishing, she studied architectural design. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two daughters. Find Lara on Twitter.

### What makes a good story?

For me, it comes down to a big thought-provoking question that is explored in a relatable and emotionally-resonant way. I think that's true even for humor-driven picture books!

### What is your favorite current trend in children's books and why?

I love working on narrative nonfiction picture books, and I'm so glad that there is a healthy market for them. I learn the coolest facts from my clients' nonfiction picture books, and the illustration potential is so innovative and exciting.

### How do you read a submission? What do you look for?

I usually first review the query letter, hoping for the concept to hook me and to see evidence of the author or illustrator's professionalism and commitment. Then I dive into the writing sample or portfolio. I usually know fairly quickly whether the voice is working for me or not, and the same is true with art style for a portfolio. I ask myself if I'm excited to read more or if I can walk away without knowing what happens next. Hopefully, I can't walk away! If that's the case, I take a moment to check in with myself because, for work that's a good fit for me, I usually have the beginnings of a submission strategy almost right away. I know where it fits in the market, and I can articulate the hooks (even if the author or illustrator hasn't). But if I feel at a loss when I think about how to sell it...then I might not be the best advocate for the book.



Art by: Lisa Hancock

[www.lisajohnstonhancock.com](http://www.lisajohnstonhancock.com)

About the Artist: Lisa Johnston Hancock is an illustrator whose work has found a home in children's books. She enjoys creating work that focuses on ecology and environmental education, encouraging a lifelong positive attitude toward the natural world. She recently partnered with MacLaren - Cochrane Publishing as illustrator of *Yellow-Speckled Blackbird*, written by Dylan Pritchett and published in February of 2020.

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## *Lara* PERKINS CONTINUED

### What project are you secretly hoping to receive in your inbox?

I would love to receive a twisty but grounded, atmospheric, Tana French-style literary YA mystery novel, told from an underrepresented perspective by someone whose story it is to tell. (That is so specific, I know! I am also looking for many other kinds of fiction and nonfiction!)

### Your best tip for an unpublished author seeking an agent?

Read widely in your category, and make sure that being a great reader is as important to you as being a great writer. As a great reader, you'll be supporting your chosen profession, making connections at your local library and bookstore that will serve you once your work is published, and coming up with comp titles will be much easier if you've read a lot of books in the same category and genre as your work. Also, by studying jacket copy, author bios, and acknowledgements on published books, you'll get a free primer on how to draft these things yourself and whose tastes (agents, editors, imprints) align with yours.

### What book is on your bedside table? (Or books!)

Right now, Lori Gottlieb's *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone* and Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime*.

Most importantly, how are you balancing work, family, mental health and fun in this scary time?

The answer for my family seems to be getting as much fresh air and sunlight as possible, having a flexible schedule and good communication about shifting priorities throughout the day, and doing my best to be grounded and present in whatever I'm doing at that moment.

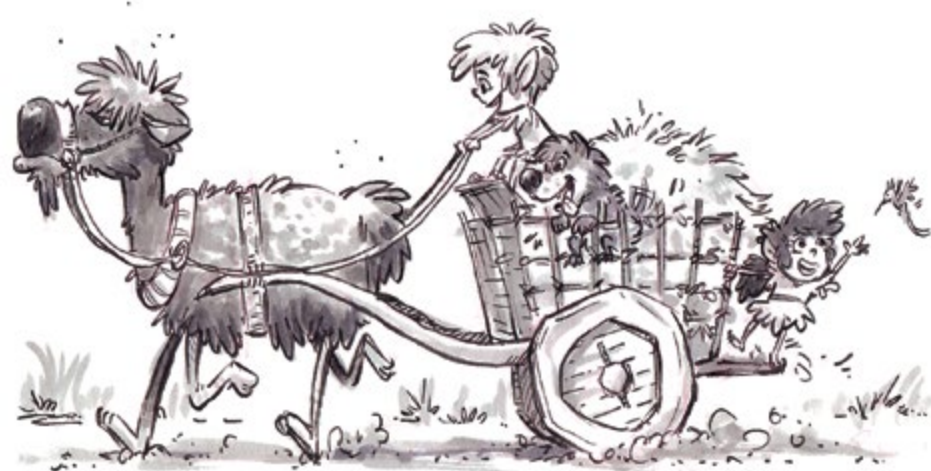


Art by: Nicole Dalrymple

[nedalrymple.com](http://nedalrymple.com)

About the Artist: Nicole Dalrymple is a freelance illustrator inspired and influenced by midcentury themes.

**Lindsey Allgood is a creative writer, university-level educator and professional writing consultant based in San Diego, CA. She can be reached at [lindseylallgood@gmail.com](mailto:lindseylallgood@gmail.com).**



Art by: Wendy Grieb

wendygrieb.com

**In these scary, troubling times, I've had several patrons come to me asking for books to help their kids cope. For my youngest patrons (preschool through early elementary), I take a page from Mr. Rogers and "look for the helpers." Therefore, I recommend nonfiction books on garbage collectors, mail carriers, nurses, and anyone else still on the front lines while the rest of us are sheltering in place.**

**Older kids want escapism. So I suggest veering towards humorous and/or romance books (depending on their taste) and away from horror and/or dystopia.**

#### Recommendations:

##### PB:

*Hooray for Doctors* by Tessa Kenan: Doctors know many things about health and the human body! By examining patients and prescribing medicine, doctors can find out what is making someone sick and how to make them feel better.

