

S C B W I

S O C I A L



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2024





Illustration by Cyndi Wojciechowski www.cwojo.com

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SCBWI SoCal PRESENTS ART DAY

BY CARLENE GRIFFITH

SCBWI'S SoCal Chapter members, illustrators and author-illustrators, asked for a day focused on creativity and art-making. Hearing their needs, chapter leadership put their heads together and came up with ART DAY.

This first-time event was held March 16th, at Laguna College of Art and Design (LCAD) Big Bend campus, set within the lush canyon hills of Laguna Beach, California.

Award-winning illustrator and internationally-exhibiting artist, SUSIE GHAREMANI provided the keynote address to kick off the one-day event, and later gave a fantastic illustrator demonstration for all who attended. Susie focused on the importance of the personal, creative, professional, and financial aspects of an artist's career.



During the Q&A portion of her speech, Susie emphasized the importance of copywriting your work to protect artists legally and the impact of AI on the industry. KRYSTAL THOMPSON said, "Susie Gharemani's presentation and her afternoon art demonstration with the ink blot exercise were awesome. Her presentation of the four aspects to consider as an artist were extremely helpful to me."



When asked what they liked about the event, MARIE CHAN said, "I loved how Art Day gave me creative rest and play that actually freed me to be more creative and refreshed to persevere in my craft. I loved the collaboration between authors and illustrators!

Such a wonderful day to interact with friends and meet new artists in the kidlit community." LISA JOHNSTON HANCOCK said, "Overall it was a huge success, and I definitely enjoyed the day. I've been a little burnt-out with the regional conferences because I feel like I hear the same information over and over. This event was fresh and new, and I left feeling inspired to create."



In addition to the uplifting keynote address, attendees had the opportunity to choose from three workshops taught by industry professionals: Creating Picture Book Dummies with award-winning author-illustrator SUSI SCHAEFER; Making Graphic Novels with the author/illustrator of the Surfside Girls graphic novel series, KIM DWINELL; or How to Prepare Traditional Art for Digital Submission with CHUCK GRIEB, professor and Program Director for Animation and Visual Effect at Azusa Pacific University.

When asked what they thought of the workshops, MARIE CHAN said, "I appreciated Kim Dwinell sharing her original graphic novel manuscripts formatted and like a screenplay.

And her original panels (pencil and inks) that really gave me a good foundation of how to write a graphic novel."



KRISTAL THOMPSON said, "Chuck Grieb is a great speaker, and his demonstrations were extremely educational on the subject of photographing and digitizing one's art." As for Susi Schaefer's class, MONA RICHIE HADLEY liked learning "how to begin and organize my initial thumbnails before the dummy stage."

The only complaint we had from attendees was they would've liked to attend all three classes and not have to pick only one. This will certainly be considered when planning the next Art Day.

The objective for the event was not just about learning, but also about giving attendees time to be creative. Thanks to CYNDI WOJICIECHOWSKI, a volunteer Art Day committee member and SoCal chapter member, the event offered not only fun swag bags with our beautiful Art Day logo illustrated by committee member CAROLYN LE, but also a table full of art and craft supplies to enjoy throughout the day. If attendees didn't want to participate in the activities, they could peruse the back table and utilize any tools they wanted.

The fun didn't stop there. Throughout the day, prizes donated by local art and book supply stores were raffled off to attendees.

continued Art Day...

Two random winners went home with \$100 gift certificates from BLICK ART MATERIALS and three won \$25 gift certificates from SAN MARINO TOY AND BOOK SHOPPE. The grand prize winner scored a bag full of signed books donated by presenting authors and illustrators.

After a lunch provided by Jersey Mike's, committee members CARLENE GRIFFITH and CYNDI WOJCIECHOWSKI conducted a short, timed exercise where participants either drew a picture or wrote a short story prompted by words/topics selected from a jar. When time was up, they could then switch with a partner and either draw or write a story based on what their partner had done, or keep it and challenge themselves to try writing a story or drawing a picture about it. Some loved it; others found it challenging to come up with something in such a short time. The idea was to inspire creators to get out of their comfort zone and try something new. Altogether it inspired individuals to meet and make new connections with like-minded people. SU MOON said she liked that "it was a small event, relaxed, and inspiring, with several opportunities to meet new people."

