

SCBWI Montana

Summer Newsletter • 2022



Cover Illustration by Montana Illustrator Jennifer Ard©2020



Summer Newsletter • August 2022

Regional Events

PRECIOUS MCKENZIE
REGIONAL ADVISOR, MONTANA

I hope everyone is doing well considering the terrible floods that occurred in Montana. In the midst of a busy summer, your regional team has been busy. Here's just a small sample of what we've been up to!



The Montana Sparks Show, organized by volunteer Jeanne Bowman, was held during the Montana Kid Lit Fest at the Billings Public Library in June.

Jeanne worked with SCBWI illustrators and writers to

create original pieces based on the theme "Curiosity." Then, all the works were displayed at the Montana Kid Lit Fest. There was a fabulous turnout. It was a very fun and inspiring event.

There are plans in the works to have a few virtual gatherings that will feature these works so you'll have a chance to see them again.

The big **SCBWI Summer Conference** is all virtual this year because of COVID. But, there's a fantastic line-up of industry professionals to help you reach your professional goals. The event is August 5-7, 2022. To learn more, visit www.scbwi.org.

Membership across the state is growing—and so are the critique groups! If you are interested in joining a critique group, please email me, and I will put you in contact with a lead volunteer closest to your hometown.

And, last, but not least, with the rising COVID numbers across the nation and the financial risks of planning a large-scale conference, SCBWI Montana is planning to continue to host Zoom webinars rather than a live conference this year.

Our hope is that we can offer a conference or writing retreat in 2023. That said, keep checking our Facebook and Instagram page for upcoming webinars. I am working on more for you 😊 We also promote webinars for other regions on those pages, too. You are welcome to attend those.



Joann Howeth - Assistant Regional Advisor along with her granddaughter & sister



Precious McKenzie
Regional Advisor

SCBWI Headquarters is also updating their website to include all of the webinars offered in the entire international organization. You will find the list on their website under Regional Virtual Events.



Photos from the KidLit Festival Billings

Open Submissions: BeLu Books, a small independent publisher based in Florida, is actively seeking K-2 fiction and 3-8 fiction. But, NO picture books. For more information, visit www.bealubooks.com.

If you are a current SCBWI Montana member, we'd like to share your good news. If you had a kid lit book published in 2022, email me your brief bio, a two-sentence blurb about your book, and an image of your book's cover. We want to share your good news on social media (Facebook and Instagram).

Let's celebrate your accomplishments!

Precious McKenzie
montana-ra@scbwi.org



Locally Produced Literature to Celebrate!



This Fab Four of kid lit creators spoke about writing and illustrating children's books at an elementary school visit with over 100 students. They also spoke with families at the Kid Lit Fest held at the Billings Public Library in June.



Photo of: Jenn Ard, illustrator of *Nest*, a forthcoming picture book by Precious McKenzie; and Erika Wilson, illustrator of Sue Lawrence's picture book, *Montana's Memory Day*.



