Children's Book Insider

January 2018

THIS MONTH: Above the Slushpile Code for Top Literary Agency!

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This issue's contributors

Hilari Bell has written five fantasy series for middle grade and young adult readers, and five stand-alone novels (three of which as science fiction). She's currently working on a novel that mixes steam punk with fantasy. Visit her website at **http://hilaribell.com**.

Sharon Olivia Blumberg is a recently retired school teacher, having taught Spanish and English for over 20 years. In addition, she is a writer and voiceover artist. She is a contributing author to *My First Year in the Classroom*, edited and compiled by Stephen D. Rogers, *Kids Imagination Train*, *Guardian Angel Ezine for Kids*, *Foster Focus*, and *Voya Magazine*. Visit her website at: **http://www.voiceofsharonolivia.com**

Lynne Marie is the author of *Hedgehog Goes to Kindergarten* and *Hedgehog's 100th Day of School* (Scholastic), and numerous stories and articles in magazines, including *Highlights for Children, High Five, Baby Bug, Family Fun, Hopscotch, Turtle, Spider* and *Writer's Digest*. Her website is **http://www.LiterallyLynneMarie.com**

Jane McBride is the author of 36 novels, numerous short stories and articles including pieces in 16 Chicken Soup for the Soul anthologies, and the CBI Managing Editor. Follow her writing blog at **http://www.janemchoate.blogspot.com**

PJ McIlvaine is a published writer/produced screenwriter/kid lit author/blogger/journalist. In a former life she was a great baker of Europe. PJ is a co-host **#PBPitch**, the premiere Twitter pitch party for picture book writers and illustrators.

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mail@CBIClubhouse.com
http://www.writeforkids.org

Publisher: Laura Backes
Layout: Shellie Dougherty
Editor/Agent Spotlight Editor: Lynne Marie
Genre Spotlight: Jean Diagneau
Featured Interviews: PJ McIlvaine
Chief Operations Officer: Jon Bard

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At Presstime:

Emerging Artist Award Open to Submissions

The Little, Brown Emerging Artist Award is open to unpublished, unagented author/illustrators whose work reflects the rich cultural experiences of this country—whether they manifest in character, theme, setting, plot, or are derived simply from the artist's own experience of identity. The award will be given to the entrant who submits the most accomplished picture book submission in the form of a mock-up. One prize is available and consists of American Express® gift cards totaling $1,500, round trip travel to New York City, and the honor of a one-day mentorship with a Little, Brown Books for Young Readers' professional children's book design and editorial team and Artist Mentor Grace Lin. The winner of the Little, Brown Emerging Artist Award will also have an opportunity for his or her submission to be reviewed by the Little, Brown Books for Young Readers editorial team for possible future publication.

Submissions for the Award must consist of: a mock-up of a children's picture book that incorporates the Award's Mission Statement; is no more than 32-pages of text (no more than 1200 words), sketches, and at least 6 pages of finished art; and is written in English and appropriate for children up to 8 years of age. It must also include a portfolio of at least 6 additional pieces of sample art that is representative of your work (unrelated to the picture book mock-up). Full rules, submission details and a sample mock-up template can be found at **https://lbartistaward.com/rules**

The winner will be chosen by July 15, 2018. **All entries for the Award are sent electronically (see submissions form at http://lbartistaward.com/submit) and must be received between January 15, 2018 and May 15, 2018.**

Fiction Contest for Unpublished MG and YA Books

Leapfrog Press, a small, independent publisher focused on discovering new talent and books that are overlooked by the big houses, is accepting submissions for its 2018 Leapfrog Fiction Contest. Adult, young adult (YA) and middle grade (MG) novels, novellas, and short story collections are accepted. Minimum word count: 22,000. Individual stories in a collection may have been previously published in journals. Books that have been self-published will be considered "unpublished" if fewer than about 200 copies were printed. Looking for literary fiction and mainstream fiction. Genre fiction is accepted (especially science fiction), but the story is more important than the genre.

All manuscripts will be reviewed by at least two Leapfrog editors, and those that go to the second round of judging may be read by editors at other small presses as well.

The Award consists of a First Prize publication contract offer from Leapfrog Press, with an advance payment, and one or two critiques of the manuscript from contest judges, permanent listing on the Leapfrog Press contest page as a contest finalist, along with short author bio and description of the book. A Finalist Prize consists of $150 and one or two critiques of the manuscript from contest judges, permanent listing on the Leapfrog Press contest page as a contest finalist, along with short author bio and description of the book. One Semi-Finalist receives their choice of a free Leapfrog book and permanent listing on the website. An Honorable Mention gets listing on the Leapfrog Press website.

Entrants can submit as many manuscripts as they'd like. Each is submitted separately through Submittable at **https://leapfrogpress.submittable.com/submit** and requires a $33 entry fee (the Contest link will be on Submittable on January 15, 2018). Entrants may submit their manuscripts to other contests as well as agents and editors while under consideration for the Award. Manuscripts must be received between January 15, 2018 and May 1, 2018. For more information, go to **http://www.leapfrogpress.com/contest.htm**

Highlights Magazine Accepting Submissions

Highlights is a general-interest magazine for children ages 6-12. Writers are encouraged to read several recent copies of *Highlights* before submitting work. Writers can also visit **http://www.HighlightsKids.com** to see examples of previously published content. *Highlights* pays on acceptance, and buys all rights. Does not consider previously published material.

