

# SCBWI Montana

## Spring Newsletter • 2023

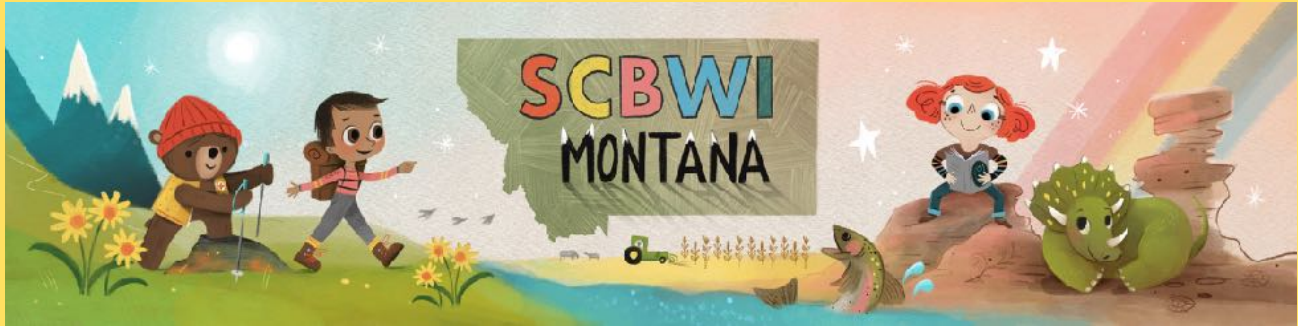


Illustration by Kelly Anne Dalton ©2022



Illustration by Eric Castleman ©2022



Illustration by Michelle Weltz ©2022

**And the winner is ...**



# Amy Center Cory!

**YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED . . .**

**WE HAVE A NEW BANNER**

## **Banner Contest Results**

Joann Howeth  
Regional Advisor, Montana

SCBWI-MT recently held a contest recruiting designs for a new regional banner. Nine beautifully rendered illustrations were submitted, each representing something unique about Montana. Voting took place on our Facebook page which garnered a good turnout with most of our members voting. Using horse racing lingo,

two images pulled ahead of the pack, and it became tightly contested. In the end, Amy Center Cory's image crossed the finish line first.

Congratulations, Amy!

Thank you to everyone who entered the contest. And I want to extend recognition and an even bigger "thank you" to Laurie Muggli whose design has graced our region's web page on the SCBWI website, our newsletters, and our Facebook page







## Note from the Editor

Tiffany Spire

Happy (almost) Spring!

I saw several robins flitting around my backyard here in Billings a couple days ago. Those red-breasts were a welcome sight since they mean spring weather is just around the corner. I always think the transition to spring comes with a sense of growth and renewal. Along with the change of season, we have a changing of the guard, if you will, in our Montana chapter of the SCBWI.

You have probably already heard that our long-time Assistant Regional Advisor, Joann Howeth applied for, and was selected to fill, the role of Regional Advisor. On behalf of the team and members of our chapter I want to congratulate and thank Joann for assuming such a large responsibility. I know our Montana chapter will continue to grow under her guidance, and I know that new and exciting adventures are ahead. Congratulations Joann!





## Regional Events

by Joann Howeth  
Regional Advisor, Montana

SCBWI MT has a new Assistant Regional Advisor. Welcome, Santral Lusin!

Artist, illustrator, and teller of tales—Santral grew up in Kennewick, WA and is currently living in Bozeman, MT. She has a graduate background in modern U.S. History, is the mother of two young children, and the volunteer community coordinator for a local Montessori school. She has spent years working in the nonprofit world and is excited to join Montana’s Regional team.

Santral is an author-illustrator and has published her first book with several more following soon. Intrigued by the colorful world around her, Santral sees art as a medium through which our dreams speak. ***“Kids need to see themselves reflected in joy-filled stories not just biographies, historical fiction, or cause books.”***

A big thank-you to Santral for volunteering to serve as our new Assistant Regional Advisor. Welcome to the team!



## Scholarship Announcement

By Joann Howeth, RA

Last year your regional team was excited to create two brand-new scholarships for our members: The BIPOC Scholarship and The Student Scholarship. In December, just before RA, Precious McKenzie, resigned from her position, we were able to award one of them.

Robin Cranney is the very first winner of The Student Scholarship. The award entitles her to a year’s free membership.

If you are interested in applying for a scholarship, visit Montana’s webpage on the official SCBWI website ( [scbwi.org](http://scbwi.org) ) to check out the requirements and deadlines.

Congratulations, Robin!







## HAWAIIAN GETAWAY

by Joann Howeth



On February 4<sup>th</sup> fifteen Montanans flew to Hawaii for a little getaway.

I can hear you saying, “**What?!** How did I miss that trip?”

Of course, it was a virtual event. Our hostess, Dorothy Hinshaw Patent, formerly of Missoula, welcomed us to her new home on the island of Kauai.