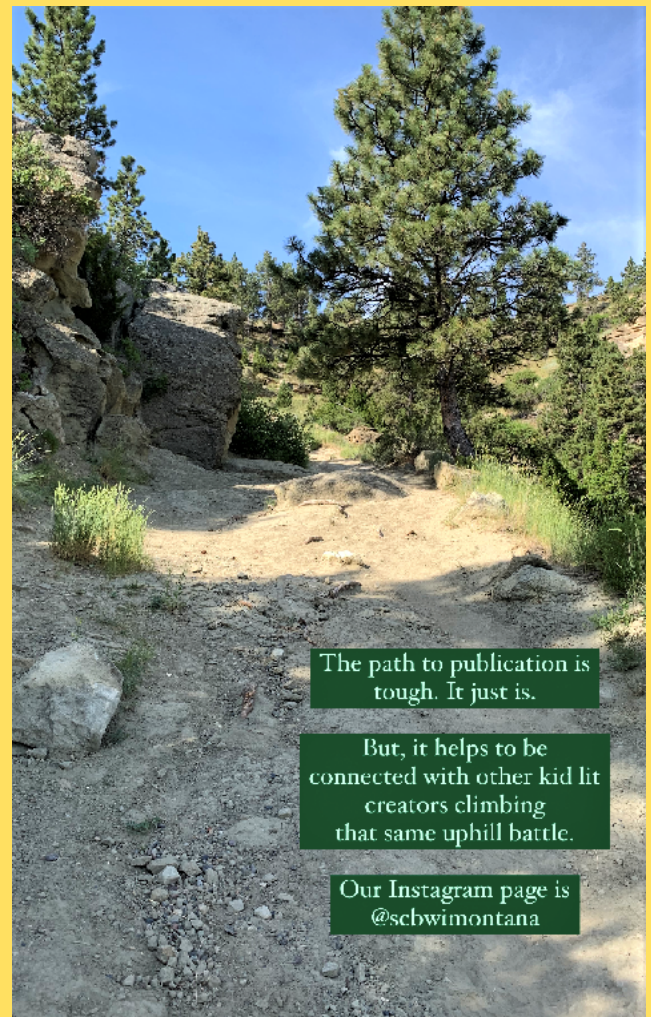
Montana photos by Sue Lawrence



Photos from the Kid Lit Festival Billings



photos by Sue Lawrence



The path to publication is tough. It just is.

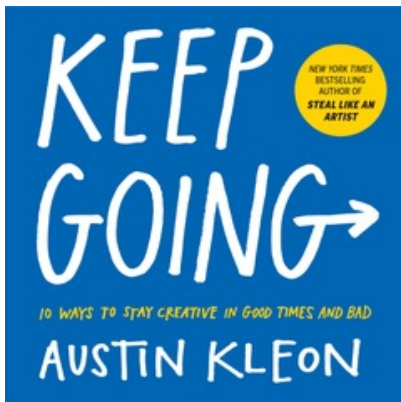
But, it helps to be connected with other kid lit creators climbing that same uphill battle.

Our Instagram page is @schwimontana

Craft Corner

BY TIFFINY SPIRE

MONTANA SCBWI NEWSLETTER COORDINATOR



Book Review of
*Keep Going: 10
Ways to Stay
Creative in Good
Times and Bad*

by Austin Kleon

W o r k m a n
P u b l i s h i n g
Company 2019

My first encounter with the work of Austin Kleon was through a free zine he created for National Independent Bookstore Day this past April. It was titled “*Read Like an Artist: 10 Tips for a Better Life with Books.*” I was pleasantly surprised to receive this little treasure when I picked up my order from our local indie bookstore, This House of Books. I found the zine pithy and thought-provoking, so I decided to look up the author which led me to purchase his most recent book. (Authors, notice how this marketing ploy worked.)

Keep Going is a short book full of wisdom for modern creatives. Author Austin Kleon outlines 10 ideas designed to encourage artists from all walks of life to continue their work no matter the obstacles. There’s no guessing what this book is about as Kleon freely gives us the “10 ways to stay creative...” right on the back of his book.

I will list them here:

1. Every day is Groundhog Day.
2. Build a bliss station.
3. Forget the noun, do the verb.
4. Make gifts.
5. The ordinary + extra attention = the extraordinary.

6. Slay the art monsters.
7. You are allowed to change your mind.
8. When in doubt, tidy up.
9. Demons hate fresh air.
10. Plant your garden.

Kleon generously sprinkles in inspirational quotes from various creatives both current and past which I thoroughly enjoyed due to their wit and relevance. One of my favorites is by Amy Krouse Rosenthal.

“For anyone trying to discern what to do with their life: Pay attention to what you pay attention to. That’s pretty much all the info you need.”

This book is so short that if I were to attempt to expand on each section, I would essentially be rewriting Kleon’s book, though much less eloquently. Instead, I will focus on only a few of my favorite sections and quotes. It was hard to narrow down my choice as every chapter I read had me nodding in agreement.