Prior to the event, attendees had an opportunity to participate in a themed Spring Renewal prompt contest by submitting either a short written story or a one-page illustration. First-place winners received a personalized critique from Susie Ghahremani. Awards of recognition were given to the first-place winner in the illustration category, SHIHO PATE, and runner-up LISA JOHNSTON HANCOCK. First place in the writing category was JULIE HENDRICKSON, with a story titled "Curious Bugs." Runner-up was JENNIFER MEYER's "Nature Awakens in Spring."

LCAD provided the perfect location, with ample parking and a cozy venue, including student art-covered walls for inspiration. All the day's success can be credited back to LCAD student volunteers and SCBWI's SoCal chapter committee volunteer members: BEV PLASS, CARLENE GRIFFITH, DEBORAH MENESES, CAROLYN LE, CYNDI WOJCIECHOWSKI, and CHUCK GRIEB



Carlene Griffith is the author of the 10 Minute Play for Kids of All Ages and the Rose Maidelaiden series. She has been a proud SCBWI member since 2017 and serves as SoCal's chapter co-Assistant Regional Advisor and Newsletter Editor. www.carlenegriffith.com

ART DAY

By Deborah Showers Kelly

Art Day in Laguna Beach
 Superb choice of venue,
 Blue skies, picturesque view,
 Remarkable gathering
 Writers, illustrators all together now,
 To share, share, share
 To be inspired
 To be encouraged
 To think outside the rectangle, circle,
 To listen and to be creative
 As well as exude HOPE.
 One exercise paired writer/illustrator
 Given a story starter, interesting phrases
 Story for 100 words only!
 Challenging, but quite fun
 Why not?
 Shared story and pictures.
 Reversed pictures and story
 Both were funny, silly, colorful and creative,
 Oh, the things we can think of!
 Best of all, writer and illustrator quickly bonded as a super-
 duper duo!
 Yes, the Art Day in Laguna Beach was a great hit!!
 Let's do it again, I say!!!



Illustrations by Cyndi Wojciechowski www.cwojo.com

KILLER FIRST LINES

by Tim Burke

Welcome to the third of our new column. However, it will only thrive with your support! Email me your favorite, awesome opening line(s) to a book or short story (At any age level is okay, from PB to adult)

We'll include them in future newsletters with credit to you as the contributor. Follow the format of the ones below, and if your email name is something arcane like TweedleBeelzebub6535, please provide your actual name so I can give proper credit to you. Email Time at www.Timburketales.com

I remember falling.

—*Restart*/Gordon Korman

It was the day my grandmother exploded.

—*The Crow Road*/Iain Banks

The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.

—*Neuromancer*/William Gibson

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.

—*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*/C. S. Lewis

This is my favorite book in all the world, though I have never read it.

—*The Princess Bride*/William Goldman

I didn't run because I killed him. I ran because I didn't.

—*The Garden of Second Chances*/Mona Alvarado Frazier

The snow in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation.

—*The Secret History*/Donna Tartt

It began with my father not wanting to see the Last Rabbit and ended up with my being eaten alive by a recluse spider.

—*Swamplandia!*/Karen Russell

Her father was dead and all Grace could think about was pie.

—*Jane Austen Goes to Hollywood*/Abby McDonald (submitted by Christine Henderson)



Illustrations by Cyndi Wojciechowski www.cwojo.com



Illustration by Lisa Hancock Johnston
www.lisahancockjohnston.com

Their aunt was decidedly sinister.

—*Wretched Waterpark*/Kiersten White (submitted by Laurie Young)

The people of bone gap called Finn a lot of things, but none of them was his name.