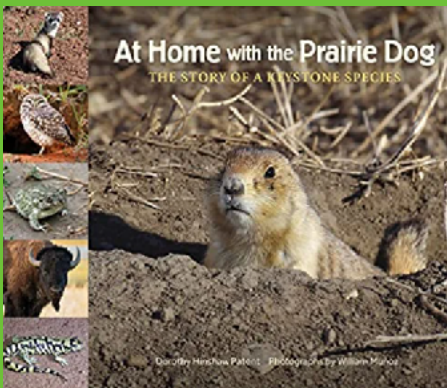
With tropical drinks in hand, we were treated to a compressed writer’s workshop in an attempt to clear the cobwebs from our winterized brains.

Dorothy holds a PHD in zoology, and she writes **gorgeous** non-fiction picture books like these.

She is the author of over 140 books for children and has won an impressive collection of awards for her writing including the SCBWI’s prestigious Golden Kite Award.

Currently, Dorothy is creating an online writing course that will be unveiled in the spring.

Stay tuned!





## PICTURE BOOK Mentee Program

Interested in finding a mentor to guide you along the path of creating picture books? Check out Picture Book Rising Stars.

(not affiliated with SCBWI)

### PB RISING STARS MENTORSHIP INCLUDES:

- 3 months of intensive 1-on-1 craft and business development with your mentor.
- Feedback and revision help on one or more manuscripts that will go well beyond typical critique.
- A website spotlight, showcasing your headshot, bio, and social media links.
- 5+ webinars hosted by industry professionals.
- A Slack group to communicate with fellow mentees.
- A Wrap Party to celebrate your accomplishments and growth.

Visit Picture Book Rising Stars website to learn how to apply. <https://www.pbrisingstars.com>



## Upcoming Opportunities

### Pitch Contest

The Montana and Inland NW regions of SCBWI are teaming up to bring you an excellent opportunity to

## Perfect your Pitch!

Don't miss your chance to learn from agents how to strengthen your pitch (PB-YA) with the first workshop to be held on April 15 before you submit your pitch to the contest the following week. Agents will then review pitch entries at the follow-up webinar on May 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Don't wait to sign up. Registration is limited.**

<https://inlandnw.scbwi.org/events/perfecting-your-pitch/>

### Jackson Hole Writers Conference

(Not affiliated with SCBWI)

Don't miss an opportunity to learn from award-winning children's authors and illustrators Candace Fleming, Eric Rohmann, Eugene Yelchin as well as HarperCollins/Quill Tree Editor Courtney Stevenson at the Jackson Hole Writers Conference June 22-24 in Jackson, WY.

Check it all out, including the other amazing authors, editors, and agents here: [jhwriters.org](http://jhwriters.org)



## Finding Inspiration

by Tiffany Spire - Newsletter Editor

When Joann asked me to write a piece about my recent three-month sojourn in Europe, I was happy to talk about the trip, but not sure how my ramblings would be of benefit or interest to the rest of you. Then it dawned on me; one of the unexpected perks of this trip was the amount of inspiration it spurred for my writing. I hope this article encourages you—writers and illustrators alike—to actively seek the muse.



It all began when my overworked husband decided it was time for an extended vacation abroad. Since I homeschool our (now eleven-year-old) daughter, we could make that happen. The plan was to spend three months in Europe practicing our Spanish and visiting ancient ruins—we're studying ancient civilizations for history.

My husband was wondering if I would write the "great American novel" while abroad. I did not. I did write quite a bit, but, more importantly, I garnered a lot of inspiration.

*I hope this article encourages you—writers and illustrators alike—to actively seek the muse.*

Imagine being on a cruise ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean for over two weeks. For some of you that might sound terrifying (the ocean is so big), but let me tell you, it was the most awe-inspiring, yet relaxing experience of my life to date—except for that one day when hurricane Nicole hit Florida, and hurricane-force winds traveled all the way up to the North Atlantic whipping up 21-foot waves. That aside, to see nothing but blue water in every direction for days

on end makes you realize just how small we are in this big, big world. Plus, the sunsets over the ocean never get old.

The people watching is great fun too. Take, for example, the eccentric elderly couple who joined us for a dolphin excursion in Gibraltar. The husband wore a top-hat and suspenders. The wife wore what appeared to be a hand-quilted ankle-length dress and ribbons tied at odd angles in her hair. Once the tour guide on our little boat spotted dolphins, the husband helped his wife up onto the deck where she attempted to speak with the dolphins in clicks and squeaks.

Meanwhile, the wind tried to carry the gentleman's hat away. Luckily, a fellow passenger caught it before it went overboard. I tucked those people and experiences away for later use as interesting characters in a story.







Train to Prague • Photo by Tiffany Spire ©2022

the exterior of the station.

I didn't give these crumbling buildings much thought as we passed them until I saw a woman standing on the upper balcony of one such run-down structure smoking a cigarette and watching as our train rolled into the newer station parallel to the old tracks. Immediately, the questions began. Who was she? What was she doing on the balcony of a seemingly abandoned building? How did she get in there? Why was she there?