##### MG:

*Flawed Dogs: The Shocking Raid on Westminster* by Berkeley Breathed: Sam the dachshund, bred to be a show dog, has only one interest in life: to be loved. When he escapes from his new owner, he becomes friends with a young girl named Heidi and is welcomed into her home. But Cassius, the jealous poodle, frames Sam and causes him to be thrown out. Sam then embarks on a series of adventures and befriends other abandoned dogs, eventually traveling to the Westminster Dog Show, where he plans his revenge on Cassius. Once he arrives, however, his plans change when he sees Heidi after years of being apart.

## Ask the Librarian

By Kelly Powers

About the Artist: An award-winning storyboard artist and illustrator, Wendy Grieb has illustrated six books in the *Monster and Me* series for Mighty Media Press. Wendy's clients include Disney, Nickelodeon, Sony, Klasky-Csupo, White Wolf, Mighty Media, etc. Currently, she teaches Animation and when she's not drawing, she loves to read books, play games and spend time with family.

##### YA:

*Geekerella* by Ashley Poston: Seventeen-year-old Elle Whittimer grew up watching the sci-fi TV show "Starfield." So when she hears about a cosplay contest at a local convention that awards the winner the chance to meet the actor slated to star in the reboot, she's determined to win, despite the fact that she's less than thrilled with him being cast in the role. As she redesigns her dad's old costume for the event, she begins texting with a mystery boy who loves "Starfield" as much as she does.

Lastly, remember that though the libraries may be closed to the public, there's a wealth of online resources available for you and your kids. Audio books, e-books, databases, online tutoring, virtual story times, and much more. Librarians are here to help, even from home, and though we can't wait to get back to working with you directly, there's much we can offer you from afar. Please reach out if you need us, and take care of you and yours.

##### The Librarian.

Sincerely,  
Kelly Powers  
Contributor to *The Joe Ledger Companion*

**Kelly Powers has worked in libraries for over ten years and especially enjoys providing Reader Advisory (or book recommendations). If you have questions regarding book recommendations for children through young adult readers or need suggestions for comparable titles to help sell your manuscript, please send an email to Kelly Powers at [kelpowers2000@yahoo.com](mailto:kelpowers2000@yahoo.com).**

## Courtney STEVENSON

ASSISTANT EDITOR AT HARPER COLLINS  
By Tim Burke

### What book/author changed your life as a kid (under 15)?

This is a very predictable answer, but I was in the magical generation that got to read the Harry Potter series as the books were coming out—I read the first one when I was ten. Those books shaped so much of my childhood: the make-believe games I played, the music I listened to (wrock on!), and how I understood storytelling and character development.

### What would you say you are most excited about right now as you observe the children's literature industry?

We're slowly figuring out how to have hard conversations about the tough subjects kids are sometimes faced with, and questions of how to get representation right. Sometimes it's a difficult learning experience, and we don't always get it right, but I do think the stories that are being told now are even more complex, interesting, and empathetic.

### Can you share a valuable lesson that you have gleaned from working with authors and editors, whether it be related to the creative process or professional relationships?

Every author is different. Some want to review every bit of copy and come up with a million suggestions for the marketing plan, while some are totally hands-off and happy to follow your lead. Some authors need an edit letter that gets right into everything that needs to change in their manuscript, and some need a letter that's heavy on the praise. Part of my job as an editor is to give every author what they need—it's a very personal job!



Art by: Shiho Pate

shihopate.com

### What were the biggest surprises for you in all your years of publishing; e.g., books you thought might not have wide appeal but ended up being loved?

I was beside myself the first time my name was included in a book's acknowledgements—in Jandy Nelson's *I'll Give You the Sun*, which I'd read and given late-stage notes for as an agency intern. I don't think I stopped smiling all week long!



Art by: Shiho Pate

shihopate.com

About the Artist: Shiho Pate works in the mobile gaming industry and illustrates picture books. She is represented by East West Literary Agency. [shihopate.com](http://shihopate.com) Instagram and Twitter @shihopate

# Courtney STEVENSON CONTINUED

## How important is social media and maintaining an online presence? Does it influence how you approach a manuscript?

Social media is your calling card; I will usually check out an author's pages to get a sense of who they are, what their sense of humor is like, the details of their lives they choose to highlight. Maintaining an Instagram or Twitter is not supposed to be extra homework for you, but a way to connect to your community. Readers might not care as much—they hold the stories in their hands for just as long as it takes to read—but the community that you build on social media will get more books into those hands.

## What is your single most important piece of advice for the unpublished author out there?

If an editor or agent says your book isn't for them, it might be perfect for somebody else—our taste is subjective too! That said, be sure you're reading widely in the current market, as that will help you understand what we're looking for (and comps are always helpful!).

## Finally, is there anything unusual or interesting about you that you'd like to share with our readers?

I used to be part of a Scottish highland dance troupe!

**When not writing MG and YA novels, Tim Burke plays guitar for various working bands, skates with and ice hockey team, teaches ESL or SAT and ACT and hangs out with his wife and two comedian mutts. Tim is also the Regional Advisor of SoCal SCBWI.**



Art by: Maya Ismailova

[mayaismailova.com](http://mayaismailova.com)

About the Artist: An artist, a people's photographer, and an avid traveler of the rainbow of cultures, Maya has 10+ years hands-on experience working with children. That experience and love for color inevitably led her to write and illustrate her first children's book. A self-taught illustrator and a lifetime poetry writer, she has yet another story to tell.