—*Bone Gap*/Laura Ruby (submitted by Lori Polydoros)

By the time Alex managed to get the blood out of her good wool coat, it was too warm to wear it.

—*Ninth House*/Leigh Bardugo (submitted by Heather Buchta)

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

COMIC ORANGE

Article written by
Christine Van Zandt

I've lived in Southern California for more than 15 years, but had never been to Tustin—until Comic Orange. One of the benefits of SCBWI is attending events in person at places we haven't yet explored. (There are also all those virtual events, just a click away.)

Comic Orange billed itself as “a celebration of libraries, graphic novels, cosplay, animation, and more!” Those combined areas of interest created a fun day for kids and adults alike. SCBWI-SoCal hosted seven local authors at four tables (myself included). Next to us were various fan groups; my favorite was Ghostbusters OC, a friendly group with an amazing display and lots of freebies—including green “slime” punch!

Other booths featured event-related items. Kids could attend stations for free face-painting, clay activities, or a scavenger-hunt kind of bingo.

Inside the large Tustin Library, events happened every hour, capping with an author talk by NYT best-selling author Joey Spiotto (Grumpy Unicorn series).

As we braved the occasional wind gusts and chilly-for-SoCal weather, it became clear that we're all a community. Chatting with people was a highlight. I enjoyed seeing kids delight in collecting stickers, spinning a prize wheel, and sneaking a sweet treat or two. It was also nice having other local authors stop by to say hi and root us on.

Book sales were steady, and you can never tell where a conversation will lead later on: maybe a school event, a sale elsewhere, or someone checking your book out from the library and then leaving an online review. We often hear the phrase “move the needle” when it comes to promoting our products; participating in events certainly boosts recognition of our books and of what services we offer. The days leading up to the event can be a blur on social media, making our reach for publicity extend far beyond each book we hand-sell.



Being able to participate for free at the SCBWI SoCal table is certainly a membership benefit and made possible by the Regional Advisor volunteers—thanks, Carlene! I appreciated meeting other local authors and illustrators, swapping tips and stories. It is, after all, a learning process and one that keeps evolving. The table displays by our group were awesome; I'll be upping my game, borrowing some of those ideas because, though people steadily passed by, having something eye-catching or engaging is what instigates a connection.

Comic Orange was low-key, with easy, nearby free parking and access to bathrooms and food. Many of the participants were also heading to the LA Times Festival of Books the following weekend. Today's event was a great way to practice, working out the kinks. At the FoB, there's no quick running back to the car for something you forget, set-up and takedown has to be fast, and the crowds are nonstop. It's helpful to try out all those payment options and figure out how to best display your items. For some of us, engaging the public for a sale may feel uncomfortable at first, yet each time we practice, it becomes easier.

We come from all walks of life, and days like Comic Orange allow us to cross paths, finding new friends while also learning more about the business of writing and illustrating. Making money is one thing, but getting our books into the hands of teachers, parents, and—most important of all—kids is what it's all about. Having a kid choose your book and smile up at you—that's my definition of success!

Christine Van Zandt is an editor, writer, and award-winning author. Her nonfiction picture books include *A Brief History of Underpants* (becker&mayer! kids, 2021) and *Milkweed for Monarchs* (Beaming Books, 2024). She lives in Los Angeles, California, with her family. You can find her at christinevanzandt.com, X/Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and Bluesky.

SPINNING THE WHEEL AT LA TIMES FESTIVAL OF BOOKS

BY LORI POLYDOROS



SCBWI Writers from both SoCal/Inland Empire & L.A. joined forces and brought a little fun and imagination to Booth # 826 on April 20-21st on the USC campus. The festival featured ticketed events with authors and celebrities, but SCBWI made their appearance with about thirty picture book, middle grade, and young adult authors that talked to hundreds of booklovers of all ages throughout the day. They shared their books, their love of reading, and how to get started in children's books (join SCBWI, of course!) The event drew over 155,000 visitors but hanging out and getting to know other writers from both chapters seemed to be one of the highlights for our members.