As our train pulled away from that station, my brain began to supply answers to the questions, and I had a new story to write. I opened the laptop and spit out over 2,000 words before we reached Prague. How I got that many words written I don't know.

Our transatlantic cruise ended in Portugal where we only stayed a couple of nights before starting the train portion of our journey. We would cross a lot of the European countryside by rail over the next two months. There would be good moments and bad on the trains, but it would turn out to be an unforgettable experience.

Between Berlin and Prague our train passed through several small towns. In some of these track-side towns, you could still see what must have been the old train station—a small two-story stone building with a lookout balcony on the upper floor and a long platform at ground level spread out on both sides of

*Who was she?  
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Barcelona • Photo by Tiffany Spire ©2022





Dolphins in Gibraltar • Photo by Tiffany Spire ©2022

If you've ever heard of the black forests of Germany, you can picture the distracting beauty we were traveling through. Seared into my memory is the twilight scene (just as we were crossing into the Czech Republic) of the black glassy Elbe River flowing through a snowy valley filled with dark, dark evergreens and jagged peaks in the distance. It was like something out of an epic movie.

There were other (smaller) moments of inspiration throughout our time abroad. Watching swans in Switzerland and sea gulls in Spain (something this landlocked gal doesn't get to see often) inspired new lines for a picture book I've been working on (stuck on) for years.

We spent the final week and a half of our trip in Norway and Iceland. At a museum in Oslo, we saw artifacts from the Middle Ages as well as the world's oldest rune-stone (a stone with Viking runic writing). For several months now, I'd been trying to come up with an artifact I could infuse

with magical powers for a MG novel I'm working on. The rune-stone was just the thing I needed!

The city of Bergen is a great jumping off point to see the fjords of Norway. Unfortunately, the day we chose for our fjord cruise, it was raining buckets! I have never seen so much rain come down so hard for such an extended period.



Iceland • Photo by Tiffany Spire ©2022





Malaga, Spain • Photo by Tiffany Spire ©2022

*If you're feeling stuck, I encourage you to get out somehow. Go somewhere you don't usually go.*

manuscript I had started working on a year ago but had lost inspiration for. I've been able to breathe fresh life into that storyline.

Not everyone will get the opportunity to spend three months on another continent. But you don't have to go that far for inspiration. If you're feeling stuck, I encourage you to get out somehow. Go somewhere you don't usually go. I find that nature offers the most fuel for creativity, but the hustle and bustle of an unfamiliar city can be inspirational as well. Where can you go to get out of your familiar rut?

Can you go on a short road trip? We're fortunate we can boast of the two most striking National Parks, Glacier and Yellowstone (which opens in about a month).