Fiction should have an engaging plot, strong characterization, a specific setting, and lively language. Stories for beginning readers should have fewer than 475 words and should not seem babyish to older readers. Stories for independent readers should have fewer than 750 words and should be appealing to younger readers if read aloud. Rebus stories should have fewer than 100 words and feature a variety of familiar words that can easily be shown as pictures. Accepts all genres appropriate for young readers (no romance, crime, or violence). Payment: $175 and up.

Nonfiction can include science, arts, sports, how-to's, world cultures, history, What a Pro Knows articles, and Gallant Kids articles. Articles for beginning readers should have fewer than 400 words. Articles for independent readers should have fewer than 750 words. Articles with a tight focus are most successful. Prefers research based on firsthand experience, consultation with experts, or primary sources. Include references and correspondence with experts with submission. Articles about cultural traditions and ways of life should reflect a deep understanding of the subject. Prefers biographies that are rich in quotes and anecdotes and that place the subject in a historical or cultural context. Any included digital images should be no less than 300 dpi. Payment: $175 and up.

Crafts can include gifts, toys, games, and decorations. They should appeal to boys and girls. Crafts should have concise, numbered directions, up to 5 steps. Materials should be inexpensive and easy to obtain. Crafts that celebrate holidays, cultures, or religious traditions are welcome. Submit step-by-step photos of a well-made sample of the craft. Payment: $40 and up.

Puzzles should not require readers to write in the magazine (no crosswords or word searches). Current needs include math puzzles, code activities, and visual puzzles. Puzzle instructions should be concise, but playful themes and language are welcome. For visual puzzles, include puzzle instructions and art suggestions. Payment: $40 and up.

Cartoons should be fresh, original, and geared to kids. They can be single-panel or multiple-panel, black-and-white or full-color, with or without a caption, and with either human or animal characters. Payment: $40 and up for black-and-white, $50 and up for full-color.

All material is submitted through Submittable at **https://highlights.submittable.com/submit**. Click on *Highlights Magazine*.

Publisher Accepting Picture Book/Middle Grade Submissions

Pelican Publishing Company enjoys national recognition as an independent company with a backlist of over 2,500 titles and 40-50 new titles produced yearly. As a general trade publisher, Pelican is presently the largest independent trade book publisher in the South. In their children's line, Publishes picture book and middle grade fiction and nonfiction. Some middle grade nonfiction is in the illustrated, 32-page format with up to about 1100 words of text (example: *Gordon Parks: No Excuses* by Ann Parr, photographs by Gordon Parks. Biography of African-American photographer for ages 8-11.) Longer middle grade fiction and nonfiction (with chapters) should be a minimum of 25,000 words. See the entire catalog at **http://pelicanpub.com**

Looking for themes of history (especially Louisiana and the South), multicultural, science, regional and holidays in fiction and nonfiction. Does not want any general Christmas stories, talking animal stories, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, or general “day at school” or “accept yourself” stories. Material should have a specific, unique focus and timeless themes. For brief books for ages 5-8, Pelican Publishing Company requires a query letter describing the project briefly and concisely, a separate list of the author’s publishing credits, a printout of the full manuscript, and a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) sufficient for the return of the manuscript or at least a reply. If the manuscript’s return is not needed, please so state in the query letter. For longer books, send the above material but include an outline and 1-2 chapters instead of the full manuscript. Mail to Children's Submissions Editor, Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster Street, Gretna, LA 70053.

Doghouse on Malibu Beach:

What you should, and shouldn't, put in the opening paragraphs of your manuscript

by Hilari Bell

At a writers' conference I attended, an editor compared the first few pages of a manuscript to Malibu beachfront property, some of the most expensive land there is. "Every word of those first few pages counts," she said. "Just like land that sells by the square inch. You don't want to put your doghouse there!"

So what do you want on those expensive pages? What constitutes a mansion with gleaming windows and a sweep of gardens?

The first few pages of your story—sometimes the first few paragraphs—is all the time you have to hook an editor, or a reader, into the rest of your book. You absolutely have to put your best into those few lines. In fact, in just the first few pages, preferably in the first few paragraphs, you have to:

- Place a hook.
- Introduce the protagonist.
- Introduce the protagonist's main story problem.
- Establish the story's setting and genre.
- Establish the tone of the story.

And finally you have to do a sufficiently good job of entertaining the reader that he wants to go on and read the next paragraph or page.

No wonder writers hate beginnings. My record for changing beginnings belongs to my novel *A Matter of Profit*, which had four completely different first chapters—and I'm still not crazy about the one that was finally published. Not every really good beginning manages to cram all five things into the first paragraph, but most good beginnings manage most of those things.

One of my favorites is the beginning of the movie *Cat Ballou*, which starts out with a couple of minstrels singing: *It's a hanging day in Wolf City Wyoming, Wolf City Wyoming, 1894. They're going to drop Cat Ballou through the gallows floor.* Hook, place and time, protagonist, problem, tone, genre—in two sentences.