SCBWI-LA PAL Liaison, Jennifer Pitts, was the glue that pulled us all together. Her organization, creative and gorgeous "book-themed" decorations, social media savvy, and welcoming nature brought both chapters together seamlessly. For the SoCal/Inland Empire chapter, co-volunteers Kathleen Troy (Dylan's Dog Squad) and (me!) Lori Polydoros (Quake Chasers: 15 Women Rocking Earthquake Science) enjoyed getting to know our participating authors as well as helping our members publicize and promote their work. Picture book author Christine Van Zandt (Milkweed for Monarchs & The Brief History of Underpants) and one of our person-sized monarch butterflies, truly appreciated "pushing together our chapters on socials and cross-promoting the event on various platforms," proving that local chapters can unite, support each other, and get the word out two-fold (plus make great friends!)

Throughout the day, our authors made all sorts of magic happen. The enthusiastic son of Caroline Perry (The Corgi and the Queen) romped around in an inflatable Corgi suit, Zeena M.Pliska (Egyptian Butterfly & Here Little One) fluttered around the booth in her monarch wings and Lori R. Snyder (Circus at the End of the Sea) taught juggling lessons out in front of the booth. Our SCBWI prize wheel brought in a ton of guests, all willing to say hello and peruse our books. Even when we ran out of mini-slime and bubbles for prizes, the line never ceased, and people were eager to spin the wheel even when the odds were 10/10 that they'd get a Jolly Rancher or a roll of Smarties.

During the most magical moments, authors connected with readers. Lori R. Snyder made eye contact with a shy little girl from across the booth. The young reader stopped, spotted Lori's book, and found her way to the special story that she would take home that day. The highlight of my day was when a young woman noticed a photo of Edith Carolina Rojas, one of the scientists in my book. She made a beeline over to me and shouted, "That was my professor!" She bought a copy, beaming at the success of one of her beloved teachers—one that inspired her years ago. Author Judy Campbell-Smith (Ice Cream Everywhere!) had a favorite moment too. A teacher-in-training had her sign and a copy of her book for her future classroom, which was inspiring and "pretty special."

Books and authors create connections, and when you mix the two...magic happens! We appreciate all the authors and volunteers that participated in the LA Times Festival of Books. Books were sold. Friends were made, and the love of reading and writing united all of us. A day of true inspiration.

Thank you to the following SCBWI OC/Inland Empire participating authors not mentioned: Carlene Griffith, Kim Davis, Nydia Armendia-Sanchez, Ana Otaru, Amber Morrell, Megan Morales, J. Dianne Dotson, & Katrina Tangen. Plus, our SCBWI LA friends: Brandi Dougherty, Sue Schmitt, Robert Mellele, Moni Hadley, Tim Cummings, Monica Mancillas, Andrea Looney, Vezna Andrews, Micky O'Brady, Glenda Armand, Diane Browning, Maureen Charles, Janie Emaus, Renee Colato, Seina Wedlick, Axier Uz kudun, and Molly Ruttan. And to our fearless leader, Bev Plass, for all her support!

Lori Polydoros has been writing for children for over twenty years and has published over 80 books, articles and short stories. Her latest work is QUAKE CHASERS: 15 Women Rocking Earthquake Science, published by Chicago Review Press April 2022. She is a high school English teacher and community college adjunct instructor in Orange County, CA.





Los Angeles Times
FESTIVAL OF BOOKS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
APRIL 20-21, 2024

Carlene Griffith, Christine Van Zandt, Nydia Armendia-Sanchez, Kim Davis, Ana Otaru, Lori Polydoros, Kathleen Troy, Judy Campbell-Smith, Megan Morales, Katrina Tangen, James Luna, Amber Morrell



SUNDAY
APRIL 21
2:35-3:00 PM

Join me at

Los Angeles Times
FESTIVAL OF BOOKS
APRIL 20-21, 2024 | UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