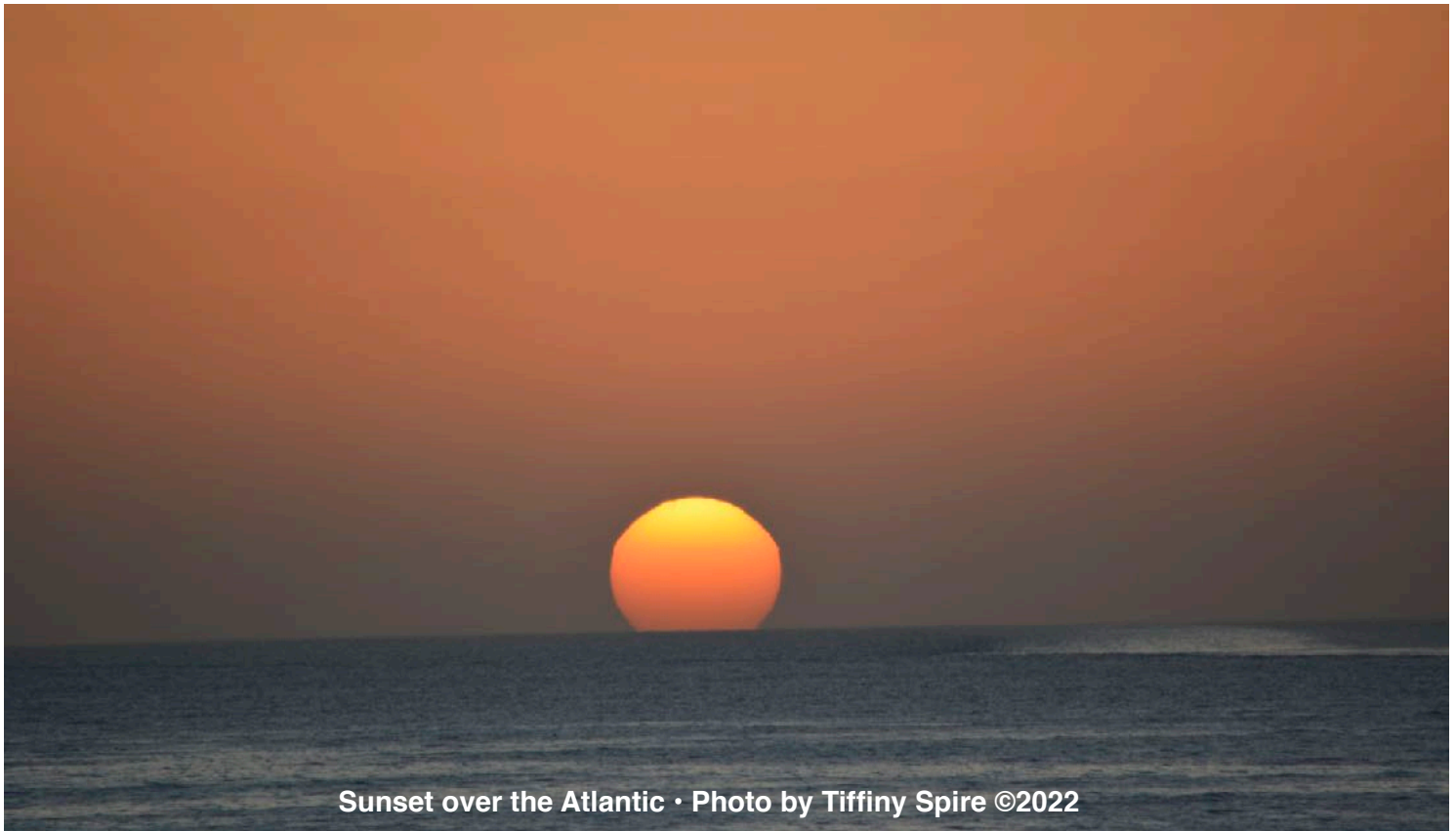
We were disappointed and thought our cruise was going to be a big waste of money. The boat was enclosed and quite warm and comfy inside, but you could hardly see anything through the rain-spattered windows. Photographs were certainly out of the question. That is, until about an hour up the coast from Bergen, the captain slowed the boat. My husband decided to go above deck and brave the elements. It was too rainy to do much up there, but the back of the boat had an open area with an overhang. The passengers took turns standing in this area to view and record the rugged beauty of those sheer cliffs of black granite jutting straight up to the heavens with waterfalls pouring over their sides.

The rain at this point was a thin mist, and we were able to get many pictures and videos, though they can never do justice to the original. The fjords of Norway will always live in my memory as one of the most breath-taking places I've ever seen. And it is now the setting of a YA



Norway • Photo by Tiffany Spire ©2022





Sunset over the Atlantic • Photo by Tiffiny Spire ©2022

We also have several state parks spread across Montana. There are probably at least a few within a short drive of where you live. Or why not just visit one of your city parks? Get across town to somewhere you don't usually go. Perhaps even a local museum.

Inspiration can be found just about anywhere if we are watching for it and open to it. I think there is a lot of value in getting out of our routine and away from our usual places. A change of scenery can really get the creative juices flowing.

So, where are you headed? Where will you find inspiration?

If you want to read more about my trip, you can check out the travel stories I've just started adding to my website [www.tiffinyspire.com](http://www.tiffinyspire.com). I'll be continually posting more in upcoming weeks. Or you can see pictures and videos of the trip on my Instagram page @learningherenthere.



Colosseum in Rome • Photo by Tiffiny Spire ©2022

## Celebration Corner

By Tiffany Spire – Newsletter Editor

We have three local authors to celebrate this quarter.

First up, former Montana Regional Advisor Kiri Jorgensen recently published a MG contemporary mystery.

Title: *Perfect*

Author: Kiri Jorgensen

Publisher: Chicken Scratch Books

### About the author:

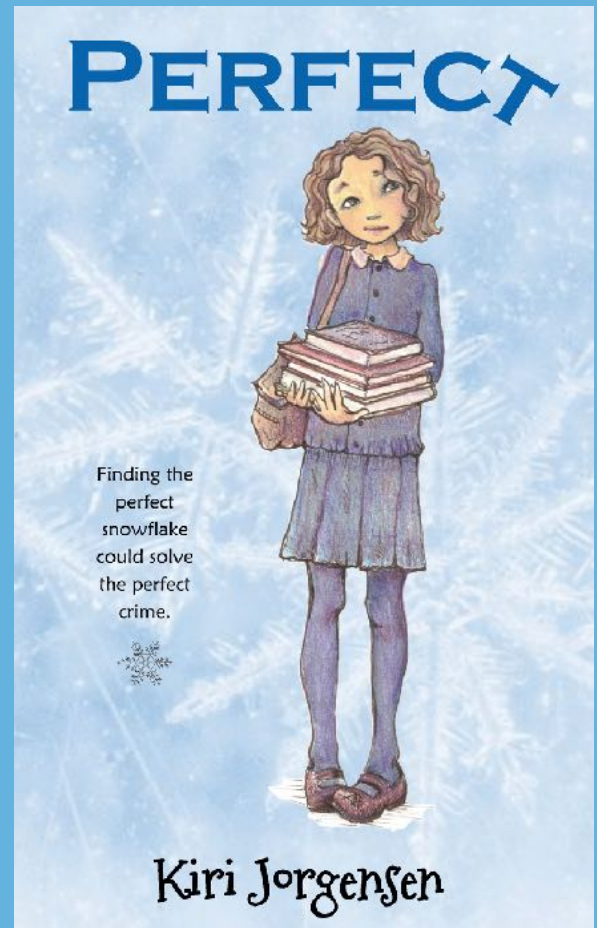
Kiri Jorgensen has been writing stories since she was in elementary school. Many of them are in the form of stage plays. She's written and produced over thirty plays for kids, and even a few musicals. She is a teacher, a writer, an editor, a publisher, a gardener, and a quilter, but her favorite roles are wife and mother.