## 2020 DEBUT AUTHOR

By Lindsey Algood

# ERNESTO Cisneros



Ernesto Cisneros' first novel (MG), *Efrén Divided*, debuts on March 31st. Here he generously shares his experiences and words of wisdom. If you'd like to learn more about Ernesto, take a look at the Member News section.

## What inspired you to write *Efrén Divided*?

My story was born after three of my students experienced ICE raids at each of their homes. Each one of them lost someone that year. There was so much uncertainty in the community; I needed to do something. I created the character of Efrén (a friend) to help my kids, both at school and at home, to navigate through the confusion and uncertainty.

## How long did it take to go from your initial idea to publication?

The entire process took almost three years. I spent eight months writing and polishing the manuscript. Then, after a two-week period of submissions, we landed an offer from HarperCollins. That was two years ago almost to the day. There were so many revisions, edits, and line edits to do that I felt like college finals that would never end. I honestly wasn't sure I had it in me to complete them all. It was the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life. Since then, I've been working on drumming up as much attention for the book as possible while working on a second manuscript.



## Did you encounter any challenges in writing, finding an agent, or getting published? If so, how did you overcome them?

Finding an agent felt like an impossible task. For the most part, I received my fill of generic rejection letters or never heard back from some at all. Then, at one of SCBWI's Agents Day events, I was selected by Deborah Warren as her top pick. Many people think that's all it took, but what they don't know is that it took me THREE years for Deborah to offer to represent me.

Throughout the process, she patiently encouraged me to hone my craft. I will forever be grateful for her faith in me. After she took me on board, we submitted to just about everyone in the business with little luck. So I put down my other manuscripts and penned the novel of my heart. Two weeks into the submission process, *Efrén Divided* had an offer—from HarperCollins!!!

CONTINUES ON PAGE 14

# ERNESTO Cisneros

CONTINUED

## Can you share a bit about your writing process?

I like to do something I call METHOD WRITING. Pretty much, it means I do my best to channel the mindset of my characters. Whatever the mood and situation my character is faced with becomes the lens by which I write. I'll usually create a playlist of songs to help achieve this. I've got playlists to suit all moods: goth, rock, '50s, '80s, rap—even country music for those emotional scenes. Sometimes I'll even act out the scene (either in my head, or my bedroom where no one is watching).

## How did you seek initial feedback for your manuscript? Did you participate in a critique group?

Definitely. I rely heavily on my critique group for feedback. I really don't see how anyone can ever write a book without some sort of support group. They not only help me to revise and polish my work, they also keep me focused and motivated—especially when my confidence falters. However, the only thing worse than not having a critique group is being in the wrong one. Be sure that the people around you are truly there to help, not compete against you. This arrangement should be beneficial to every member of the group. A bad critique group can be toxic and sideswipe your career.

## Which authors or artists inspire you?

The very first book that inspired me was K.L. Going's *Fat Kid Rules The World*. I really connected with the voice. It wasn't overwritten... but authentic-sounding (to me). Something I'd never seen in books before. I also turn to Jerry Spinelli's *Maniac Magee* because of the way it deals with serious issues of race, running away, and mental health in a way accessible to young children. There's also *Operation Frog Effect* by Sarah Scheerger. I love the way she captures the voices of so many diverse characters in such an entertaining fashion—while making it all appear so effortless.

## What advice do you have for new writers?

Don't write what you think others want you to. Whatever your style is, stick with it. It's what makes your writing unique, marketable. Listen to other authors and try different things. But at the end of the day, write for yourself. Write about the things that matter to you.

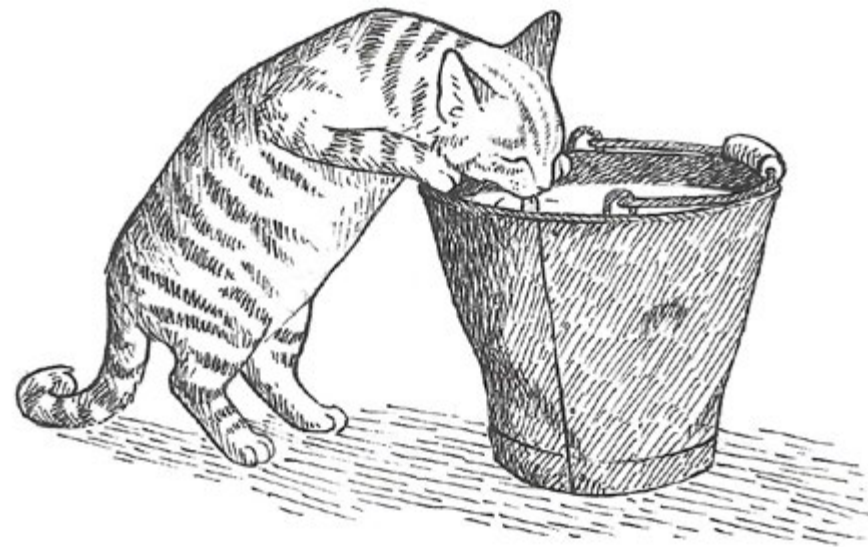
Shut your eyes, think about the memories that you hold special in your heart. Ignore everything else that might distract you like worries or problems—even that nasty voice of self doubt. Now share those memories with the world and don't hold back; the relationship between the writer and reader needs to be genuine and honest.