Another of my favorites comes from Melissa Michaels' novel *Cold Iron*:

> *My first sight of Jorandel did nothing to improve my opinion of the kind of elves who abandon Faerie for show business.*

This is not only a wonderful first line, but by the end of the first paragraph, all the rest of it is there:

> *He was drunk or stoned, I never knew which, and vomiting in the gutter outside one of the most exclusive hotels in San Francisco. Passersby pretended he was invisible. I wished he were. Or I were. I'd been on the job for less than an hour, and already I knew it had been a mistake to take it.*

I once met with a group of writers (SCBWI Sunday Schmooze) to compare good and bad novel openings. One writer had just dropped into the Schmooze for the first time and hadn't brought any examples with him, but he had just purchased a memoir in the bookstore where we were meeting—without reading the beginning. We thought it would be fun to hit the first line cold and see whether the memoir author had done a good job or blown it. So he opened *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls and read; *I was sitting in a taxi, wondering if I was a bit overdressed for the evening ahead, when I saw my mother rooting through a dumpster.* We gave the opening an ovation that made the rest of the people in the bookstore stare at us.

I think single thing that it's most important to get right in your beginning is tone. Surprising, isn't it? But if you pin them down, most agents and editors will tell you that what they're really looking for in a new novel manuscript is a fresh, distinctive voice. And if you look at the examples above, you'll notice that there's a distinctive, and very appealing voice talking to you in every one of them.

Now I want to demonstrate some things not to do. These are the beginnings that actually belong in the doghouse.

The most common error is to start by setting the scene. Sometimes, if your command of language is really good, and you're writing an adult book, and especially if it's a

Doghouse on Malibu Beach continued

literary novel, not genre fiction, you might be able to get away with a few paragraphs of lyrical evocative description. Maybe. But many beginning writers set the scene in excruciating detail, for several pages, before they get down to mundane things like character and conflict. 98% of the time, your reader doesn't give a damn if autumn leaves are wafting along on the crisp fall breeze. And the part of scene setting that's such a common bad-opening mistake that it's almost a cliché in its own right, is to begin with the weather report. You do need to set the scene somewhere in the first few paragraphs, so your characters aren't acting against a blue screen backdrop. But make your descriptions evocative, fresh, and *brief*. Particularly in the first few pages.

You don't *have to* introduce the main story problem in the first few paragraphs, though it's good if you can. But your main character does need to encounter the main story problem by the end of the first chapter at the latest. The story doesn't start until the main story problem is introduced. And it ends when the main story problem is resolved. Having more than one chapter before your story starts is usually a bad idea—and so is having more than one brief chapter after the climax is over.

The most common reason for people to have one (or more) chapters before the story problem is introduced is that they begin with backstory. Look at: *Mary Sue lived in a house in the Ozarks, with five brothers, twenty chickens and a pig. She'd always regretted that looking after her brothers meant that she couldn't finish high school.* Compare that to: *"Bobby, I swear if you don't get that pig out of the TV room this minute I'm going back to high school!"*

Beginning writers tend to think that the reader has to know everything about their characters and the situation up front, but the truth is that until we've become invested in Mary Sue by seeing her in action, we don't care about her history.

Another other common mistake that occurs when writers are told not to put backstory in the first chapter, is that they put Mary Sue in one interesting scene, and then do a big dump of backstory in chapter two. In general, the best way to handle backstory is to chop it into very small bits and sprinkle it through chapters three through about seven, refusing to tell readers anything about the character's history if they don't need to know it. And a lot of the time, they don't.

The opposite of the backstory error, though not so common, is too start in the middle of too much action. *Shots whizzed past my head. I rolled out from behind the dumpster and fired half a clip into my would-be assassin.* The thing that's wrong with this is the same thing that's wrong with giving us the backstory too soon—we're not invested in this character enough to care whether he gets shot or not.

Dialogue is frequently a good beginning, *if* it displays conflict and character right up front. Dialogue without conflict is as bad as eternally setting the scene: *"Mom, can I go to the beach with my best friend Judy?" "Sure honey, just be back by dark." "That's no problem, Judy's dad is driving us." "Oh, well that's fine then. Have a great time."* Yes, characters have been introduced, but…are we yawning yet? Conflict, or at least the intimation of conflict to come, is what fires every part of a good novel, and particularly beginnings.

Starting in the viewpoint of someone besides the main character in order to introduce them is another error. I've heard a number of authors, at writers' conference readings, explain to the listening editor or agent, *"Well, no you'll never see X again. I'm just using her to introduce Y, who the story is really about."* When you start a novel in one character's viewpoint, you're making a promise to the reader that this is either the main character, or in multiple viewpoint novels one of the primary characters. If you break this promise, the reader will stop trusting you.

Introducing too many characters in the first few pages is yet another common problem:

"Bobby, I swear if you don't get that pig out of the TV room this minute I'm going back to high school!"
"Ah, come on Mary Sue, don't be like that," Bobby whined.
"Yeah," Charlie chimed in. "Who's going to clean the Cheeto crumbs off the floor if we kick Porky out?"
"That's right," said Aelfred. "Porky has as much right to be in this room as you do. Animals have rights too."
"Who'd want to go back to dumb old school." Aelfred's girlfriend Charmaine yawned.
Porky, thank goodness, said nothing.

A general rule of thumb is that two names on the first page is plenty, and more than three (*Hama, Kavi, Soraya…*) is too much.

Very few agents or editors will even read beyond the first page, first five pages tops, if your opening doesn't grab their attention. Better yet, blow them away. So pay lots of attention to what you're building on your beachfront—and keep the doghouse in the back where it belongs.