Even though her husband and kids are all avid snow skiers, Kiri is content with the extreme sport of snowflake catching. Throw in a good middle grade novel to read and a mug of hot cocoa, and she's set. Kiri lives in rural Montana with her husband and lots of pets.

### About the book:

Saloma Hammond is not your typical 12-year-old. Sal counts her steps between classes, wears a school uniform that isn't required, and prefers to stay locked inside her tightly controlled OCD world. But when the lure of the perfect snowflake entices her to join the Weather Club, her anti-social shell begins to crack. At the same time, dozens of phones have gone missing, and her classmates are getting suspicious.

If Sal can unlock her pattern-driven mind to identify the workings of the real thief and then set an irresistible trap at the Science Fair, she may just learn how powerful friendship can be.



You can learn more about Kiri and her book and publishing company at [www.chickenscratchbooks.com](http://www.chickenscratchbooks.com).



Next up – a book due to be released this month by Dr. Lisa Weckbacher.

Title: *What is the Shape of my Egg?*

Author: Dr. Lisa Weckbacher

Publisher: Little Whoo Books

Publication Date: Spring 2023

### About the author:

A native to the East Coast, Dr. Lisa Weckbacher grew up with a love for books and animals from an early age. As a new venture in her academic career, *What Is the Shape of My Egg?* is the first of a series of books titled *Shape Stories with Farm Friends*.

To date, she has also published several works pertaining to the role of spatial thinking in childhood and adolescence. The implications of her research are largely related to how educators can help prepare K-12 students to pursue and ultimately succeed in STEM-oriented careers.

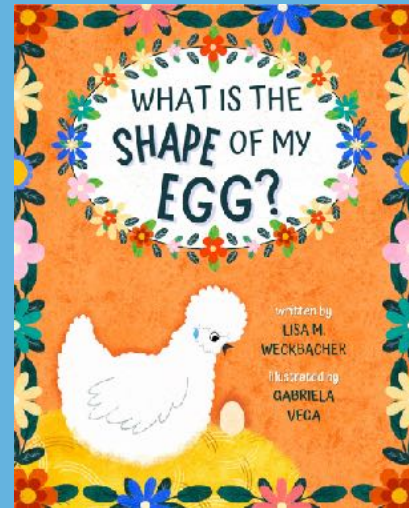
Lisa divides her time between Southern California and Western Montana with her family, and, of course, their many feathered and furry friends.

### About the book:

*What Is the Shape of My Egg?*, the first title in the *Shape Stories with Farm Friends* Series, stars Silkie who is—to no surprise—a Silkie chicken! Soon after laying her very first egg, Silkie discovers that her egg is not as perfect as she thought. With the help of the sisters, she learns about the shape of her egg along with the shape of other circular objects both inside and outside their home.

The four characters (Silkie, Dreeka, Henrietta and Dottie) are not fictitious. The Illustrations and corresponding text reflect the actual appearance and personalities of the sisters in real life. They live on a small farm with other animals (the future stars in *Shape Stories with Farm Friends*) in Western Montana.

## Celebration Corner



As an educational resource, *What Is the Shape of My Egg?* introduces children to the properties of circles, as well as ovals, to help build accurate conceptions of both geometric shapes. In addition, the content of the book is rich with select language (e.g., left, right, up, down) to nurture and practice spatial thinking. Silkie chicken facts are also included for those of you who may not know about this loving breed of chickens!

To learn more about *Shape Stories with Farm Friends*, visit: [www.littlewhoobooks.com](http://www.littlewhoobooks.com)

## Celebration Corner

And last, but certainly not least, a book by one of our newest members Patricia Osborn.

Title: *The Ambulance that Could Fly*  
Author: Patricia Osborn  
Illustrator: Morrell Cravens  
Publisher: Huey's Books  
Publication Date: July 2022

### About the author:

Patricia loves aviation and loves being a part of it on both the military and civilian sides. She has a commercial helicopter pilot license, as well as a Master's Degree in Aeronautical Science.