## What other jobs or interests do you have, and how do these impact your writing?

As a schoolteacher, parent, and author, it is easy to see how my worlds collide. I can't tell you how many times I've overheard one of my students say something that I feel the need to jot down for future use. I love to write but hate doing research. That's why I tend to write about things I already know about. That includes: basketball, wrestling, music, biking, and fighting with my siblings.

## What's next for you?

I'm working on a second middle grade book, tentatively entitled *One Shot*. It is a quirky, but heartfelt story about two best friends with two things in common: strained relationships with their fathers and a promising fresh start in middle school that just might fix everything.



Art by: Hannah Sease

[hannahsease.com](http://hannahsease.com)

About the Artist: An illustrator specializing in traditional watercolor and black and white illustration, Hannah loves to create home-spun style illustrations focusing on subjects such as animals and rural lifestyles. When she's not creating art, Hannah enjoys bike riding and camping. She also loves cooking and a good IPA.

# Takeaways from a Contest JUDGE

By E.L. Tenenbaum

Last year, I had the dubious privilege of first-round judging a self-published book awards contest. No matter the contest, judges always have too much to read in too little time. I had to read fifty books in about two-and-a-half weeks, plus write a 200-300-word critique on each one within the six weeks after that.

With such a short crunch time, it's vital for submissions to not only be good, but to really stand out. And this holds true for the much, much wider book market.

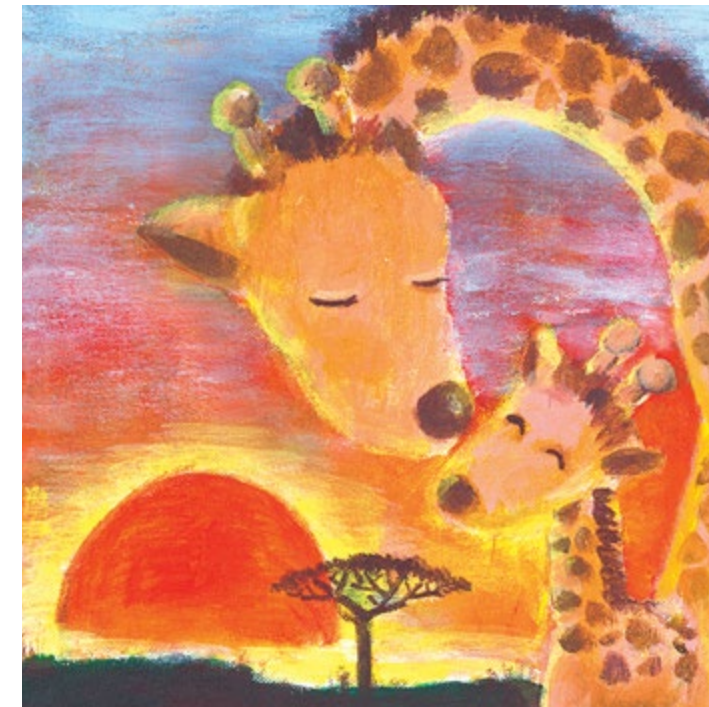
Below, a list of tips culled from this experience, for however you'll publish:

### 1. Covers needn't be intricate, but must be professional.

One cover, a simple black and purple background behind white text, looked like it had been designed by the author in Publisher. Maybe books shouldn't be judged by their covers, but an unprofessional cover is a warning to readers about the quality of what's inside.

### 2. Layout and formatting must be correct.

Some books had fonts so large, which, while easier to breeze through, is also a massive waste



Art by: Wing Yee Lee

Ig: @wingyeedoodles

About the Artist: Wing Yee is a tenacious illustrator and graphic designer who enjoys working on both analog and digital mediums. Since graduating from Otis College of Art and Design, her work has included children's books, promotional pieces for businesses, festivals and events, and commissioned paintings. She loves to doodle anything and everything she sees and finds inspiration in her peers' work.

of paper. (Some books were even double-spaced!) Conversely, some fonts were so small, I pushed them to the bottom of the pile and only eventually approached them with dread. Open any big-name book and look at the layout, font, and formatting to get an idea of the right way to go.

### 3. Many books entered in the contest contained too many basic mistakes.

Not only were there multiple grammatical errors, but overall it seemed the book was lacking a thorough "scrub" by a professional proofreader. One error too many will obscure the actual story, because a reader simply cannot overlook so many mistakes, no matter how well you write.

### 4. Illustrations are a nice touch, but not recommended if, again, they're not professional looking.

One author had not only gone to the expense of publishing in color and hardback, he'd also added multiple illustrations. Impressive, except they were poorly done. His characters' arms seemed to be attached to the front of their torsos, which obviously made certain poses difficult to show, and elicited mixed moments of shock and incredulous laughter.

### 5. Fiction must still make sense!

Never mind lack of proofreading, some stories didn't seem to have been edited at all. Some characters were brought in without introduction or purpose, as if I was supposed to be in the author's mind and just know. There were also numerous instances of love interests being introduced without any context for the relationship; Character A couldn't wait to see Character B because she was beautiful and he loved her. And that was it, the entire relationship was supposedly believable. Your story needs a professional set of eyes to make sure all parts properly fit together.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 16



# Takeaways from a Contest **JUDGE** CONTINUED

### 6. Stories must be cohesive and well developed.

As with the above "love" interest, context and description of worlds were often absent (or information dumps slowed down the narrative entirely). This means I don't know which "rules" the characters are playing by, why certain things are happening, so I don't understand why they're behaving in certain ways. (This includes stories about animals! One story about a dog's adventure kept talking about the dog wanting to go back home but didn't have a reason why, especially because the dog was making friends and having a great time away from home.)