For more on writing great opening scenes, check out this article by Peter Selgin, "The Deadliest First Page Sin—Plus a Critique of Two Openings" at http://bit.ly/deadliestsin

From Mother To Daughter :

Reclaiming the Past To Discover the Present, An Author's Personal Journey

interview by PJ McIlvaine

In 1990, Fern Schumer Chapman was already an accomplished reporter and journalist, but a fateful trip to Germany with her mother Edith, a Holocaust escapee, changed her life and writing perspective. The author of several critically acclaimed nonfiction books, Chapman was named "Illinois Author of the Year" in 2004, and was a featured author on two Oprah Winfrey shows. Her latest work, *Stumbling on History* (Kar-Ben Publishing), a poignant and powerful journey of reclamation and the healing effects of art, was a Junior Library Guild selection in August 2017. Chapman's work has appeared in the Chicago Tribune, Forbes, The Washington Post and other national publications, and has taught college level magazine writing and other seminars. Her memoir, *Motherland*, was a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection and a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. Chapman makes her home in Chicago, Illinois.

PJ McIlvaine: Did you always aspire to be a writer?

Fern Schumer Chapman: I always loved writing. I started out as a journalist and, eventually, I applied those reporting skills to my own family story, which was a mystery to me. I have revealed my findings in a memoir, a historical novel, and several narrative non-fiction works for adults and young adults.

My mother never spoke of her past. It seemed to me she had divorced herself from her own history. As far as I knew, she had no mother, no father, no cousins, no childhood friends. She had no stories and no religious traditions. Consequently, I knew nothing of her history, her family and her childhood. Her past was like a busy intersection that I was to avoid at all costs. This created a wedge in our relationship because I felt she was withholding important personal information from me and she felt she was protecting me from her painful history.

My mother came from a small German town of 2,000 people and only two Jewish families. Her family had lived in that town since 1721. When she was only 12 years old, my grandparents sensed the growing anti-Semitism in Germany and sent my mother to this country all by herself. Eventually, her parents were killed in concentration camps. My mother coped with her losses by cutting herself off from her early life and her childhood and numbing her emotional life.

Finally, for a variety of reasons, my mother decided she wanted to return to her town in 1990, and I went with her on the trip. Everyone in the town remembered her and, when we returned, each resident was confronted with his or her sense of responsibility for the past. In addition, my mother began to open up about her childhood and I began to understand her.

As I learned about my mother's story, I recognized that I had a unique window on experiences that wouldn't be recorded unless I wrote them down. That's when I switched to writing books. *Motherland* captures our trips, the German legacy of the Holocaust, and the transformation in my relationship with my mother.

In addition, I had a difficult childhood, but writing saved me. I discovered that capturing my emotional life on the page could be therapeutic. As Anne Frank wrote in her diary in April 1944, "I can shake off everything if I write. My sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn."

PJ: Did your family encourage you?

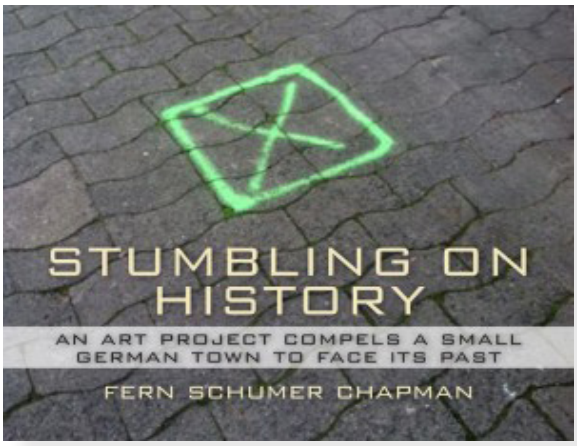
FSC: For years, I felt angry that my mother wouldn't share her stories. I felt deprived of my personal history. But once I learned about my mother's childhood immigration experiences and her profound losses, I developed a greater sense of empathy for her. Now, I appreciate my mother and love her more deeply. I have a much better understanding of why she struggled with the role of mother.

At first, my mother didn't believe that her story was worthy of telling. But she encouraged me by answering all of my questions as best she could. My mother knew little about the program that brought her to America be-

cause she was so young when she came to this country. But she was eager to know what I learned. It helped her understand the mosaic of her life.

In my research, I found out about the small American rescue operation organized by Lutherans, Quakers and Jewish organizations that brought ten children at a time from Europe to America on cruise ships. Between 1934 and 1944, this organization brought over about 100 children a year, saving about a thousand children. My mother was one of what is now known as the "One Thousand Children."

Since the American program that saved my mother's life was so small and it received little publicity, there wasn't much information about it. In fact, only one book provided original source material — letters, diary entries, and pictures of the One Thousand Children. I relied heavily on that book for details about the children's' immigrant experiences to write a work of historical fiction called *Is It Night or Day?*. Every story and anecdote in the book came from the experiences of the One Thousand Children.



Through the prism of one girl's story, readers of *Is It Night or Day?* experience my mother's bewildered efforts to assimilate in America, her struggle against constant feelings of abandonment and isolation, and the daunting work necessary to rebuild a life in the face of unspeakable loss — challenges for every child immigrant.

My mother's story is universal and it raises important issues of identity, prejudice, and assimilation. It sheds light on the story of becoming an American and I believe each of us can benefit from learning about that experience. In addition, I want readers to see how a cataclysmic event such as World War II reaches beyond its participants and continues to shape future generations. Readers of my work can see how the past defines the present.

Finally, my mother wanted me to write the book to fulfill a lifelong wish: "I hope this book is like an open letter to my old ship friend, Gerda Katz," my mother said when I began the project. "I hope Gerda reads this book and finds me. I've thought of her often, and I always wanted to see her again."