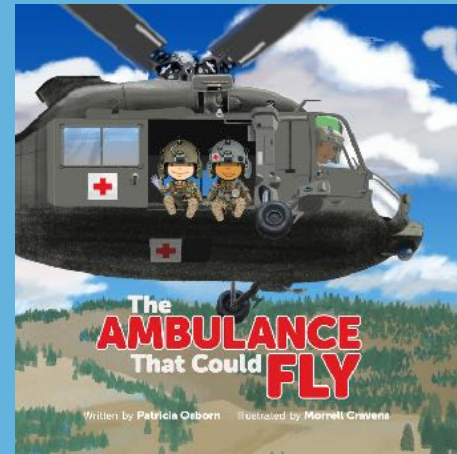
Huey's Books was originally inspired by Patricia's desire to share a book with her young niece about MEDEVAC and about how the Army National Guard use their aircraft stateside.

### About the book:

*The Ambulance That Could Fly* is a fictional story about an Army MEDEVAC Black Hawk helicopter and a rescue mission conducted in the mountains. This book is designed to teach children about Army MEDEVAC using a common mission conducted in the United States.

To learn more about *The Ambulance that Could Fly* visit [www.hueysbooks.com](http://www.hueysbooks.com).

We hope you'll take a minute and visit the listed websites to learn more about these newly published books.



## Celebrate your favorite local authors!

Remember, a great way to continue to celebrate authors is to request your local libraries and bookstores stock their books. It also helps them when you leave reviews on places like Goodreads and Amazon.

If you are a Montana author or illustrator and a member of SCBWI, we want to celebrate your recently published children's book in our quarterly newsletter. Send your bio and a blurb about your book to me at [tiffynspire@gmail.com](mailto:tiffynspire@gmail.com).





**As Montana's Regional Advisor for the better part of four years, you already know who Precious McKenzie is, and you've maybe even had the opportunity to meet her. As your Assistant RA, I had the privilege of getting to work with her, which was a great experience for me. I'm thrilled to interview her and share some of the tidbits that make up her interesting and full life.**

**One thing that I have been positively daunted by is Precious' educational attainments. She has a Ph.D. in English from the University of South Florida. Her area of specialization is nineteenth-century British literature, so if she were a contestant on Jeopardy, she would win the Victorian novel category hands-down. She also has a Master of Arts in English from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington and an M.F.A. in Writing from Spalding University.**

Some of you will know that until recently she was an associate professor at Rocky Mountain College in Billings. And she has also taught at the University of South Florida, New College of Florida, and Montana State University's City College.

**Originally from Florida, I have to ask: What brought you to Montana, and how long have you lived here?**

Way back in 2011, I was on the job market and so was my husband. We made a pact: whoever got the first (and best) job offer, that's where we would go. Well, he did. And so, we ended up in Montana. The first winter was a HUGE learning curve, and I still really don't like driving in snow, but other than that, Montana has been wonderful. I now know what "dressing in layers" truly means.

**Your career seems to center around writing. Have you always been a writer?**

When I was in elementary school, I dreamt of being a singer like my idol Madonna or forming a band like the Go-Gos. When I was not singing along to the songs on my boom box, I was always writing and making little storybooks for my mom. Then, in middle school, I worked on the student newspaper, and I always read a lot.

We did not have a lot of money when I was growing up so my mom would say, "Go ride your bike to the library." So that's what I did. I'd fill the baskets on my bike with books from the public library. I read all sorts of things, from *Watership Down* to *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* to anything by Stephen King. I am so thankful for the public library and the nice librarians who never limited how many books I could check out.

**As a little girl did you envision a career in writing? Or academia? (I so hope you're going to say something like "No! I wanted to be a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader!") Do you come from a family of university professors?**

As for a job, I always thought I'd be a veterinarian, but Chemistry class curtailed that dream. Probably for the best; I am not good at sewing stitches—in anything! My parents did not go to college, but they have always encouraged education, of any kind. Their motto still is "Education is always a good thing."

I joined Future Educators of America when I was in high school, shadowed some spectacular teachers, and decided I wanted to teach. My bachelor's degree is in Special Education.

After teaching elementary school and middle school for three years, I went to graduate school because I was ONLY Language Arts (not Math) and concentrated study of graduate friends I made, so I went on to be funny, but throughout those years writing and sending material out, I thought of myself as a "writer."

**Precious has published academic articles and books as well as short stories and poems. Her most recent writing for adults appeared in *Whitefish Review*, *FeverDream*, and *Zenith Literary Magazine*. And her poetry has appeared in *Ellipsis*, *Gemini*, and as part of Tupelo Press's 30/30 Project.**

**But today we're going to focus on the fifty plus children's books you've written. I remember you telling me that years ago you did work-for-hire for an educational publisher.**

**Is that how you got started in the children's book industry?**

Yes, that was my first work in the children's book industry. I did work-for-hire for a few educational publishers. They would pay me X amount of dollars to write a book on any given nonfiction topic.

It was a great way to learn more about writing nonfiction and to get experience. Deadlines were

tight which also made me learn—very quickly—how to manage my time.