The section titled “Build a Bliss Station” starts with these words in bold type, “*Disconnect from the world to connect with yourself.*” Kleon isn’t suggesting that we put our heads in the sand and ignore the world around us, but he is suggesting that we don’t start our days with the barrage of bad news waiting for us on our phones and televisions. He quotes author Anne Lammott:

“Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes — including you.”

Kleon mentions that he’s able to get significant amounts of work done when he’s traveling by plane thanks to being forced to sit still for a length of time with his phone in airplane mode. I find the same true for me; I never get more work done than when I’m flying.

*“Almost everything
will work again if
you unplug it for a
few minutes —
including you.”
Anne Lammott*

Kleon suggests we replicate this scenario in our daily lives. *“Airplane mode is not just a setting on your phone: It can be a whole way of life.”*

We need to create time and place in our daily life to do our work, and we must be diligent about protecting that space and time even when it means saying “no” to others.

“I must decline, for secret reasons.” — E.B. White

Kleon starts the third chapter with strong words for creatives.

“Lots of people want to be the noun without doing the verb. They want the job title without the work. Let go of the thing that you’re trying to be (the noun), and focus on the actual work you need to be doing (the verb).”

He goes on to encourage us to stop worrying about titles and just do the work. But he cautions us to not get too bogged down focusing on the outcomes. He reminds us that we should be enjoying the process. Take time to make art just for yourself. Keep it playful.

There’s one more section I want to highlight from Kleon’s book — though they’re all worth talking about. Chapter seven is called, “You’re Allowed to Change your Mind,” and I think it couldn’t be more relevant. Kleon says:

“Everyone’s supposed to be a brand now, and the worst thing in the world is to be off-brand.”

But to be on-brand all of the time *“...is also a roadblock to discovery.”* Kleon implores creatives to be ever-evolving. *“...be open to possibility, and allow yourself to be changed.”* But to change and grow and evolve we need to create time and space to consider ideas, new ideas, ideas different from our own. We

shouldn’t surround ourselves only with like-minded people. Instead find “like-hearted” people. The author ends this section with words that are better quoted than paraphrased.

“If you want a quick way to escape the noise of contemporary life, break out of your like-minded bubble, and do some good thinking, just visit the past for a bit. It’s inexhaustible: Every day we’re making more and more of it.”

You can probably tell by just these few excerpts that Austin Kleon has developed a knack for making short powerful statements. While reading his book, I constantly found myself stopping and thinking. (And isn’t that what we want our work to do? We want it to cause others to stop and absorb it in such a way that it changes them.) No wonder Kleon is a best-selling author.

I’ll end with a little encouragement from Ralph Waldo Emerson that Kleon included in his book.

“Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could; some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; you shall

begin it well and serenely, and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense.”

To see more of Austin Kleon’s work, visit his website at

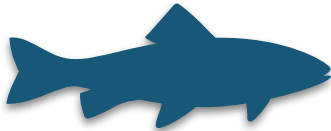


austinkleon.com



FEATURED INTERVIEW WITH ILLUSTRATOR JENNIFER ARD

by ARA Joann Howeth



If Jennifer were a store owner (think Fly Shop), you'd find the sign "Gone Fishing" on the door more often than not. That's because she loves fish. In fact, fish are a consuming interest for her. And not just for catching.

Jennifer went to college at MSU in Bozeman and holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Fish & Wildlife Management.

Employed part-time by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, she is a part-time children's book author and illustrator as well.