And that's exactly what happened. A class of compassionate 8th graders located and reunited Gerda and Edith 73 years after their long-ago immigration journey. The Oprah Winfrey Network did a half-hour program on this remarkable reunion and I captured the story in my book, *Like Finding My Twin: How Compassionate 8th Graders Reunited Two Holocaust Refugees*. (see below) The book is used in classrooms to inspire other students to do service learning projects.

PJ: All your books come from a very personal space, and you handle tough subjects with intelligence, dignity and grace. How easy has that been to navigate, to separate the emotional daughter (since you write about your mother, a Holocaust escapee) from the objective journalist when dealing with painful subject matter?

FSC: In telling her stories, I worried about my mother's response to my work. For decades, she had kept a lid on her early life experiences. I feared that by exposing her story, she would feel vulnerable and betrayed. But these books actually have had the opposite effect. She has embraced the opportunities the books have presented, often joining me as I give speeches. She has evolved and, by hearing her story told over and over again, I have taken the terror out of her trauma. (Interestingly, some therapies for trauma use this technique.) Now, she is far less haunted by her history and she is satisfied that her stories are recorded, and her suffering has served a larger purpose.

Personally, I learned that I can't predict outcomes and I shouldn't try. I never would have imagined that my mother would find healing from my work.

PJ: Were there any facts or history about your family that surprised you the most?

FSC: The biggest surprise was finding Gerda Katz, my mother's childhood immigration friend. For decades, my mother yearned to see her old friend, Gerda Katz. I had tried to find her, but had no luck.

In an incredible turn of events, after reading about Gerda and Edith's friendship in *Is It Night or Day?*, compassionate 8th graders reunited the two women 73 years after their shared immigration journey. What those children did for Gerda and Edith — who were now in their 80s — was immeasurable.

The first time Gerda and Edith "talked" on the phone in 2011, just a few weeks before they would meet in per-

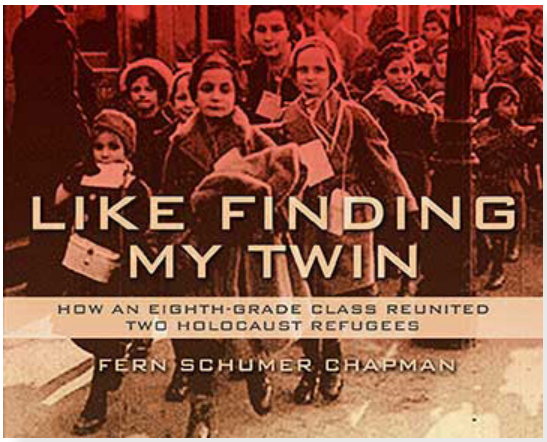
son, they said hello and then, for twenty minutes, they sobbed together. No words were necessary. Each felt the other was the only other person who understood their deep uprooting and unbearable losses.

The Nazis murdered my mother's parents and many family members. Gerda's loved ones perished too. But thankfully most of her family survived, though she was separated from them for 30 years.

During their dramatic reunion in Seattle, my mother told Gerda, "I wish we could have been in touch. I think we could have helped each other."

After the reunion, when my mother and I were flying home to Chicago, I asked her, "Why was it so important to see Gerda again?" She said, "I knew she had suffered as I have. Seeing her was like looking in the mirror. It was like finding my twin."

Gerda and Edith were historical twins.



When the two resumed their friendship six years ago, they did "help" each other. They often talked on the phone — sometimes twice a week. They never seemed to run out of things to say, and they could feel each other's moods simply by listening carefully.

Gerda had never spoken of her early traumatic childhood and her history. My mother encouraged Gerda and gave her the confidence to tell her story to her friends, children, and grandchildren. Gerda gave Edith unconditional love and understanding. As my mother said many times, "seeing Gerda was like seeing my parents again." Finally, my mother found some peace.

Before they would end their phone conversations, the two old friends had a ritual.

Edith would tell Gerda, "You are my sister."

And Gerda would whisper into the receiver, "And you are my sister."

Sadly, Gerda recently passed away, but Gerda and Edith modeled true friendship. They spoke in German and English. They giggled like schoolgirls. They shared the ups and downs of their lives. They fretted about politics and world affairs. They cried together about the weight of their shared history.

Most of all, they stepped into each other's lives and filled in the holes.

PJ: Do you have any words of advice or tips on writing about difficult topics in a way that engages today's young readers?

FSC: I love to write narratives that brings readers along on a journey and gives them an experience they wouldn't have in their own lives. I present personal stories that resonate with history and social issues. My latest book for example, *Stumbling on History: An Art Project Compels A Small German Town To Face Its Past*, raises timely questions of how do countries atone for their national crimes. Young readers love questions that require them to think critically. They also identify with the personal stories I embed in my books.

As far as tips…writing should really be called "rewriting."

When it comes to writing a novel, I love what E. L. Doctorow said: "It is like driving a car at night. You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way."

That's how I do it.

PJ: Do school visits help in that regard?

FSC: Yes, school visits give me a great opportunity to meet my readers and to discover what resonates with them. I often speak at schools with immigrant populations and many of those students are unaccompanied refugees. My mother's experiences inspire those students.

American students are fascinated with my mother's experience since many are close to the age my mother was when she came to this country. Readers imagine what it would be like to be in her shoes. They come away with more empathy for some of their classmates who are immigrants or for those who are unlike themselves. In addition, they begin to understand that their parents' experiences also define them.