### 7. Stories should have a point, as if the writer had dumped out an idea and then submitted it without once thinking about what the reader was supposed to take away once the story's done, which can lead to an undesirably empty experience.

Not every story requires a lesson, but it should have a point.

And now, cautions aside, a note on each of my book picks for what they did right.

### 1. My top pick was a shorter book that was simply designed, all black and white, no color.

The simplicity of it is part of what drew my attention, because this was either going to be done very right or very wrong. The writing was sparse and unadorned, to the point, but also reflective of the teenage male protagonist. Still, it was a rather deep and thought-provoking book, because bundles of words are not always necessary to convey a feeling or message. It picked a point, stuck to the point, and didn't include anything that had nothing to do with the point. It was also refreshing to read a book that was effective with what it had set out to do, so it not only caught my attention and shot to the top of my list, but it stayed there too.

### 2. The second pick was, believe it or not, a rom-com, which I admit to being on the fence about.

I even contacted the organizers to double-check the criteria because it felt like something "deeper" should be chosen. HOWEVER, this book was not only well written, but also perfectly captured its audience and genre. It won a top spot because of its excellent execution, even though I knew exactly where the story was going because it was so familiar. Also, the book was about a body swap,

where the boy and girl grow closer and closer as they spend time as each other. The author added in a nice touch, which also increased believability, added depth, and made it her own. As the girl watched the boy during the switches, she began to consider how the boy was imitating her, specifically in the way he saw her. She was a rather self-conscious, shy girl who thought all her friends were so much more than her, but seeing the boy trying to act as her, the way he thought her to be, she suddenly began to see someone she liked, and that boosted her self-confidence and belief in who she could be.

Overall, contests can really help an author's reputation and resume, but the competition is very high and inundated judges aren't always going to wait until the end to give a book a chance. **Submissions must be your absolute best and must impress from the outset!**

**E. L. Tenenbaum is the author of several works of YA fiction. Visit her at [ELTenenbaum.com](http://ELTenenbaum.com) and take a book off the shelf!**



Art by: Chuck Grieb [chuckgrieb.com](http://chuckgrieb.com)

# Leaf Healer



Art by: Savannah Guzman [sbguzmanillustration.com](http://sbguzmanillustration.com)  
About the Artist: S. B. Guzman, when not drawing, can be found chained to her drawing desk writing short stories or doodling little shenanigans. She received her BA in Illustration and currently dwells in Southern California with a variety of pets.

# LIT - Humor

<https://www.weareteachers.com/literature-jokes/>

**"What would you find in Charles Dickens's pantry?"**

The best of thyme, the worst of thyme."

**"What kind of dinosaur writes romance novels?"**

A Brontësaurus."

About the Artist: Chuck Grieb is creating *The Garden Clan* - check out his Patreon at [thegardenclan.com](http://thegardenclan.com)! An award-winning story artist and animator for studios including Disney and Nickelodeon, Chuck also teaches animation. His illustrative work has been recognized with an SCBWI portfolio award, displayed in various shows, including Illustration West 57, and featured in esteemed publications like Spectrum: The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art.

# Grammar **NERD** PRONOUN TWINS PATTERN

By Tim Burke

This time we're tackling a common mistake that ironically occurs because folks think they are going out of their way to speak proper English. I call it the **Pronoun Twins Pattern**.

To be clear, here are examples of pronouns: **I, me, you, he, him, she, her, it, we, us, they, them**

\_\_\_\_\_ and/or \_\_\_\_\_

### Examples:

the teacher and me      the boys and us  
my sister or I              she or he

The mistake occurs when the person uses the wrong form of the pronoun, for example I instead of me, or her instead of she, and so on.

**Wrong:**  
Give the money to John or I.  
My sister and me will help.

**Right:**  
Give the money to John or me.  
My sister and I will help.



Art by: Lisa Hancock [www.lisajohnstonhancock.com](http://www.lisajohnstonhancock.com)  
About the Artist: Read more about Lisa on page 8.

**CONTINUES ON PAGE 18**

# Grammar NERD

CONTINUED

## THE STRATEGY

**Step 1:** Separate the twins by using only the pronoun in the sentence.

**Examples:**

Give the money to I.                      Me will help.

**Step 2:** Your ear will tell you if it sounds correct. It's that easy.

**Step 3:** The exception to the "ear rule" is the pattern using between.

Just between you                      He sat between  
and I.                                      John and she.

In the case of between, always use what I call the "I like" form. Which are the "I like" forms:

I like I/me      I like she/her      I like we/us

The answers are obvious: I like me/her/us

In the above examples, the correct answer is:

*Just between you                      He sat between  
and me.                                      John and her.*



Art by: Wendy Grieb

wendygrieb.com

About the Artist: Read more about Wendy on page 10.

## THE PRACTICE

**Correct any that are wrong. Some may already be correct. Answers are below the exercise.**

1. The problem with the students and me.
2. The book lies between he and her.
3. The fact that the expert is fond of both you and I.
4. The football players or her should know what to do.
5. The profits belong to either she or I.
6. Most of the blame is on the eldest and he.
7. The responsibility for this failure lies with her and me.
8. Neither her nor the teacher can make it.
9. I believe that the coach and them are showing up.
10. Be sure to distribute the copies to him or I.