So let's go back to the beginning - tell us how this passion for fish came about:

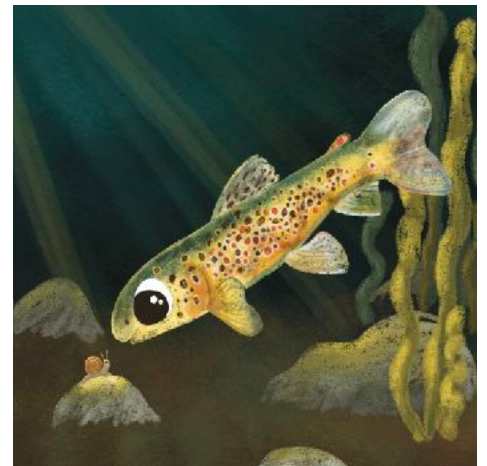
Are you a Montana girl - born and bred?

I am a 5th generation Montanan. My family homesteaded in the Cardwell area in the late 1800s. My family owned a mine on the south side of the Jefferson River. You can still see the mine tailings when you look south across the Jefferson when you're standing on the trails at the Lewis & Clark Caverns.

I was born in Butte and moved to Billings when I was eight because my dad got a job there. My future husband was in my class on my first day at my new school. We ended up being high school sweethearts (as were my parents and as were his parents), and we are both mechanics' kids. I went to college in Bozeman because I followed my wildland firefighter husband to Bozeman but ended up finding and loving the Fish and Wildlife program at MSU. We moved back to the Billings area to be close to family after I graduated, so I have always lived somewhere in Montana and will never move away.

Who introduced you to fishing?

My parents took me fishing before I could walk. That's what we did on weekends. If we weren't at car shows, we were camping and fishing south of Butte. My dad was always there for some sound advice, "Keep your tip up," or "Don't horse it." But my mom taught me how to put a worm on my hook. My favorite fishing memory was the Christmas that we packed up a picnic and went fishing on the Yellowstone because the weather was glorious. We fished all day and ate hotdogs off the BBQ for Christmas dinner, and it was fabulous. I have so many fishing stories . . .





What is it that you like about fishing?

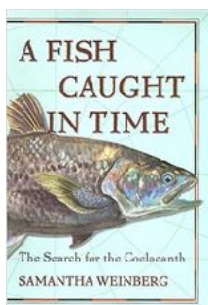
It's my happy place. I love the sounds, the bugs, the water, and sharing it with my family.

Tell us about your intrigue with fish - as a species, which ones are your favorites and why?

I find creatures that are not living on the same plane as me interesting. I love birds because they can fly and fish because they can breathe underwater. I have always been more interested in the behavioral aspects of biology: why do animals, plants, fungi do what they do?

I love ancient species that are still alive today: Sturgeon and Paddlefish, for example. They are unique and incredible species. I think my favorite fish is the Coelacanth. They are a deep ocean fish species that was thought to be extinct. Coelacanth fossils have been found in the US, Greenland, China, Brazil, and Madagascar.

I have always been more interested in the behavioral aspects of biology: why do animals, plants, fungi do what they do?



In 1938 Marjorie Courtney-Latimer, a female scientist, was working at a dock in Africa and saw a unique fish in the rubbish pile. She snatched it up and worked tirelessly to identify it. Her male colleagues pushed her discovery aside and dismissed it because she

was a woman, but she kept trying to figure it out and wrote a letter to an ichthyologist who knew exactly what she had.

The discovery was so important that the specimen was shipped with its own security guard. The entire story is fascinating. There is a book written about it called [A Fish Caught in Time](#) by Samantha Weinberg.

You are also a gifted painter and have such a beautiful touch with watercolors. Do you work in other mediums?

I work in watercolor, in gouache, and digitally. I love the convenience of digital art, but there is something about putting paint to paper that you just can't get from a screen.

Are you self-taught?

I suppose so. I have taken a lot of classes over the years. Everyone can be an artist, but not everyone is an illustrator.

How old were you when you discovered your love of drawing?

I have always been a maker and have drawn things my whole life. I fell in love with picture books when we started reading them to our kids (twelve years ago). I have had quite a few hobbies over the years but decided I wanted to start painting again in 2018. I tried to paint pretty flowers, but they looked juvenile. I have always felt as though my drawings looked juvenile.