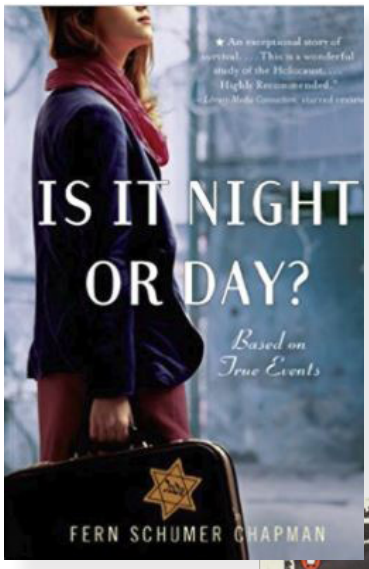
PJ: Which part do you enjoy the most, the research or the actual writing?

FSC: Hmmm…I enjoy both. I feel like a detective when

Fern Schumer Chapman continued

I do the necessary research for the books, and I employ all of the skills I learned as a journalist. But there's something deeply satisfying about telling the story in my own unique way. It's a great challenge to keep readers engaged in the story, and I can feel it in my bones when it's working.

PJ: Do you have a writing routine?



FSC: Most writing ideas strike me while I'm riding my bike. That's not surprising, given the research on how exercise enhances creative thought. For me, biking is a way to stoke my brain. I'm often asked, "Why not use a stationary bike?" Not the same. The combination of exercise and nature feeds me. Ideas also strike me while I'm driving, walking, even showering, but not with the same frequency or intensity. That's why I am the last biker off the path in December and the first one out in March…maybe even February.

My best time for writing is in the early morning. Often, when I write, I achieve "flow" — the creative state where an individual loses track of time because of the level of engagement. When that happens, I concentrate for hours. Sometimes, my husband will come into my office and ask, "Do you know how many hours you've been sitting in that chair?" It might be time for dinner. Those are my best days!

PJ: From first draft to publication, how long does it take?

FSC: My memoir, *Motherland*, took me a whole life to assemble the material and two years to write. *Is It Night or Day?* took three years from first draft to publication. I worked with one of the best editors in the business at the time, Melanie Kroupa at FSG, and she pushed me and elevated the work. I'm so glad she did; it was worth the extra time. My most recent books, *Like Finding My Twin* and *Stumbling On History*, combine photographs, historical documents, and storytelling to give the reader the experiences. Those books took about a year to complete.

PJ: What part of the publication process do you enjoy the most? The least?

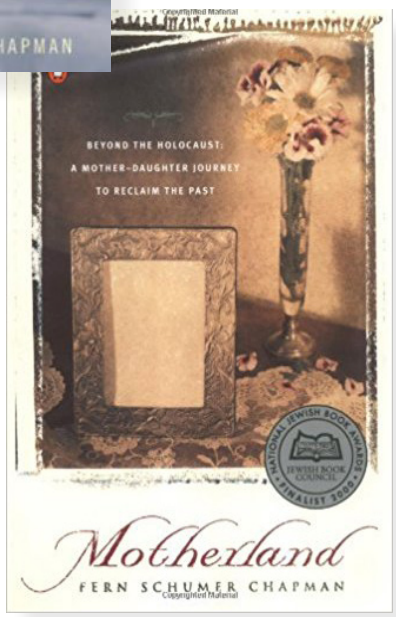
FSC: There is nothing quite as sweet as the feeling that the writing is working. But I feel frustrated when I have a vision for the work in my head and I can't seem to capture it on the page. It's a little like imagining a picture you want to paint, but not having the skills to bring it to life on the canvas.

PJ: Is there anything you wish someone would have warned you about, re-writing and publication?

FSC: Everything in publishing takes two or three times as long as you think. It requires great patience.

PJ: While you've carved a unique niche as a Jewish writer, do you see yourself branching out into other genres and/or issues?

FSC: As a Jew, I have an obligation to remember and recount. In retelling, even those parts of the past that are painful to relive, I hope to consecrate the memory of those who came before me. In addition, I often recall what Iris Chang, author of the *Rape of Nanking*, said about genocide: "First they kill, and then they kill the memory of killing." I write, in part, so the memory of those who perished and of those who survived the Holocaust endures. I hope to give voice to survivors and refugees who are not capable of telling their own stories.



However, I don't see myself as a Jewish writer. I believe I capture the immigrant experience, which is especially relevant today.

I imagine I will explore other sociological and psychological issues in another memoir one day. I have a few ideas.

PJ: What are you presently working on now?

FSC: I am just completing a book that tells the story of my mother's childhood immigration friend, Gerda Katz. Remarkably, her family escaped Nazi Germany through a little-known program in the Dominican Republic. However, an anti-Semitic bureaucrat prevented the family from leaving the country and joining Gerda in America. Consequently, Gerda did not see her parents for 30 years. *Three Stars In The Night Sky* is based upon interviews with Gerda and the family's letters during their long separation. The book should be available next year.

WRITING THROUGH THE MIDDLE WOES

by Jane McBride

I have sold 35 books. That sounds pretty good, doesn't it? However, I have written many more books, some complete and some incomplete, books that didn't sell. They remain in my computer, probably never to be published. If I had sold all the books I've written, all the books I started, I would have a far greater number to my credit.

When I'm honest with myself, I acknowledge the real reason why the completed books didn't sell and why I failed to finish the books that never saw the words "The End" typed on the last page. The reason: the middles of those books sagged. They were flabby. They were soft. In exercise parlance, their cores were weak.