### ANSWERS.

1. Correct
2. him and her
3. and me
4. or she
5. her or me
6. and him
7. Correct
8. she
9. and they
10. him or me

**You can reach Tim with grammar questions or ideas for SCBWI at [socal-ra@scbwi.org](mailto:socal-ra@scbwi.org)**

# WORD Documents

## WITH TRACKED CHANGES

By Sandy Rogers

You have polished your work and are ready to see it in print. First, you send it to a copy editor or a writing coach for feedback to make sure it is perfect before you shop it to agents or publishers. But instead of a gold star, you get your work back with revisions, deletions, and comments.

### The Easy Way to Accept or Reject Suggested Edits in Word.

Go to the main menu at the top of your Word document and select the Review tab. Look for **Track Changes** and turn it on.

- If you're using an Apple computer or laptop, Track Changes is a toggle switch.
- In Microsoft Word, Track Changes is an icon to click.

After you turn on **Track Changes**, look for the dropdown menu to its immediate right. It will say, "Simple Markup," "All Markup," "No Markup," or "Original." Make sure you select "All Markup."

Next, put your cursor by the first indicated change. In the **Review** tab in the main menu, you will see an icon for **Accept** and another for **Reject**. When you click on the appropriate icon, it will make the change and go to the next edit. If you change your mind, you can click on the icon for **Previous Change**. Only when you agree with all the changes, click the small down arrow next to the **Accept** icon and choose the "Accept All Changes" option.

**Microsoft has an online video which shows you the process of accepting and rejecting changes.**

**Sandy Rogers: Act I consisted of many years in school culminating with PhD in clinical psychology. Act II consisted of working as a clinical psychologist and clinic supervisor. Act III is a transition into full time writer of children's literature and a volunteer for SCBWI.**

You might see comments from the editor on the side of your document. Once you make the changes and accept them, the comments linger. To make the comments disappear, you can right click on them and pick **Delete Comment** or **Resolve Comment** from the dropdown menu.



Art by: Marcela Cespedes

marcelacespedes.com

About the Artist: Read more about Marcela on pages 4 - 5.

# 2020 DEBUT AUTHOR Heather BUCHTA

By Desi St. Amant

**Heather Buchta's debut novel (YA), *Beyond The Break*, debuts on June 2nd. Here she generously shares her experiences and words of wisdom. If you would like to learn more about Heather, take a look at the Member News section.**

### What inspired you to write *Beyond the Break*?

My agent forwarded me an email from a publisher, who was looking for an author to "give legs" to an idea that he had. It was a very broad premise—internally focused, primarily—with no outward motivation. I think it was more of a "I'll know it when I see it" type of idea. He gave other basic parameters: YA, somewhat wholesome, standalone (not a series). I created an outward motivation, built the character, outlined her world, and wrote about 5-8 chapters. We sent it in and expected to hear back with a worst-case scenario: a pass, or a best-case scenario: that he'd like to see more chapters. Instead, he made an offer. It was very exciting.

### How long did it take to go from your initial idea to publication?

It was fast-forward mode from the beginning. Publishing doesn't usually move at this crazy pace, but I wouldn't have it any other way. They were determined to have it on the shelves by June 2020. They bought it in April of 2019. I finished the manuscript in July of 2019. We edited like mad until my eyes crossed, finishing in December of 2019. Three rounds of grueling copy edits later, we submitted the galley AND the final in February of 2020.

Did you encounter any challenges in writing, finding an agent, or getting published? If so, how did you overcome them?

Goodness, it's been a while since I was on the agent hunt, but I still remember the many rejections. I found my agent, Michael Bourret,

the old fashioned way. In 2008, I sent in a query with two pages attached. At the time, he was still looking for new clients. He responded, asking for 50 pages, attached. I sent them in, and then I heard nothing for over two months. After countless rejections, I was offered representation by a different agency, but Michael was still my first choice, so I sent a follow-up letting him know. He responded, asking for the full manuscript and a request to give him two weeks. In two weeks, he called me and offered representation. Since then, we have submitted multiple manuscripts with many rounds of submissions. Some have come agonizingly close. This is my **first** book deal. It is hard to have an agent for so many years and not be able to give them a manuscript that gets bought. Michael has remained so faithful and hopeful for me, but I will say that to overcome that challenge, you have to constantly keep writing. Once I finish revising, and it's out on submission, I move on to the next project and the next idea. There's always more in me! I'm a writer. I do this because I love it, not because I'm guaranteed publication. Keeping that perspective is healthy and protects me from being sucked down the discouragement drain.

### Can you share a bit about your writing process?

I love creating characters and imagining them in actual conversations. My favorite part of storytelling is writing dialogue. Sometimes I'll write a standalone scene and then imagine an entire story around that scene. From that point, though, outlining is everything. Without an outline, I'd never go anywhere. The outline—though loosely structured and flexible to change if need be—keeps my story's forward momentum going. It keeps me from writing "sexy sepulchre scenes"—scenes that might have incredible dialogue or fantastic writing/description, but do nothing to move the story forward. Carcasses. When you have this type of excerpt, this masterful symphony of words, dialogue, or description that does nothing for the story, you inevitably have to cut it, and that's extremely painful. To avoid that as much as possible, I outline.

### How did you go about seeking initial feedback for your manuscript? Did you participate in a critique group?

I'm a very private writer. I don't let anyone read my first drafts except my agent. After studying Screenwriting/Communications at LMU, I gained a strong sense of story and all the necessary elements, so I know what I need in every novel. If I get feedback too soon, it just confuses and frustrates my writing process. Sometimes I'll have a friend read a chapter if I'm looking for something

**CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE**

specific, such as cutting unnecessary words or checking if I've given enough description for my reader to visualize a location. But I'm very particular with people I trust with my writing.

