

The Zephyr

A newsletter for children's writers and illustrators

Winter 2009

From your Regional Advisors

Greetings, Nevada SCBWI! What an odd winter we're having, eh? Warm. Not nearly wet enough. But, hey, it's clouding up as I write this, so maybe we'll have a winter after all. The oddest thing is, even after that frigid January snap back east, when Suzy and I recently traveled to New York City for the annual SCBWI Winter Conference, it was relatively dry and warm there, too. Maybe we carried our western winter weather east?

Much like the cities themselves, the New York conference has a whole different feel than the summer conference in Los Angeles. Spread out over four days, LA is sprawling. Laid back. You can wear your Hawaiian shirt and not feel out of place. New York packs a whole lot into just under two days. (Three, if you're lucky enough to net a spot in the Friday intensives.) Tropical clothing won't do in Manhattan, where black trench coats are a staple.

Forget the dark cloud. Be a part of the helium.

Since NYC truly is the heart of publishing, many authors and illustrators come in a day or two early, or stay a day or two late, to visit their houses—or potential houses. This year was especially exciting for me. Simon & Schuster set up a staff meet-and-greet, where I was introduced to the new head of the children's division, Jon Anderson, and CEO Carolyn Reidy. I also did a video shoot for the S&S Web site and met with the digital department to discuss cutting edge marketing ideas. After that, it was lunch with the Barnes & Noble buyers, followed by a public library visit. Then Suzy joined up with our wonderful editor, Emma Dryden, and me for a lovely Italian dinner. Start to finish, a fabulous day.

A dark cloud continues to hover over publishing. But it may be lifting, at least a little. And as it turns out, children's publishing seems to be the helium pushing it higher. While sales in the adult divisions at most houses fell last year, children's remained steady or even gained some momentum. Part of that was due to blockbusters like the *Twilight* books, but they are not solely responsible. Kids love books, especially if the right books fall into their hands. Sometimes a parent puts the right book into their hands. Other times it's a teacher, librarian, sibling, or friend. Once in a while, they just find it. What joy in the discovery!

Your mission, now, is to write "the right book," whether that's a humorous picture book, a middle grade adventure, or perhaps YA historical fiction. Forget the dark cloud. Be a part of the helium. See you over the rainbow!

—Ellen Hopkins, *Regional Co-advisor, Nevada SCBWI*



Inside this issue

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in a few words

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Good news!

Register now for Las Vegas Workshop

SCBWI—Las Vegas is off to a great start in 2009! Our three critique groups are working hard, and our first half-day seminar, Publish or Perish, is March 14 at CSN, giving writers and illustrators the tools they need to promote their work. Our keynote speaker is Sharon Mann, a talented writer and illustrator who found a back door into the publishing world with her love of crafts. Mann will share ideas on how to build a publishing résumé to succeed in the industry.

We will also be joined by proofreader, translator, and search-engine wizard Judy Jenner, who will talk about proofreading and how to optimize exposure on Internet search engines.

Web site tips will round out our session. Michael Gazzano, of Perkolate, will explain pros and cons of do-it-yourself Web sites compared to hiring an affordable company.

Our half-day seminar is packed with valuable information, so save your spot! The pre-registration fee is \$25 for SCBWI members, \$30 for non-members. (Pre-registration must be paid in advance of the event date.) The fee at the door is \$30 for SCBWI members and \$35 for non-members.

For more information, contact Ann Kimbrough (775-269-1715, annkimbrough@cox.net) or visit www.nevadascbwi.org.

—Ann Kimbrough,
Las Vegas Coordinator,
Southern Nevada SCBWI

From your Regional Advisors (cont'd)

Greetings, SCBWI friends and family! Ellen and I just got back from the SCBWI conference in New York City, and it was fun and fabulous. But the undercurrent is that times have changed. Ellen rightfully points out to ignore the “dark cloud and be the helium,” but some background and thoughts as the markets for our books change may be helpful too. Booksellers are struggling to sell books, and publishers aren’t getting the orders they did in July or August. The word at the SCBWI conference seemed to be that publishers still have to acquire and produce books—that’s what they do. But this year they may take fewer risks and look to established authors with known track records. They are all looking for bestsellers (they are always doing *that*), and publishers will simply be choosing fewer, better books.

What does that mean to an author or illustrator trying to break in? Do your homework. Polish your work until it’s your very best. If this isn’t a great time to sell, it *is* a good time to learn. Take classes, join a critique group, go to conferences. Commit to your career, not to one story. While your first project is making the rounds, write a second one. Get your plans and projects in order so when things turn around—and they will—and publishers are scrambling to fill expanding lists, you’ll have projects to send them.