I was so incredibly frustrated, but one day I had an "aha" moment when I realized that there is an entire art industry devoted to the kind of art I was already making. I realized that I love to read picture books, and I love to paint and draw, so why not marry the two, and I never looked back. Creating picture books is the perfect creative combination for me. Instead of fighting what was already happening, I just leaned into it.



So let's talk about the blending of these two passions:

Do you get to use your artistic talents in your job for the state?

I have to use some of my ever-evolving and improving design skills for my regular job, other than that, no.

Do you see a freelance art career blossoming in your future?

I work on my writing and/or my art every single day. I just finished a commission for some adorable, somewhat biologically accurate, bats (one of my favorite creatures), so I am on my way.

I feel like there's a story behind every one of your illustrations - do you feel that way too?

I would say a good portion of my art is illustration, but some of it is just a painting of a pretty insect. When I intentionally want an illustration that is actually the first thing I ask myself. What is the story? For art to become an illustration there must be a story. Everyone that makes any kind of art is an artist, but only those artists that tell stories with their art are illustrators.

What sorts of things spark your urge to pick up a pencil?

Everything, but I don't always have the time. My sketchbook and pencils are always with me no matter where I go just in case I have a moment, though. I do dedicate time to work on my projects during the school year, but when

My sketchbook and pencils are always with me no matter where I go just in case I have a moment.

I draw when I have a spare moment...any spare moment.

my kiddos are home, I draw when I have a spare moment...any spare moment.

I will often get an idea for an illustration but can't work on it in that moment, so I put the idea into a journal or the notes feature on my phone. Then when I have the time to draw or write I look through the idea journal for inspiration. My kids give me a lot of ideas too, and they are a lot of my inspiration.

Do you paint most days of the week?

I draw and/or write every weekday for a few hours. I try to reserve weekends for family, but my art spills into my weekends frequently.

I know you have a book coming out that you collaborated on with Precious McKenzie called *Nest*. Is this your picture book illustration debut? Who is publishing that?

Nest is my illustration debut. The poem that Precious wrote was so beautiful I couldn't possibly say no when she asked me to illustrate the book. I am also incredibly grateful that she asked me. It is an honor to be part of such an amazing project. Precious also asked me to write bird nest science facts for it, too, so it has a little science in it. *Nest* is scheduled to come out in the fall of 2022 and will be published by Bealu Books.

Did you enjoy the process?

I did! I learned just how much time it takes to create a picture book. I also developed a deeper appreciation for them. I have no problem paying a measly \$18.99 for a picture book anymore. That's cheap compared to the time, energy, and love spent on the making of one. They are an incredible piece of art.





Did you have to do any field research?

I did some research for the book but not any outdoor research. I also have a background in bird biology and knew quite a few of the species I wanted to include because of their interesting nesting strategies. I wanted to show as many different nesting strategies and habitats as I could. I can't wait to see it in person. I illustrated it in six months outside of the bird nesting season (September – February).

Can we show any photos of *Nest* yet? I don't have a digital copy of the book yet, but I would love to share some of my pictures from it. Have you or do you think you'll try your hand at writing and illustrating your own stories one day?

I have several manuscripts done and several in the works. My goal is to be an author/illustrator of my own stories. I'm working everyday toward that goal.

Who are a couple of your favorite illustrators working today?

I absolutely love Paddy Donnelly, Leo Timmers, Brendan Kearney, Vera Brosgol, Dan Tavis, and Steve Small, among so many others.





He is absolutely right. Floods are incredibly important and a normal part of a healthy ecosystem. Some species need high water to thrive (Sturgeon and Paddlefish for example).

When you aren't painting or fishing, what else do you like to do in your spare time?