**I gather from looking at your book titles that you have counterbalanced fiction with nonfiction. Is that because when you WFH, you write to assignment and a lot of those are nonfiction titles intended for the classroom?**

You got it. Plus, I like to mix things up a bit and try new things. Sometimes it's poetry, fiction, a picture book, a short creative nonfiction piece. I also finished a play which will see the stage in the next couple of months with the ideas that spark you.

**Plus, I like to mix things up a bit and try new things. Sometimes it's poetry, fiction, a picture book, a short creative nonfiction piece. Go with the ideas that spark you.**

**You've never had an agent? (You've never needed one!)**

I haven't yet. I am looking though, because I have a YA novel that is geared for the trade market, and I'd like to see it published.

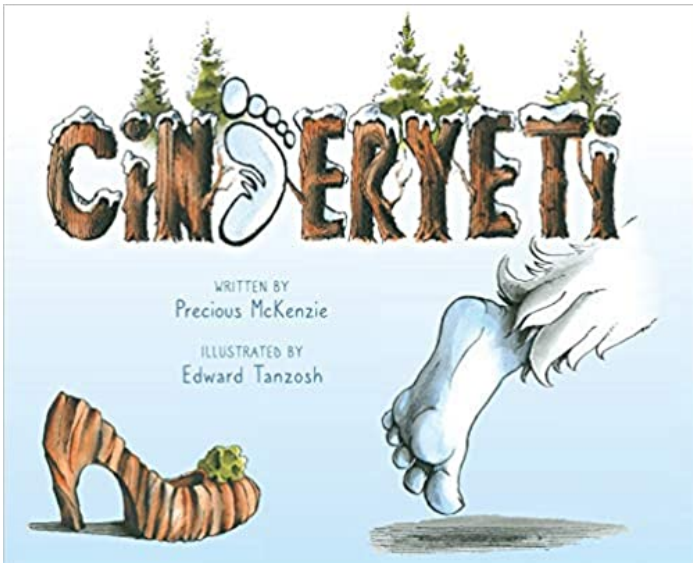
**For people who want to break into getting published, do you recommend applying for WFH as a starting place?**

As for WFH, absolutely, yes. WFH is a great place! Read each publisher's guidelines carefully and follow their instructions. You can have a lot of fun with WFH, and you get PAID!

**I know you've won some awards. For example, in 2020, the Library of Congress/National Book Festival chose *Cinder Yeti* as one of the "Great Reads from Great Places." Please tell us about that:**

I was so honored to represent Montana, but then Covid shut everything down. So, the National Book Festival went virtual, and I gave a virtual presentation. It was still amazing, but someday, with another book, I hope to finally make it to Washington DC and present at the National Book Festival in person!





Award an award that recognizes writing about the horse industry.

To be a semi-finalist for this award was a big deal for me because typically the award does not go to children's books. This recognition really meant a lot—that adults found something in the story too.

Some of you may also know that Precious is a member-owner of [This House of Books](#) in Billings. It has to be a ton of fun owning a bookstore, kind of like a candy store—isn't that everyone's dream?

What does being a member-owner look like and do you get to run the cash register?

It is a cooperative, so there are a lot of owners. We have board meetings, planning meetings, we do book sales, community events, all kinds of things.

I love to immerse myself in gathering information. Then the first draft is tough, but after that I love how a story can take shape — with lots of constructive feedback from a writing group, mentors, and editors.

And, yes, I can run the cash register, but mostly I like to hang out and talk books with people, and I buy a lot of books. 😊 I then also share lots of used books with friends.

Let's talk about this writing gig of yours. I know you have an unwavering writing schedule getting up at five in the morning to write before going to work, correct? Have

you always been an early morning writer? Do you have a certain number of words you try to write each day like with the NaNoWriMo Challenge?

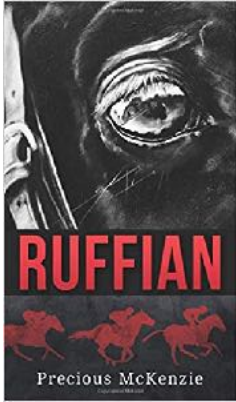
I am a morning person. "Sleeping in" means 7 a.m. in my world. Well, I just started a new job at the Yellowstone Art Museum, so my day starts a little earlier, and I am settling into a new writing schedule. Now I am up at 4:30, have coffee, exercise, do some jotting down of ideas or sending things out. Little by little. I do like extended chunks of writing time, so I write in the evenings or on weekends. Some days I don't write at all. And that is okay. I give myself that space, that downtime. Rest is important for creativity. I failed miserably with NaNoWriMo. That was too much pressure to perform, I guess. Shrug.

Do you have a favorite part of the writing process?

The research. I love to immerse myself in gathering information. Then the first draft is tough, but after that I love how a story can take shape—with lots of constructive feedback from a writing group, mentors, and editors.