### What authors or artists inspire you?

The movie (not the book) *The Firm* is the best teacher of story structure. It inspired me as an author more than any movie I've ever seen. As far as YA authors, Sara Zarr creates characters who feel real, such as in her book, *How To Save A Life*. Not always likable, but so raw and real. Like I could meet them on the street and not be a huge fan, but still be like, "Hey, Sara Zarr wrote about you." Carrie Ryan (*Forest Of Hands And Teeth*) convinced me that zombies could be the people you loved most and that the ocean could be the thing of fairy tales. Maggie Stiefvater made me believe in savage killer horses who lived in the ocean, and I'm still in awe at how she managed that. Have you ever tried to explain SCORPIO RACES to someone? Ha-ha.

### What advice do you have for new writers?

Write, write, write, and then write some more. Never be married to your manuscript. Humbly listen to ANYTHING that someone offers as feedback. Never argue with that person or get defensive, because you may hinder them from sharing freely in the future. If it's something you disagree with, say thank you, and then silently disregard it. Every



Art by: Wing Yee Lee

Ig: @wingyeedoodles

About the Artist: Read more about Wing Yee on page 15.

now and then, someone will give you an absolute gem, and if you shut them down in the beginning, they may stop sharing, and you may never get to the point where they offer that gem that helps your manuscript become gold.

### What other jobs or interests do you have, and how do these impact your writing?

Ha-ha. Where do I start? I live my life in close-up zoom, but when I pull back to a wide angle, it's amazing to see how much my jobs and interests impact my writing. In the editing process, my biggest problem with my novels is that I have too many elements at play. This probably stems from my day-to-day life. I have many, many (did I say many?) other paid jobs besides writing. I enjoy juggling different tasks, and going through my days with plans and checklists. As far as interests go, I love movement. My mom likes to say, "Motion is lotion." It keeps me feeling alive, and ready to attack what the day has in store. I love obstacle course racing, running, hiking, climbing, snowboarding, dancing, playing team sports, and playing individual sports. In every manuscript I write, there may not be a sport, but there is always a great deal of movement. It's how I'm wired. I noticed the other day that every job I've had since high school has involved high schoolers. I've been a high school teacher, youth pastor, or tutor since I was seventeen. I've never NOT been around that age group. It keeps me connected to the heartbeat of the teenager and I think that bleeds into my writing.

### What's next for you?

Another book, hopefully! We'll see how this plays out. Book sales are everything. It's like the NFL. If you're a coach and your team loses, it doesn't matter if you're the coolest, raddest, funnest (yes, it should be a word) coach who gets your team amped with unedited Eminem songs and pays off their school loans, and buys them pizza and Slurpees every Monday for team practice. If you don't win, you're fired. That's not harsh or mean. It's just business. Book sales are like W's, and I've got an underdog team with a rookie quarterback that I'm hoping makes it to the Super Bowl. *BEYOND THE BREAK* hits shelves on June 2nd. If it does well, then there'll definitely be a "next for me!" In the meantime, I'll be writing, writing, writing, and then writing some more!

**GINA**  
*Capaldi*

## FAREWELL TO SOCAL'S ILLUSTRATOR COORDINATOR

By the Newsletter Team

### Tell us a little bit about your trajectory with SCBWI.

Previously, I had hosted SCBWI Meet-ups on and off for 15 years. Around 2016, I put on a gallery show that featured local illustrators. As a Fine Arts Appraiser, as well as an illustrator, I understand how important it is to have a body of work featured in gallery shows as part of a vitae and for long-term career credibility. At the time, I had a conversation with Francesca Rusackas, then the Regional Advisor of SoCal SCBWI, regarding the purpose behind the show. She offered me the job as the Illustrator Coordinator.

### What were the biggest challenges you encountered as an Illustrator Coordinator and what were the best moments?

I've had some wonderful moments meeting our amazing members, who have become life-long friends. For this, I am so very grateful. I've also been thrilled to have pulled in many notable illustrators for a variety of events, who have inspired us with their stories. I think INSPIRATION has been the key to my planning. Speaking of which, there are a lot of 'behind the scenes' conversations that go on as part of the Regional Team, and I am thankful for the direction and enthusiasm I have received.

### About your career: How did it all begin?

I wanted to write and illustrate my own books since I was in second grade. I was lucky enough to have won an art scholarship to Pepperdine University. After two years I was accepted by my dream school, Art Center College of Design, where I studied illustration. After Art Center, I found myself editing film for several years, then landed at a post-production house doing special effects video graphics, working with such notables as Francis Ford Coppola, Lionel Richie, and others. It was a long way around from studying illustration, but I firmly believe that the arts are intertwined, as my career path represents.



Gina Capaldi is stepping down as SoCal's Illustrator Coordinator. We want to say a million thanks to Gina for her years of guidance and hard work on behalf of SCBWI. While we are sad to see her off, we are excited to see her move on to more amazing projects. She was kind enough to answer a few questions so we could learn from her vast experience.

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

### What is your process? Where do you find your inspiration?

I love "Story!" I guess this is why I'm an illustrator and not a Fine Artist. I get very excited about new projects that cross my path. While inspiration is important, so is working hard every day, even if the 'muse' does not show up.

### What have been the biggest lessons/challenges you've encountered as a published Illustrator?

Patience! Things never happen as quickly as I'd like. But all good things are worth the wait and this includes the publishing!