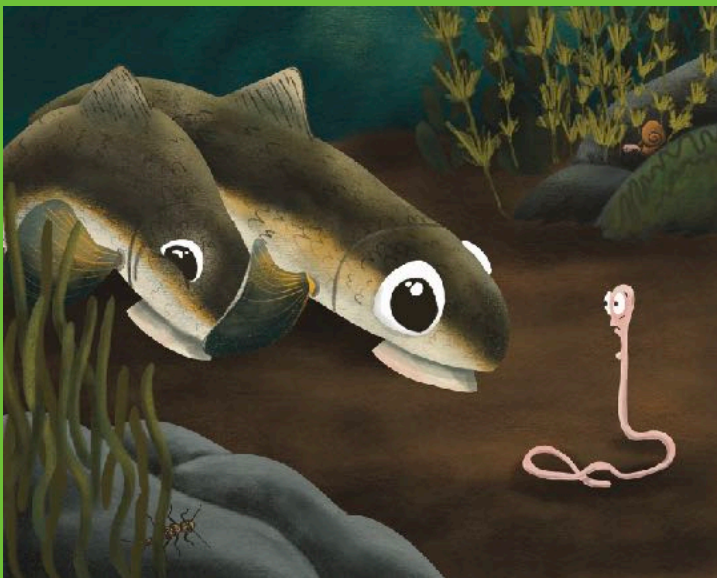
I don't have a lot of spare time, but I like to knit and crochet around Christmas time. I love to read books (mostly natural history books, classics, and graphic novels at the moment). I love to go birding. I love to ID insects and plants. I love to help my husband in the woodshop. I love to watch my kids play. I love to sit by the fire.

I envision your home is filled with aquarium(s) - yes?

Absolutely not! I spent years scrubbing trout tanks in college. So much so that I never want to clean another one ever again. I love fish, but I already have too many things to take care of. I do love visiting aquariums, though. We took our kids to Monterey Bay Aquarium a few years ago, and we loved it so much we spent two days there.

I read the most interesting and positive article in the [National Geographic](#) about the recent flooding of the Yellowstone. And while the author acknowledged the unfortunate damage to people's property, in the long run, he said this is going to be good for the landscape and the river. As a biologist, you surely have an opinion about this:





Any other creatures at your house?

We have 3 dogs. A 13-year-old basset hound and two young wirehair pointing griffons. I also have a lot of ferns. I love ferns (another ancient species).

What's your favorite-in-the-whole-world dessert?

Mashed potatoes and gravy.

This has been so much fun! Thanks for visiting with me, Jen! I am a huge fan of your artwork, so learning more about you has been delightful!

Jennifer's art frequently features fish and bugs and kids and furry creatures and lots of humor. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Jennifer's work, I suggest you visit her [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts immediately. Then, you'll know what I'm referring to.

www.jenniferard.com



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Seeking...

- K-2 fiction
- 3-8 fiction

*Not currently accepting picture books



BeaLu Books publishes books written by authors of all ages!

CELEBRATION CORNER!

Jeanne's book *Charlie Russell and the Gnomes of Bull Head Lodge* was recently proclaimed the 2022 winner of the prestigious Spur Award for Children's Picture Book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR (IN HER OWN WORDS):

I love books- as physical objects, as idea incubators, as laugh generators and as friends for lonely days. My goal in life is to create as many wonderful, inspiring books as possible. I use illustration as my method to provoke laughter and wonder for children.

My greatest strength is in the details. There is nothing more satisfying to me than placing "in jokes" throughout a story or adding subtext to an already amazing tale.

See more of Jeanne's eye-catching art on her website jeannebowmanillustrates.com

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Deep in the woods of Glacier National Park, artist Charlie Russell struggles to create his latest painting. With fellow artist Joe De Yong, he hikes into the wilderness to clear the cobwebs from his mind.

Just as the artists disappear, three gnomes -- funny little creatures that Charlie built from twisted branches and birch bark -- POP! POP! POP! to life. They know how to inspire Charlie's next masterpiece! Jumping down from the porch, they search the forest floor for just the right thing to jog his imagination.

Creating an afternoon of magical mischief, author Emily Wilson crafts a modern fairy tale based on the life of Charles M. Russell (1864-1926) and his many letters. Illustrator Jeanne Bowman fills each page with the beautiful colors and wildlife of Glacier National Park, a landscape that still conjures awe in visitors today.

