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

A LOOK INSIDE

INTERVIEWS
- Tiffany Liao - Editor - Page 2 - 3
- Marcela Cespedes - Illustrator - Page 4 - 5
- Lara Perkins - Agent - Page 8 - 9
- Courtney Steveson - Editor - Page 11 - 12
- Ernesto Cisneros - Author - Page 13 - 14
- Heather Buchta - Author - Page 20 - 21
- Gina Capaldi - Illustrator - Page 22 - 23

ARTICLES
- Page 6 - 7 - Member News
- Page 10 - Ask the Librarian
- Page 15 - 16 - Take aways by a Contest Judge
- Page 17 - 18 - Grammar Nerd
- Page 19 - Word Documents with Tracked Changes
- Page 24 - Save the Date
- Page 25 - Social Media

LOCAL ARTISTS FEATURED ON EVERY PAGE

Art by Marcela Cespedes
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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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
selectively on the picture book end. 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.
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.

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.

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE
My Name is Zuma (Xlibris Publishers) is Isaac Osae-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.

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.

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 dates 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.

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.

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.
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.

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.
In these scary, troubling times, I’ve heard 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 Heidy and is welcomed into her home. The Westminster Dog Show, where he plans his other abandoned dogs, eventually traveling 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 Heidy and is welcomed into her home. The Westminster Dog Show, where he plans his other abandoned dogs, eventually traveling to

YA:
Geekerella by Ashley Poston: Seventeen-year-old Elle Whitmer 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.

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!
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.

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!!
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 overhead 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.

Can you share a bit about your writing process? 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 sidetrack 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 Oliver Jeffers Frog Effect by Sarah Scheberger. 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.

Art by: Hannah Sesse
hannahsesse.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.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 16
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” was supposed to take away once the story’s done, which can lead to an undesirably empty experience. 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.

3. **The third pick** was a book that was imitating her, specifically in the way she 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 and take a book off the shelf!

---

**Leaf Healer**

Art by: Savannah Guzman
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.

---

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.”**

---

Continentals on Page 18
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.
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—literally 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 we’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, so I sent him back 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. 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 rejections, 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 place. A favorite moment 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 sepulchrish 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 that confuses and frustrates my writing process. Sometimes I’ll I have a friend read a chapter if I’m looking for something 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 live 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 helping you. Sometimes, you’ll need to carry on in your own way and ask for help from other people. McKee says, “Motion is lotion.” It keeps me feeling alive, and ready to attack what the day has in store. I love obstacle courses, 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 schools. 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, I should be a word) coach who gets your teamamped with unedited Eminem songs and pays off their school loans, and buys them pizza and bumper stickers for the story, you inevitably have to cut it, and that’s extremely painful. To avoid that as much as possible, I outline.

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, so I sent him back 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. 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 rejections, 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.

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 live 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 helping you. Sometimes, you’
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.

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
TAHQUITZ PINES WRITRER 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 (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 (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

ORANGE COUNTY CHILDREN’S BOOK FESTIVAL
DATE Sunday, Sept. 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

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!

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 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!

Social Media

By Sandy Rogers

Save the DATE

By Tim Burke

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 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!