### What do you like to do when you're not working hard?

I really don't have a lot of time off. When I do, I paint! Ha. But I'm also a voracious reader, and I enjoy woodcarving. I LOVE the smell and touch of wood! A few days a week, I teach art to special needs adults. Sometimes we go to the museum or off-location to paint. It's very rewarding to be around these beautiful people.

### What are some pearls of wisdom you would like to share with the SOCAL Illustrators?

SCBWI offers so many wonderful opportunities....so stay focused, work hard, and trust your instincts.

### What amazing projects are looming in the horizon for you right now?

Lots of amazing things are going on. There are two projects that I can mention. One is creating a large mural on literacy, and the second is planning an educational imprint for a non-profit organization. But my first love is writing and illustrating so my stories come first.

We will miss you Gina.



Art by: Gina Capaldi

# Save the DATE

By Sandy Rogers

## TAHQUITZ PINES WRITER RETREAT FOR MG AND YA WRITERS

**DATE** June 12-14, 2020

**PLACE** Online

Intensive writing and editing experience for MG/YA writers.

Two agents, two editors and one published author in attendance.

Individual critique by agent or editor.

More details will follow.

[www.scbwi.org](http://www.scbwi.org) (SoCal region)

## WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS DAY

**DATE** Saturday, Oct. 3, 2020

Annual SCBWI SoCal Conference

Presenters: Editors, agents, published writers.

Individual critiques

First Page Panel

Contests: PB, MG, YA, Illustrators.

Details to be announced.

[www.scbwi.org](http://www.scbwi.org) (SoCal region)

## LOS ANGELES TIMES FESTIVAL OF BOOKS AT USC

**DATE** October 3-4, 2020

Trade show event, not specific to children's literature.

<https://events.latimes.com/festivalofbooks>

## NEWSLETTER STAFF *Box*

### NEWSLETTER CHAIR

Tim Burke

[socal-ra@scbwi.org](mailto:socal-ra@scbwi.org)

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Sandy Rogers

[ajrsp@icloud.com](mailto:ajrsp@icloud.com)

### ART DIRECTION AND ARTISTIC RELATIONS

Marcela Cespedes

[mace.cespedes@gmail.com](mailto:mace.cespedes@gmail.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.



Art by: Chuck Grieb

[chuckgrieb.com](http://chuckgrieb.com)

About the Artist: Read more about Chuck on page 15.

## ORANGE COUNTY CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVAL

**DATE** Sunday, Sep. 27, 2020

**PLACE** Orange Coast College, Costa Mesa

Free access. All ages welcome.

Over 150 authors and illustrators in attendance.

Participating authors for this year's event to be announced.

2019 event included a Story Stage and an Illustrator Stage.

<http://kidsbookfestival.com>

## FANTASY BOOK FEST

**DATE** October 16-18, 2020

**PLACE** Anaheim Majestic Garden Hotel

Reader / Author Convention for Fantasy Fans.

\$15-\$150

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fantasy-book-fest-2020-tickets-56071232566>

# SOCIAL Media

By Tim Burke

**Although this dark virus plaguing us may make it seem that we have left the 21st century for times long past, we are pleased to announce that we have taken a giant leap forward with our new social media profiles!**

Find us on the Twitter @SCBWI\_SoCal  
Follow us on Instagram @SCBWI\_SoCal

Hashtag us! Like us! And we'll like you back!

ADDITIONALLY, pages/profiles have been set up with a specific focus on Illustrators, but all are welcome to join and support. Instagram, in particular, will serve as a gallery for all the amazing illustrators in our chapter! Follow so you too can gush over their phenomenal talent!

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/scbwiSoCalillustrators>

Instagram: @scbwi\_socalillustrators

## PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT:

If the above seemed to you to have been written in a foreign language, fear not! We'll

follow up this email with others about how to sign up/use these social media platforms.

As with the incomparable power of our ink, we defy the forces keeping us apart by refocusing on our online writing community. Not meeting in person doesn't mean we can't meet at all! With a few taps of our keys, we intend to use these new platforms to strengthen our chapter's virtual community. Specifically:

1. Post updates on chapter/SCBWI events
2. Share information for events hosted by individual members
3. Promote successes and achievements of chapter members
4. Share links of articles/blog posts/etc which mention or were written by our members
5. For PAL members, let us share your cover reveals for upcoming releases! Notify us so we can celebrate and tout your recent deals!
6. Spotlight each Writer and Illustrator in our chapter
7. Just straight up make sure everyone knows about the mighty talented people in our chapter!

If you have news to share about your work, books, articles, awards, whatever, please send it with your social media handles to [SoCalSCBWI@gmail.com](mailto:SoCalSCBWI@gmail.com) so we can boast about you to the world! And if you have suggestions, please share those as well! We do this all for you!

### PROOFREADER Heather Inch-Desuta

Heather Inch-Desuta writes about everything from teenage problem stories to magical realism for the middle grade reader. In a prior life, Heather worked in advertising and non-profit management. She can be found on Twitter @HLInch1

### PROOFREADER Carrie Honigman

Carrie has written articles for newspapers, and magazines. PTA Magazine featured her article entitled "How to Host an Authors' Day". She studied screenwriting and is currently working on a YA historical fiction novel.

### PROOFREADER AND TECH ADVISOR Niki Blois

Niki Blois is a YA writer who works in marketing and moonlights as an editor. She writes about witches, mermaids and traveling storytellers. Twitter @nikiblois