Why are story middles so important? The answer is easy: they support the rest of the book. Without a strong middle, the beginning and ending, no matter how well written, will flounder, flop, and fail.

However unappealing sagging, flabby middles are on middle-aged women like myself, they are even more unappealing in books. Okay, we know the problem. How do we fix it? How do we get rid of those pudgy middles?

STEP 1: Go back to the beginning. If you discover that your story middle is wandering, you may find that you've strayed from the idea that excited you about writing the book in the first place. Are you writing about a child's first real loss in life, perhaps the death of a grandparent? Somehow, though, the story took a sharp left turn and you find that you're now writing a novel about the zombie apocalypse. (Okay, that's a bit extreme, but you get the idea.) If you've taken a different direction than that which you planned, your middle is probably mixed-up. Return to the roots of your story.

ACTION: Look at your WIP's (work-in-progress) beginning. What did you want to say in your story? What made you want to write this story? Now look at the end of the book. Did you fulfill the promise of the beginning or did your book take a sharp left turn?

STEP 2: Stay true to your theme. Just as it's easy to stray from the beginning of the story, it's also easy to stray from the theme. What is the theme of your story? What question did you want to answer; what message did you want to impart? Maybe you're writing a gritty YA novel about a sixteen-year-old boy living in east Los Angeles who must commit a crime as part of an initiation into a gang. His mother fights tooth and nail to keep him from making this step. She endangers herself to protect her son, who finally sees that his mother would do anything, even sacrifice herself, to keep him safe. He finally understands that love of family triumphs over all else. Weave this theme, that love of family is stronger than anything else, throughout the story. Don't clobber your readers over the head with it. Make it a subtle yet distinct strand, one that holds everything together. If there is a subplot, show the theme again.

ACTION: Examine your WIP. Was there a question you wanted to answer or a message you wanted to share with your readers? Did you answer it? Or did your message or theme change halfway through? This isn't always a bad thing, but you need to be aware of the change in theme and make certain that change grew from the original theme in a believable way.

STEP 3: Check in with your supporting cast. Characters don't live in a vacuum. They have parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents and cousins, friends and bullies, teachers, and a host of other people populating their lives.

ACTION: Let your secondary characters interact with your protagonist. Show the reactions of these characters as they cooperate or work against the protagonist. Do the secondary characters in your WIP serve a purpose? Or did you throw them in just for the sake of having a larger cast? Ask yourself what purpose your supporting characters serve. Is it to help reveal the nature of your protagonist or to add to the obstacles he faces? Name the purpose of each secondary character; if you can't, cut them.

Mini Blueprint continued

STEP 4: Make your characters suffer. When one problem is solved, the character should encounter another one—right away. Nothing is more boring to readers than characters who sail through life on a cloud of love and bliss and happiness. Boring your readers is the biggest sin a writer can commit. If you can't figure out what is going on in your story's middle, throw in some suffering. Of course this suffering needs to be integral to the plot. Likewise, the problems your characters face need to be appropriate to their ages. A three-year-old will face a different set of problems than a 13-year-old.

ACTION: Note if you've inflicted any suffering on your main character in your manuscript's middle. Is it appropriate to his age and to the plot? Don't be afraid to be mean to your characters. Make them work, and work hard, to solve their problems. Be brutal. Go back and determine if you've made things as difficult as possible for your protagonist to reach his goal.

STEP 5: Ratchet up the conflict. It's easy to mix up the conflict of a story with problems the characters encounter. These two elements of story writing are related, but they aren't identical. Conflict is that which prevents your protagonist from reaching his ultimate goal. In picture books and stories for young readers, the conflict is very simple. In books for older grade school readers, tweens, and young adults, the conflict exists on two levels: the external and the internal. A seventeen-year-old girl who wants to get out of the Chicago projects and make a better life for herself and her family has a goal of winning a scholarship to a good college. Her external conflict is to ace the scholarship exam even though she is dyslexic and has to study twice as hard as her peers. Her internal conflict is finding out that several students who will be taking the exam along with her have found a way to cheat. Does she tell someone in authority about this and go against the culture that has been indoctrinated in her of never being a "snitch?" Or does she simply do her best, even though the odds are rigged against her? When you layer the two kinds of conflict throughout the story's middle, it automatically is strengthened.

ACTION: Do you understand the nature of conflict? Do you know the three basic types of conflict (character against nature, character against character, and character against him/herself)? Identify your WIP's main plot (external) conflict and ask yourself if it is sufficient to carry an entire book. For older chapter books, middle grade and young adult books, you should also have an internal conflict that complicates the primary plot conflict. If your main character doesn't have to fight something (remember that man against man is the most difficult conflict), rethink your story.

Shoring up sagging middles is crucial. Following through with the analogy of getting your story middle and your body middle in shape, strengthen your core. That means doing the hard work of exercising your writing muscles just as you exercise your abs. If you do the above steps, you'll have a double six-pack!

writing blueprints

Each month, we will be incorporating Mini Blueprints into CBI, which are based on the step-by-step way of learning in our full Writing Blueprints. If you're not familiar with our longer Writing Blueprints that take you through the process of writing, marketing, or self-publishing your book, go to **www.writingblueprints.com**

SUZY EVANS

Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency

interview by Lynne Marie

Coming from background as an attorney, author, and ghostwriter for a #1 *New York Times* best-selling author with more than 25 million copies in print, AND her first children's book debuting from HarperCollins in 2018, Suzy Evans brings a lot of experience to her role as agent at the Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency.