You may recognize the two creators we are celebrating in this edition of the Montana SCBWI Newsletter. We have highlighted them both previously and are excited for their continued success! Join us in congratulating illustrator Jeanne Bowman and author Bruce Smith.



ABOUT THE SPUR AWARD:

Founded in the early 1950s, Western Writers of America promotes and honors the best in Western literature with the annual Spur Awards, selected by panels of judges. Awards, for material published in the previous year, are given for works whose inspiration, image, and literary excellence best represent the reality and spirit of the American West.

Submissions (open to all writers) for 2023 open this August. Learn more at westernwriters.org

CELEBRATION CORNER!

Bruce Smith is back with book two of his Legend Keepers middle grade series. The Partnership is scheduled to be released on August 30, 2022.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

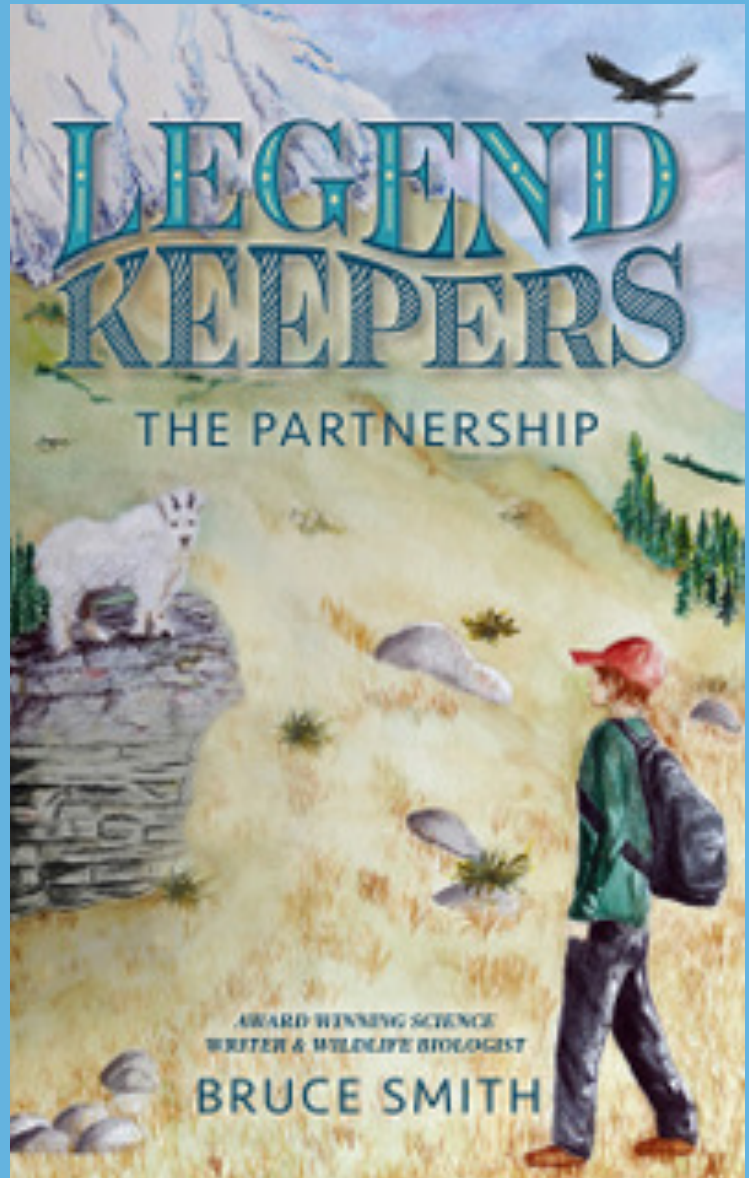
Bruce Smith is a writer and wildlife biologist who lives in southwest Montana. He's an author of nonfiction articles and books of natural history, science, and outdoor adventure. He spent most of his 30-year federal career managing populations of wildlife on the Wind River Indian Reservation and the National Elk Refuge in Wyoming. Writing middle-grade novels with environmental themes that immerse young readers in the natural world is Bruce's current passion.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

In this second book in the Legend Keepers middle-grade series, Buddy, Oreo, and Roark return, but twelve-year-old Garson Strangewalker and other characters from the human world raise the stakes of the adventure.