**"CHILDREN'S STAGE"
BOOK SIGNING AREA 7
(AFTER)**





MEMBER NEWS

By Desi St. Amant

Picture Book

Copy That, Copy Cat!
Written by Katrina Tangen
Release Date: December 13, 2023

The Secret of Sweet Treats Kingdom
Written by Kim Davis
Release date: January 30, 2024

A QUACKTASTIC TALE
WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY KERI KRUGER
AVAILABLE MARCH 1ST!
KERI KRUGER SELF-PUBLISHING HER FIRST EVER CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOK SHE ILLUSTRATED AND WROTE A QUACKTASTIC TALE, A FICTIONAL STORY IN A TRADITIONAL FAIRY-TALE STYLE ABOUT A GIRL AND HER THREE PET DUCKS WHO GO ON A MAGICAL ADVENTURE. IT WILL BE AVAILABLE THROUGH AMAZON KDP ON MARCH 1ST.

Treasure of Measures
Illustrated by Joy Hwang Ruiz
Release date: April 09, 2024

Puppy, Kitty, Bunny, Monster
Written by Jess Shea
Release date: April 25, 2024

Trash Truck Day
Written by Stacie Cooper
Release date: March 4, 2024

audio BOOK

Ice Cream Everywhere
Written by Judy Campbell-Smith
Release date: March 15, 2024

Miso Magic
Written by Moni Ritchie Hadley
Release date: September 2024

Viva Durant
Written by Ashli St. Amant
Release date: March 15, 2024

Graphic novel

Middle Grade

CAT & CAT ADVENTURES: THE STAFF OF KNOWLEDGE
WRITTEN BY SUSIE YI
SUSIE YI'S NEWEST BOOK, CAT & CAT ADVENTURES: THE STAFF OF KNOWLEDGE WILL BE RELEASED ON JULY 23, 2024! THE FOURTH BOOK IN HER CAT & CAT ADVENTURES SERIES, THIS STORY CONTINUES THE JOURNEY OF TWO CATS (AND THEIR NEW FRIENDS!) AS THEY SEEK TO PUT THE MAGICAL STAFF BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.

The Chambered Nautilus
Written by Laura Stegman
Release date: April 30, 2024

Mamie Takes A Stand
Written by Marie Chan
Release date: September 03, 2024

Young Adult

Rose Maidelaiden
The Unofficial Tale of How the Lily Got Its Name
Written by Carlene Griffith
Release date: February 07, 2024

DYLAN'S DOG SQUAD #5 & NEVER BELIEVE A COIN ARTIST TWICE
BY KATHLEEN TROY
KATHLEEN TROY HAS TWO BOOKS OUT NOW! BOOK 5 OF HER MIDDLE-GRADE MYSTERY DETECTIVE SERIES, DYLAN'S DOG SQUAD, IS AVAILABLE NOW. AND NEVER BELIEVE A COIN ARTIST TWICE, BOOK 2 FROM HER YOUNG-ADULT MYSTERY SERIES, WILL BE PUBLISHED ON MAY 7, 2024.
ORDER TODAY!

HAUNTED STATES - AMERICA
Written by Erin Lagerberg
Release date: July 09, 2024

Magazine

CANS
Written by Russ Thompson
Release date: January 26, 2024

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

Desi St. Amant is a high school English teacher and an aspiring middle grade novelist.

STRAYS
WRITTEN BY TIM BURKE
TIM BURKE'S STORY "STRAYS" IS OUT NOW IN THE LATEST ISSUE OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE MARCH/APRIL 2024.
GET YOUR COPY TODAY: LINK [HTTPS://WWW.ALFREDHITCHCOCKMYSTERYMAGAZINE.COM]

FINDING BALANCE

by Cynthia De La Torre

I have wanted to write and illustrate children's books since I was 7 years old. That was when I wrote and illustrated my first book. I instantly fell in love. I had these grand illusions of what it would be like to be a real writer and illustrator. I fantasized about writing scary stories in a cabin with no interruptions other than the sound of rain outside my windows or the sound of the ghostly inhabitants that were bound to live in the cabin with me. Or I pictured myself in a bright art studio with tons of windows and light and no interruptions, where I had every tool I could dream of and nothing would be out of place. Those two scenarios still sound magical and perhaps I'll have them once my kids are grown up and I become a super famous author/illustrator.