**I just have to ask—are you a plotter or a pantser?**



Total pantser. Everything is fluid—except with *Ruffian*. For that book, since it is historical fiction and based on the racehorse’s actual life, I had to make a plot line that followed historic events. That was challenging. It made me stretch, and I learned to appreciate the process of plotting.

**This question is probably difficult to answer considering how many books you’ve written, but has there been one of your projects that you enjoyed the most?**

You are asking me to choose a favorite child, aren’t you? Well, *Cinder Yeti* because I lived with that yeti in my head for six years before she got published. But, then *Ruffian*. That was my creative thesis for my MFA, and that book came out of me fast and furious and would not let go. I just had to tell her story . . . I have a picture book in the works about a badger that I just love. Fingers crossed, that book will be published in 2024/2025.

**In 2022, you got to go to Ireland on a Fulbright Scholarship. Can you tell us in a sound bite what a Fulbright Scholarship is and then elaborate on what your experience was like?**

The Fulbright Program is sponsored by the US State Department. There’s a competitive application process with lots of levels of vetting. I was selected to teach a graduate-level class in the Public Humanities for University College - Cork, in Ireland. For one semester, I lived in Cork City, taught my class, had time to write and research in their archives, and even had the chance to take a university-level Irish

**Some days I don’t write at all. And that is okay. I give myself that space, that downtime. Rest is important for creativity.**

class. So now I can speak a little Irish. It was magical.

Everyone was friendly, helpful, and welcoming. Plus, I got to travel around the country visiting beaches, churches, museums, castles, historic sites, and national parks. Absolutely life-changing. I am so grateful for the opportunity.

**So now that you’re no longer teaching, how are you filling your days?**

I am the Advancement Director for the Yellowstone Art Museum. My days are now spent learning about contemporary art, planning programs, working with donors, and writing/editing materials for the museum. I love supporting the arts and this has been a great path for me.

**I know you own a few animals. Tell us about your menagerie:**

Oh yes! See the part of the interview “I want to be a veterinarian.” I have two senior dogs, three cats, hens, and a horse. What is life without our furry friends? There’s nothing like writing on a cold winter’s day with a dog tucked up at your feet.

**What’s your favorite in-the-whole-wide-world thing to do?**

1. Put my nose up to my horse’s nose and take a great big inhale. Just the smell of a horse is a happy place.
2. Go to a beach.
3. Eat ice cream.
4. Go to a library or bookstore.
5. Take the dog for a walk.

WHOOOPS! Too many. Sorry, I guess I don’t follow instructions very well. (See why NaNoWriMo didn’t work for me?!?)



**Left-turn here—Watching the news covering the earthquake in Turkey and Syria brings to mind our own disaster two decades ago.**

**Do you remember where you were and what you were doing on 9-11?**

On the morning it happened, I was living in North Carolina and giving my little sons their breakfast. Both of them were still in diapers. I remember thinking that our world would never be the same—and I was worried about what the future would be like for all the world's children.

**Last question—mountains versus the ocean?**

OCEAN. That's what I miss most about Florida. I miss being around water and swimming in warm water.

Thank you, Joann. This has been a blast! Happy creating, everyone! And, Joann, thank you for becoming SCBWI Montana's new RA! The organization is in good hands!

**This has been fun, Precious! Thanks so much for taking the time to answer my questions. And thank you for your leadership of the Montana chapter of the SCBWI.**

You can find out more about Precious by visiting her page at [This House of Books website](#) and her author page at: [preciousmckenzie.com](http://preciousmckenzie.com).



## **Illustrators' Corner**

**BY JACKIEMARIE BEYER**  
Illustrator Coordinator

Hi All!

I hope you love our new banner as much as I do! The different faces and expressions are just what illustrators should try to capture. It's great that there's a child reading a book, one sketching and one in action! The contest was fun and we got some great entries! It may not seem like a lot to you, but to get nine entries when we only have twenty-seven illustrators in our region is actually quite a lot, and I know several of our regular illustrators (myself included) didn't have time to enter.

It's all I can do to keep up with the weekly [Sip and Sketch](#). I encourage everyone to join us and check it out. I feel a little guilty because I know I am benefiting more than anyone by meeting with members as I not only commit to my craft once a week, but I also learn so much.

I especially want to give a shout-out to Jenn Ard who gave me a simple tip on how to clean up my digital painting that was life changing. My painting went from dull and dirty to clear and bright like it looks in real life!

So, I am teaching full time, getting my Special Education endorsement, and working towards a Masters with a specialization in STEAM, so this year is flying by in a blur. But one thing I want to mention about being a teacher is my students definitely get more from me sharing one of the many great trade books I read to them than they do from reading our textbooks. I hope this thought encourages you to keep working and sharing your passion whether it's baseball or fishing, telling a tale about a compelling character or teaching about shapes. There are some great children's books out there, and I hope we can help you to get your dream book published!

Make sure you check out opportunities for illustrators found on the [SCBWI awards and grants page](#).