We are fast approaching three Nevada events that could be very helpful for you. Check out the Web site, www.nevadascbwi.org, for details and registration.

*If this isn’t a great time to sell,
it is a good time to learn.*

First, Las Vegas is holding a half-day workshop on March 14, showcasing talented local speakers and at a very reasonable price. Thanks to all of you in Las Vegas who are making this happen.

In the north, we have two events planned. On March 21, we will hold a Nuts and Bolts Day, which features local speakers who will share the basics of writing and illustrating for children—genres, how to make a submission, creating illustration dummies, writing cover and query letters, and some background on how to best use SCBWI. This is a good workshop for anyone new, and anyone who just needs a tune up on submissions and markets.

Our spring conference, Where the Wild Things Are, will take place April 24-26 in Virginia City. We have an all-star line up, and people are already signing up from Utah, Illinois, Colorado, and Arizona. We have an editor, an art director, and an agent attending, as well and children’s writing icon Jane Yolen and her son Adam Stempel, award-winning illustrator/author Yuyi Morales, our own YA phenom Ellen Hopkins, and an amazing author and RA from Illinois, Esther Hershenhorn, as well as many more talented authors on our faculty.

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Don't wait to sign up. Space in Sunday's intensive tracks is limited, especially for novelists, and hotels in Virginia City that weekend are at a premium. We have some rooms set aside until April 1, and after that, we will try to arrange a block of rooms for our participants in Carson City. If you want to come, plan NOW. See the Web site for information, registration, and details: www.nevadascbwi.org. You can also find all the registration forms at the end of this newsletter.

This may also be a good time to look for an agent if you've decided you want to work with one. Some editors are moving to that side of the business, and they will be looking for clients. Keep an eye out for new agencies and new hires. Agents have to have clients, and one of them might be you. With the tighter market, an agent may be more important than before. *But do your homework about agents and agencies.* There are scam agencies out there, the same way there are vanity publishers who will print your work, but only for a hefty fee. And another caution—agents can be as tough or tougher to interest in your work than editors are. Send them only your best work, and don't submit to an agent thinking, "She'll help me polish this and send it on." Yes, some agents do that, but they usually do it with something you think is already perfect. If you send something that still "needs a little work," you'll probably get it back in your mailbox.

Last, remember why you wanted to write or illustrate for children to begin with. You did it for the kids, right? You did it because you had a story to tell or art to share. That hasn't changed. Children are still growing up, still asking for books, and now more than ever, they need great stories, hopeful role models, and honest portrayals of their world. Be patient. Think smart. Work hard. Surprising things may happen.

—*Suzanne Morgan Williams*
Regional Co-advisor, Nevada SCBWI

In Memoriam: Lee Mason

Lee Mason, a longtime Nevada SCBWI member, passed away January 25, 2009. His family says his passing was quiet and peaceful. We could count on Lee for a good story, maybe a good-natured argument, and insightful critiques of whatever our writers were sharing.

Our condolences go to his family.



Mark your calendar!

Don't miss these
Nevada SCBWI events:

Las Vegas

Half-day workshop,
Publish or Perish*
March 14, 2009
8:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
College of
Southern Nevada

Reno

Mini-workshop, **Nuts
& Bolts of Writing
and Illustrating for
Children***
March 21, 2009
9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.
Holy Cross Lutheran
Church, Reno

Virginia City

Nevada SCBWI
Spring Conference,
**Where the Wild
Things Are***
April 24-29, 2009
Virginia City, Nevada

*Registration is required

**For details and
registration forms,
see the end of this
newsletter, or go to**

www.NevadaSCBWI.org.

A Picture Is Worth 0 to 50 Words

by Cynthia J. Kremsner

Writing a thousand words to describe one picture . . . Hmm . . . that *may* be a bit of a tedious challenge. But even more difficult is the task of writing an engaging story with clearly defined characters, an escalating conflict that comes to a crescendo, and then tying it up in a bow with the main character triumphing over his or her own issue in 1,000 words or less. With a limit of 32 pages, the illustrator is challenged to tell a visual story. It stands to reason that there are parameters the writer also has to adhere to. Character descriptions, scene descriptions, and even some actions can be portrayed through the text, but much, if not all, can be left to the illustrator for interpretation. Picture books are a duet of words and illustrations that sing together.