Nowhere in those visions were there kids running around, yelling, causing chaos, making messes, or interrupting me every 5 minutes for a snack. But that has become my reality. In fact, I imagine that is the reality for most writers and/or illustrators with small kids. I have three. Sebastian is 8, Elenais 5, and Leonardo is 3. Even though they are wild little creatures who make writing and illustrating a bit more complicated, they inspire me immensely and I consider being able to stay home with them one of the perks of this career. What better inspiration as a picture book author/illustrator than being surrounded by little ones and seeing all the funny, cute, and wild things they do?

I'd be lying if I said I have fully figured out how to balance having a creative career while staying home and taking care of my little monsters. Every day is different. Some days are busier than others. My youngest is in preschool, my middle is in kinder, and my eldest is in 3rd grade, so they all have different school schedules and I find myself driving around a lot of the time. I'm either dropping them off or picking them up from school, or taking them to their extra-curricular activities like art club, hand-sewing club, soccer practice and games, Spanish classes, kinetic engineering classes, and so much more.

I'm sure other parents of little ones have figured out better strategies to make the most of the little time they have to write and illustrate, so I might not be the best at giving feedback on how to do it, because I'm still figuring it out myself. But, I'll share some tips based on what has worked for me.

1 The best time for me to create is early in the mornings, before anyone else in my house wakes up. There is something magical about that time of day, when the whole world seems to be sleeping, including my little monsters. And the best part is that I can sit on the couch in my pajamas drinking coffee and making up stories. I highly recommend waking up early. It's tough at first, but eventually your body just wakes up at that time.

2 If I encounter writer's block (which absolutely sucks), or I can't come up with how to resolve a spread issue for a dummy, I will simply change my setting. I'll either move to a different area in the house, work outside while my kids run around, or during the few hours a week I get where their schedules align and they are all at school, I sometimes go to a coffee shop or the library and work there. That small change makes a huge difference. Especially going to a new location or going outside, because then I don't have to worry about doing the laundry or the dishes. I can just focus on creating.

3 During library expeditions, I make sure to take advantage of that time and do research. I pay attention to what books my kids are drawn to and why they choose the books they do and I also check out books I'm drawn to and analyze them. It helps me figure out how other writers/illustrators tackle certain scenes or storylines in new and interesting ways.



4 I also read to my kids a lot. They read to me too. It's super insightful seeing the scenes that make them think and ask questions, or the ones that make them giggle, or moments where they have to stop and point out something they find fascinating in the illustrations. All of that serves as research. I often go back to the books they found especially compelling and I try to analyze why.

5 I walk every day for about an hour. I either take my daughter to her kindergarten class (she has kinder PM) or I pick up my two eldest kids after school. I have this huge stroller wagon, which they can all ride in while enjoying their snacks. Oftentimes we chat and they tell me funny stories about their day or struggles they are facing. Or sometimes we remain silent and simply enjoy being outdoors together. I find that doing my daily walk helps me come up with ideas on how to illustrate certain scenes or how to make my stories more dynamic.

Overall, I am super fortunate to have a very supportive husband and family. If I need to work after my husband gets home from his job (which is typically around 6 PM), he will fully take over the parenting responsibilities and let me work at home, making sure the kids don't interrupt me, or he encourages me to go to a coffee shop. He is also great about making sure I have me-time during the weekends, especially when I need it. And I can always rely on my parents and siblings, as well as my in-laws, to watch the kids if I need additional time to work. I am lucky that they live close by and are very supportive.

It's tough finding a balance and doing it all, but there is nothing more rewarding than doing what I love every day surrounded by people I love.