Garson doesn't fit in at school. He's in a new community, hasn't made friends, and his father is missing in Afghanistan. Each day's a struggle until a simple question he asks at the spring science fair sparks an interest in glaciers. He reads about them but can't get enough.

For his sixth-grade science project he climbs to the Shining Mountain glacier in the wilderness not far from his home. A chance encounter with Buddy, a remarkable kid mountain goat, changes everything as these two kids' lives become entwined. Their shared alarm over the Great Warming's threat to the glacier, and to Buddy's mountaintop home, transforms an insecure boy into an ardent environmental advocate. Sometimes it takes a partnership to bring out the best in us.



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.

Illustrators' Corner

BY JACKIEMARIE BEYER
Illustrator Coordinator

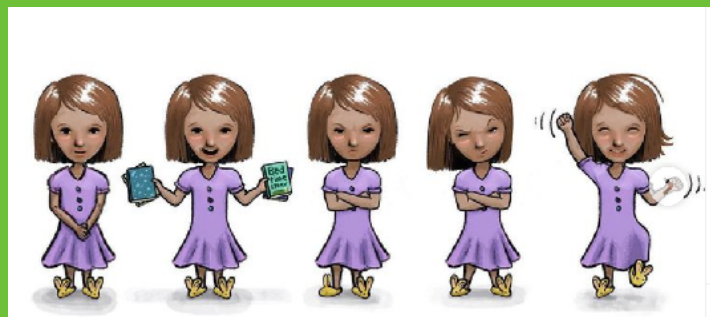
The lackadaisical days of summer are here for sure in Montana, and it seems hard to motivate myself to get anything done. On the flip side inspiration abounds: spotted fawns frolicking around the woods, kids splashing at the lake, picnics, campfires and family reunions give us plenty of ideas to illustrate.

I hope, like me, you're all making progress on your illustrator journey thanks to all of the awesome conferences, workshops and zoom calls that have been offered. The presenters have done a great job showing us ways to make our images catch the eyes of art directors and agents as well as how to impress them with our websites and Instagram feeds.

I hope you were able to participate in our fantastic Illustrator Extravaganza this spring. It was packed full of great speakers who shared amazing insights into the world of publishing children's books. One big take away I had was that art directors are drawn towards portfolios/websites that demonstrate an ability to draw different expressions, and I was so excited to see Gabrielle's different versions of her character from Erika's Procreate workshop.

One of my favorite activities was the Sparks Show especially the webinar we had at the end of July where both the artists and illustrators got to be on a call together and hear all the great stories that went with the art created for the "curiosity" prompt. The variety of images and the written pieces inspired by them were amazing and meeting the other participants even virtually was delightful.

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



Samples from Erika's Procreate workshop created by Gabrielle Livoski on Instagram [@gslivoski](#)

Extravaganza Feedback

What your fellow SCBWI members said about the Illustrator Extravaganza

The Procreate session was particularly helpful in the way of setting up canvas size, bleed lines, etc.

Looking at the works in progress going from sketch to finish was very interesting and something I haven't seen before.

The quote from Chad Beckerman's presentation: "Our best successes come from projects that teeter on the edge of failure-Aaron Duffy."

I found the critique helpful. It gave me direction on my book dummy.

To keep creating what I love and don't give up.

For questions or comments about the newsletter please email tiffinspire@gmail.com



Follow us on Instagram [@scbwimontana](https://www.instagram.com/scbwimontana)

**Kidlit Creators
Are Awesome People!!**