As a picture-book writer who is also an artist, I've always thought in pictures when writing my stories, preparing two to four illustration samples and sending them off on their journey down the submission trail. However, it wasn't until I prepared an entire picture-book dummy that I fully understood the harmonious duet performed between text and illustrations. Descriptions of action, for example, are needed when initially writing the story. When the illustrator begins to paint a virtual movie of those beloved words, some of them have to go. As an example, my recent manuscript had a few lines I delighted in writing:

Harley made his grand entrance charging full speed into the tent toward the concession stand. His long floppy ears and his short stumpy legs tangled into a torrential tizzy. Soda and cotton candy flew, bags of peanuts and popcorn catapulted.

Once the illustrations were completed, the words seemed redundant and I had to let some of them go:

Harley made his grand entrance charging full speed into the tent toward the concession stand. **TRIP! KATHUNK! CRASH! FLING! KAZING! SPLASH!**

The illustrations told the rest of the story. Nineteen words said goodbye.

"Just the facts, Jack" can come across as flat and dry. As a picture-book writer, it is important to let the few words you write sing, keeping in mind your partner in the duet of picture storytelling and giving the artist the opportunity to take the lead on occasion.

Cynthia Kremsner is a writer and illustrator who has been active in Nevada SCBWI for several years. She will be a speaker at the mini-workshop, Nuts & Bolts of Writing and Illustrating for Children, March 21 in Reno, where she will share insights for preparing both manuscripts and illustrations. For more information and to register for the workshop, visit www.nevadascbwi.org.



Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.

—Thomas Jefferson

The secret of success in life is to be ready for opportunity when it comes.

—Earl of Beaconsfield



When I'm creating illustrations, I always make sure the area I'm working in is clean. It's a great way to start fresh and save money, so you're not buying new things that you already have.

—Naomi Canale

Life as an Illustrator

by Naomi Canale

My life as an illustrator started with a little sketch of a fish and an idea that said, "Children's books should be fun and easy to publish!" Well, at least I was right about the fun part.

My fish sketch turned into an idea for a book, so I wrote and illustrated it. Then I thought it would be a good idea to call some publishing companies and talk with some editors. I didn't know that this is not the best way to approach the publishing world. I contacted the vice president of Random House Children's Books, and she was fortunately very nice! She gave me a lot of advice and even asked me to send her some of my work. Luck definitely dealt me good cards that day. I received a call back after I sent her some of my work, and she told me she wanted to keep me in mind as an illustrator.

After reading about what to truly do in this business, I realized how lucky I was to be considered by this editor. I am self-taught, so the thought that she even considered me really inspired me! I took that spark and ran. Although I haven't been published yet and it's been four years since that happened, I refuse to give up. So I put together a portfolio of my best illustrations for children and continued to create various works of art for shows and art competitions. When I joined the SCBWI, I read that a good step toward getting published as a children's writer and illustrator is to have a Web site. I put an ad on craigslist and picked an amazing Web designer from Chicago. She put it all together, and all I had to do was pick a domain name at Godaddy.com and register my domain for hosting at Hostgator.com.

Having a Web site is very beneficial and shows publishers how serious you are about the business. Any time I update my portfolio online, I send out a postcard. Browsing through a current issue of *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market* is a great way to put your postcard into the best hands. Any time I've sent out postcards, the stats on my Web site go crazy. If you're not asked to do a project right away, you're still getting your name out there and putting possibilities out there for the near future. Patience is *key* in this business! There are so many fantastic writers and illustrators out there. You may not get work right away, so remember that it takes time. Enter small competitions in the meantime, or do some nonprofit work.

I always look for ways to keep growing as an illustrator. An illustrator should never get out of practice. Try to create something new once a week, even if it's just a sketch. Sometimes, with the hustle and bustle of life, it's hard to find the time to create works of art, especially if you're not getting paid for it. But stick with it because you love it, and keep your eyes on the ball. Just keep learning about the business and take all the advice you can to improve your work.

Naomi Canale is a writer and illustrator and a member of Nevada SCBWI. Visit her Web site at www.naomicanale.com.

All I Need to Know about Submissions, I Learned from *American Idol*

by Jenny MacKay

I admit it. I'm a huge fan of *American Idol*. And every new season, as the audition floor gets stormed with the hopeful and the hapless, I am reminded of something much closer to home—submitting a manuscript for a publisher's consideration.

I realize they are not the same thing. Thankfully, rejection at the hands of an editor lacks the humiliating sting of a Simon Cowell insult on national TV. Still, there *are* certain similarities in the prospect of elbowing for space in a throng of wishful thinkers, certain rules that make it possible to predict from the get-go many of those who won't get a second chance.