Cynthia De La Torre is an author/illustrator from Southern California. She lives there with her three kids, her husband, and their cat. She is the author/illustrator of the upcoming picture book, FLOWERS FOR TIA LUZ MARIA, which is slated to come out in the summer of 2026 with Quill Tree an Imprint of HarperCollins."



ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

by Jodi Rizzotto

When I decided to take the early retirement package at my school district, I thought I would have All The Time in the World to write.

My kids were grown and had flown the nest. My husband was already retired. After countless hours spent planning, teaching, and grading work for elementary school children, my future felt unencumbered. The books I could write! The naps I could take! The beach camping trips my husband, and I could enjoy

For the first year, I did have lots of free time. It was the writing life I'd always dreamed of. I wrote. I napped. I camped. If I were in a story, this was where the inciting incident would break in. The problems would start stacking up like blocks, taller and taller until they toppled over.

First block was my daughter having an unexpected pregnancy. It was a high-risk pregnancy because she has Crohn's Disease, which affects her ability to digest food. It would be difficult to sustain a baby when she could barely eat for herself. Then she found out she was carrying twins. When they came two months early, my daughter needed a lot of help. Her disease flared up after the twins' birth. I spent most days helping feed babies and changing diapers. My writing time was confined to early in the morning and the weekends when my daughter's husband would help.

A year later, things settled down and I ended up babysitting the twins once a week. I had more time to write and more time to think about stories.



Illustration by Shiho Pate www.shihopate.com.

Block two: my 89-year-old mother had heart failure. She was living by herself about 60 miles away from me. I was the only family member close enough to stay with her and help with medical decisions. There was time to write in the hospital, but it was hard to find my creative flow. After she had heart valve surgery and began to struggle with cognitive issues, my family agreed it was time for Mom to live with one of us. Originally, we agreed to share Mom between the three of us, but my other siblings lived in Chicago. Mom had many doctor appointments, and I was the closest one to take her. She moved in with my husband and me.



I could have stopped writing. No one would have blamed me. Like the main character in my stories, I had to decide whether to give up or press on. But I couldn't stop. Writing took me out of my difficult circumstances. Getting lost in my characters' problems made mine seem smaller.

So I sneak time for writing every day. Usually, I start at 5:00 a.m. with a strong cup of coffee. It's the quietest time at my house. I keep the words flowing until 9 or 10 a.m. when Mom wakes up. She needs help with meals, wound care, and monitoring her medications. My husband helps as he is able, but he is disabled with limited energy.

Three years into my retirement, I'm almost as busy as when I was teaching full-time. Good thing I learned during those years to work writing into my schedule. My writing time may be short, but it's focused. In the last two years, with only writing four hours per day, five days per week, I've managed to finish a YA novel and two MG novels.

The story of my writing life is not over yet. I've had seven short stories published in anthologies, but my dream is to have books published. After eight years and hundreds of queries, I signed with a literary agent last October. Now my MG book is out on submissions, and I don't need to query any longer.

I have All The Time in World (that I glean from my day) to work on a new book.

Jodi Rizzotto lives in Southern California where she finds stories while riding a Harley or camping at the beach with her husband and two dogs, Harley and Davidson. Jodi's audiences and genres include MG and YA contemporary fantasy, as well as adult speculative short stories that have been published in several anthologies. She is represented by Tia Mele of Tia Rose Mele Literary.





HUMOR ON WRITING/WRITERS

COMPILED BY TIM BURKE

i once asked THIS LITERARY AGENT WHAT WRITING PAID THE BEST, AND HE SAID, "RANSOM NOTES."



A WRITER COMES HOME TO A BURNED DOWN HOUSE. HIS SOBBING AND SLIGHTLY SINGED WIFE IS STANDING OUTSIDE.

"WHAT HAPPENED, HONEY?" THE MAN ASKS.

"OH, JOHN, IT WAS TERRIBLE. I WAS COOKING WHEN YOUR AGENT CALLED. BECAUSE I WAS ON THE PHONE, I DIDN'T NOTICE THE STOVE CAUGHT FIRE. THE ENTIRE HOUSE WENT UP. POOR FLUFFY WAS ALMOST TRAPPED. I BARELY MADE IT OUT MYSELF."