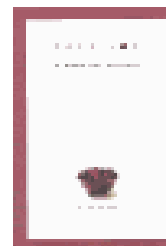
Whether you're a fan of the show or not, here are some lessons to be learned from *American Idol* and the auditioners whose fate is sealed nearly from the moment they step before the judges.

1. Lay off the pink (and the purple, red, stripes, flowers, and everything fluorescent). Many an *Idol* reject hits the tryout floor determined to force "memorable" down the throats of the judges, thinking that a painful visual assault is the one key to standing out. Some writers, too, fall victim to this way of thinking. But color coding your chapter-book segments using all six hues of the glow-in-the-dark combo paper pack you purchased at Costco will not win your submission a second reading. Deviations from white paper and a modest, black font spell disaster.

2. Ditch the gimmicks. A cow costume seems to rear its ugly udder every *Idol* season, though memory fails to recall a successful audition from any contestant thus obnoxiously clad. Gimmicks suggest inexperience, unprofessionalism, and a suspicion on the part of the writer that his or her manuscript is not good enough to be memorable on its own. Resist the temptation to sneak in stickers, confetti, a squirt of perfume, a picture of you and your French poodle dressed in matching costumes last Halloween (however cute), or anything else that is not germane to the publisher's submission requirements.

3. Cling to humility. Confidence is a trait the *American Idol* judges are constantly seeking. But it's *over*confidence that makes us squirm time and again—the ear-piercing shriek of a vocal nightmare who just seconds earlier shamelessly compared herself to Celine Deon, "only better." If you're a writer submitting your work to publishers, do not claim you are the next Maurice Sendak or that your envelope shelters the new Harry Potter. These are impossible shoes to fill. You're just tempting an editor to prove you wrong, laughing all the way to the rejection pile.

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Book Review

Jane Yolen, *Take Joy: A Book for Writers*. Waukesha, WI: Kalmbach Publishing, 2003.

"I write with a regularity that an octogenarian would envy," says Jane Yolen in this book that reads more like an intimate conversation between old friends than another advice tome for writers—although advice is exactly what Yolen imparts, and plenty of it.

Yolen's writing regularity is evidenced by the published titles she can list after her name—more than 200 of them, including Caldecott Medal and Golden Kite Award winners. In this book, with off-the cuff humor and charming honesty, she demystifies writing for young minds as only an author this accomplished can.

Jane Yolen will be at Nevada SCBWI's spring conference in Virginia City on April 25. Register now at www.nevadascbwi.org to see her speak in person.



What's in Store This Spring

Nevada SCBWI's spring conference, "Where the Wild Things Are," promises to be a great weekend. The star-studded conference faculty includes:

- **Jamie Weiss Chilton**, agent, Andrea Brown Literary Agency
- **Terri Farley**, author
- **Esther Hershenhorn**, author
- **Ellen Hopkins**, author
- **Susan Hart Lindquist**, author
- **Laurent Linn**, art director, Simon & Schuster
- **Yuyi Morales**, author/illustrator
- **Alisha Niehaus**, editor, Penguin
- **Lynda Sandoval**, author
- **Jane Yolen**, author

Virginia City, Nevada
April 24-26, 2009

Conferences fill quickly, so register early. Download the registration form at www.scbwinevada.org, or find it at the end of this newsletter.

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4. Start strong, and know when to shut up. An *American Idol* tryout is a very brief moment of fame. The judges need just a snippet to know who will go on. Most editors likewise make snap judgments with practiced eyes, and if they haven't been impressed in the first couple of pages, it's not likely to happen. Don't save the good stuff for the last page. The editor may never get to it. Make sure your submission grabs the editor's attention fast—within the precious few moments he or she has allotted to it.

5. Know the kind of artist you are. *Idol* fans hear all the time that it's all about song choice. This is perhaps the best advice I have gleaned from the show, because just as singers must decide who they are (and can be) as singers, writers must decide who they are as writers. Write what you love, and your passion and skill will shine in your submission—maybe strong enough to keep that editor's attention into round two.

Jenny MacKay is a freelance editor and the author of six nonfiction children's books. She will be speaking on manuscript editing at the upcoming Nevada SCBWI writers' conference, Nuts and Bolts of Children's Writing, on March 21 in Reno. For more information and to register for the workshop, visit www.nevadascbwi.org.

Good News!