"WAIT, WAIT. BACK UP A MINUTE," THE MAN SAYS. "MY AGENT CALLED?"



i can't understand WHY A PERSON WILL TAKE A YEAR TO WRITE A NOVEL WHEN HE CAN EASILY BUY ONE FOR A FEW DOLLARS.

-Fred Allen



WRITERS SPEND MORE TIME ON BABY NAME WEBSITES THAN EXPECTING PARENTS.



MARILYN CRAM DONAHUE



SCBWI SoCal Chapter is sorry to share the passing of a beloved chapter member, Marilyn Cram Donahue. As a kindhearted author of at least a dozen children's books, she inspired other writers by starting our

Inland Empire critique group and mentoring other authors on their journey. She spoke many times at SCBWI SoCal events, sharing insight and encouraging others. She made our world a better place and will be greatly missed.



Illustration by Sheila Fein www.sheilafein.com.

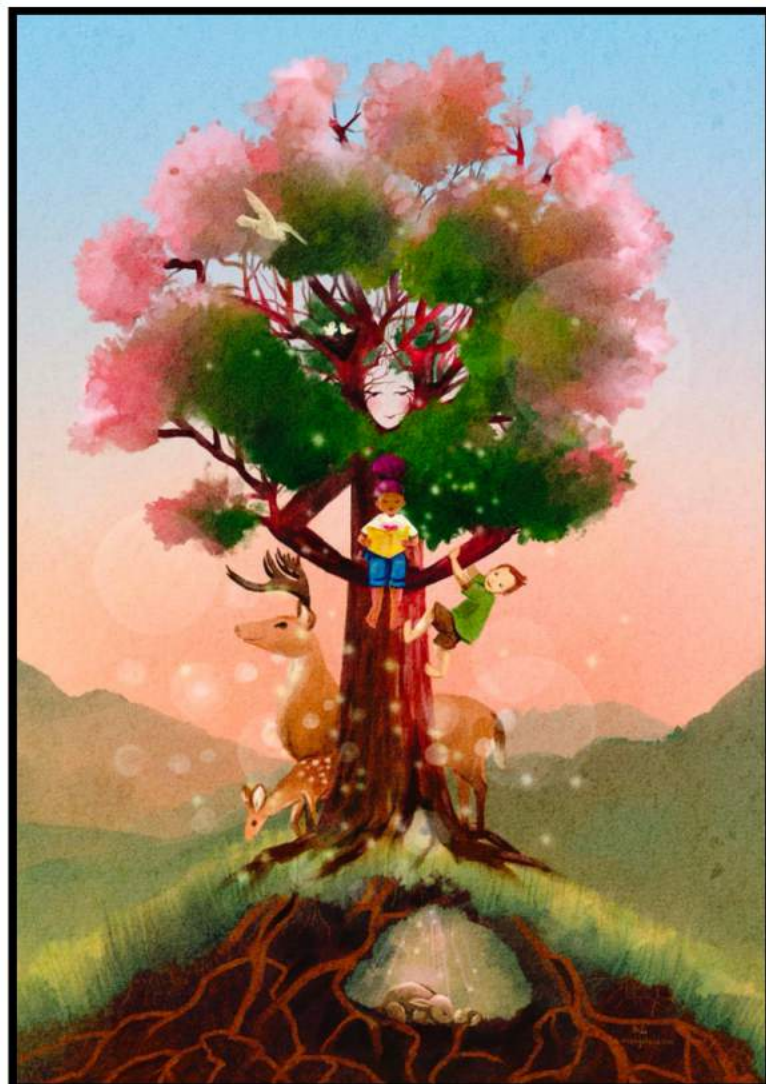


Illustration by Carolyn Le www.carolynle.com

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To share your good news: Visit <https://socal.scbwi.org/member-good-news/> and fill out the online form.

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.

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