Linda Kay Hardie gave a book appearance on December 4, 2008, at Minden Elementary School. She also spoke and sold books at Barnes & Noble in Reno on December 9 to benefit Greenbrae Elementary School. In October, Linda presented a paper on children's books to the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association's academic conference, held in Reno.

Ellen Hopkins is guest editing a collection of essays about her YA novels *CRANK* and *GLASS*. The collection contains submissions from eight YA authors, a drug court judge, a drug counselor, and Ellen's own family, plus original poetry by Ellen. The book, *Flirtin' with the Monster*, will be out in May.

Suzanne Morgan Williams' first novel, *Bull Rider*, will be out from Margaret K. McElderry on February 24. Suzanne will be speaking at the Nevada Reading Week Conference February 20–21 and will have a book signing March 14th, 11AM at Sundance Bookstore in Reno.

Jenny MacKay's latest YA nonfiction book, *Criminal Profiling*, was released in December from Lucent Books.



Nevada Region of
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators
Presents

"Where the Wild Things Are"
Conference and Community Event

April 24, 25 & 26, 2009
Virginia City, Nevada

REGISTRATION FORM

Name: _____ Phone: _____
 Address: _____ E-Mail: _____

 _____ Amount Included: \$ _____
 (See Below)

Member SCBWI?: Yes - No -

Program Selections

- Attending Friday Night Reception *(Optional for any Conference Participants)*
- Saturday All Day Conference
 - For Illustrators, I wish to attend Saturday's **Illustrator's Workshop** *(Limit 15)*
- Sunday's Intensive Workshops *(Optional)*
 - Indicate Your Workshop Track: *(Choose One - Limit 20 per Track)*
 - Chapter Book and Picture Book Writers/Illustrators Track
 - Novelists Track
 - Marketing & Media Track

Optional Items You May Be Submitting

These may be submitted with your Registration or submitted by the March 20, 2009 Deadline. Items not included with your Registration should also be mailed to the P.O. Box shown below.

- Manuscript for Individual Paid Critique
- Story for consideration in the **Fourth Ward School** Reading – Saturday Night
- First Page** Submission – FOR SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS ONLY

Conference Fees

<u>SCBWI Members</u>	<u>Non-Members</u>	
\$130.00	\$145.00	Saturday - All Day Conference <i>(Includes Friday Night Reception)</i>
\$65.00	\$65.00	Sunday – Intensive Workshops <i>(Includes Lunch)</i>
\$35.00	\$35.00	Individual Paid Critique

Enter your total Conference Fees in the **Amount Included** line above.

Mail completed Registration Form with a check for the total Conference Fees to:

Nevada SCBWI
P.O. Box 19084
Reno, Nevada 89511

Half-day Seminar:
Publish or Perish

March 14, 2009
8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

College of Southern Nevada
6375 W. Charleston Blvd.
Las Vegas, NV
Building B, Room 105

This half-day seminar will give writers all the tools they need to promote themselves and their work. For more information, contact Ann Kimbrough (annkimbrough@cox.net) or visit www.nevadascbwi.org.

REGISTRATION

Nevada SCBWI - "Publish or Perish" Seminar, March 14, 2009
College of Southern Nevada - 6375 W. Charleston Blvd. Las Vegas, NV

(Print this page, complete the form and mail to the address below.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ E-Mail: _____

SCBWI Member?: Yes- _____ No - _____

Amount Enclosed (\$25 Members/\$30 Non-Members):

(Registration at the door will cost \$30 Members/\$35 Non-Members)

Mail To:

Nevada SCBWI
P.O. Box 19084
Reno, NV 89511

Mini-workshop:

Nuts & Bolts of Writing and Illustrating for Children

March 21, 2009

**Holy Cross Lutheran Church
4895 South McCarran Blvd.
Reno, NV 89502
9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

This workshop is an introduction to children's book creation. Everyone is welcome. Bring a notebook and be ready to learn! For more information, contact Nevada SCBWI (nevadascbwi@charter.net), or visit www.nevadascbwi.org.

REGISTRATION

Nevada SCBWI - Nuts & Bolts Mini-Workshop, March 21, 2009
Holy Cross Lutheran Church (4895 South McCarran Blvd., Reno, NV)
(Print this page, complete the form and mail to the address below.)

Name: _____

Address:

Telephone: _____ E-Mail: _____

SCBWI Member?: Yes- _____ No - _____

Amount Enclosed (\$35 Members/\$40 Non-Members):

(Registration at the door will cost \$40 Members/\$45 Non-Members)

Mail To:

**Nevada SCBWI
P.O. Box 19084
Reno, NV 89511**