Lynne Marie: You have an illustrious resume. Please share your path to becoming a literary agent.

Suzy Evans: First, let me say "thanks!" for having me here, and it was a long but straight — and very exciting and rewarding!— path from being an attorney and author to becoming a literary agent. In a nutshell: after law school, I earned my Ph.D. in history at UC Berkeley. When I began, I was single and footloose-and-fancy-free, and, when I finished my dissertation, I was married with four kids ages six, five, two, and nine months! Yikes is right! With so many little kids following me around, I couldn't really go on the national job market, so I practiced law for a while (family law and writing appellate briefs) and then had the great fortune to land a book deal for my "mommy memoir" *Machiavelli for Moms* with Touchstone/Simon & Schuster. After that was published, I landed a book deal with Walden Pond Press/HarperCollins for my first children's book, and, when I finished that manuscript, my schedule opened up and I reached out to Sandy Dijkstra to express my interest in becoming a literary agent. She was kind enough to meet with me, and, after reading a lot of great proposals, she brought me in as a full associate agent at the Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency and I've been cultivating a pretty diverse list ever since. In addition to being a great mentor, Sandy truly is an agent extraordinaire and I'm very grateful and fortunate to be part of the amazing SDLA team and work with some of the best — and nicest! — agents in the business. Whew! That was long!

LM: You have a Ph.D. in history from UC Berkeley and are known on Twitter as **@TheHistoryChef**. Does your interest in history relate in any way to your literary leanings? If so, how?

SE: Absolutely! I'm on the hunt for great serious nonfiction from historians looking to make a transition from the academic to trade market and "big idea" books that make a difference; food and culinary histories of all flavors and tastes; sports books with smart crossover appeal in other genres, especially history and philosophy; elegantly-written memoir blended with local culture and history (recent favorites include *Barbarian Days* and *When Breath Becomes Air*), and small, quirky books that make me smile and think about history in new and surprising ways. In the children's market: I'm looking for compelling historical fiction (I'm particularly interested in mythology, the Italian Renaissance, and Native American history) and entertaining and informative MG/YA nonfiction, especially science and history, that makes kids excited about reading and learning.

LM: Congratulations on your book deal with Walden Pond Press/HarperCollins! Please share the details of this upcoming 2018 children's book release, as well as your adult backlist written under the name Suzanne Evans.

SE: Thank you! It's a MG book entitled, *Abraham Lincoln's Lunch: A Delicious History of the United States as Told Through Tales of Food and Drink*. As the title suggests, I

use food as a lens through which to view the whole fascinating smorgasbord of American history, from the Revolutionary era (from the Sugar Act and Boston Tea Party to the Whiskey Rebellion) to present-day debates over the politics and safety of food. My adult backlist titles include *Machiavelli for Moms*, that's been hailed by Parade as a "creative, fun new approach to parenting" and *Forgotten Crimes: The Holocaust and People with Disabilities*.

LM: What inspired you to write your *Forgotten Crimes: The Holocaust and People with Disabilities* book? Do you have a particular interest in these topics?

SE: That book grew out of an appellate brief submitted in the historic $1.25 billion Swiss Banks Settlement: In Re: Holocaust Victim Assets Litigation, and I do have deep interest in these topics for many reasons, one of which is that my youngest daughter has Down syndrome, so I'm always looking for books that explore disability and diversity in all its glorious manifestations. If you have a book on these topics, I'd love to see it.

LM: How does being an author yourself inform the way you operate as an agent?

SE: Most importantly, I understand, from the author's side of the desk, how each stage of the writing process and path to publication feels, from queries, silence, rejections, and offers of representation to all aspects of the editorial process, from revisions, notes, marketing, promotion, and, at long last, publication day! In other words, I can connect with authors on a very deep and genuine level because I know, first-hand, what the process for writers is like, from the dizzying excitement and exhilaration of offers and acceptances to its disappointing lows and blows, and how to successfully navigate everything in between. Being a literary agent is the best job in the world and it allows me to help other writers achieve their own publishing dreams and get their ideas out into the world.

LM: Are you an editorial agent? If so, please explain how you might carry out this role with a new client.

SE: Yes, very editorial. Sometimes development and revisions takes only a few weeks and sometimes many months, but the end goal is always the same: to work as long and hard as necessary to ensure that a submission is as *perfect* and polished as it can be. The path to publication can be painfully slow, for good reason, so patience, persistence, positivity and professionalism pays off. How's that for alliteration!

LM: Please share some of your clients, as well as their books, so that our readers can get a feel for what has pulled you in.

SE: I'm really excited for my clients, Jennifer McGaha, whose fabulous and funny memoir *Flat Broke with Two Goats: an Appalachia Story* is coming out in January, 2018, and Nikki Meredith, whose fascinating narrative nonfiction book, *The Manson Women and Me*, which provides a chilling lens through which we gain insight into a particular kind of woman capable of a particular kind of brutality, will be published in April, 2018. I'm also stoked (to use a surfing term!) for my client, Jim Kempton, a former editor at *Surfer* magazine, whose travel cookbook *First We Surf, Then We Eat* comes out next fall and should be the "go-to" cookbook for surfers and adventure-travel lovers everywhere. As for what pulls me in: I look for what I call the trifecta: Great Concept, Great Writing, Great Platform. And bonus points for humor (if your book can make me giggle, smile, or laugh out loud, I'm in) and anything that has "MOVIE!" written all over it.

LM: Do you work with clients as they are generating new ideas? If so, how? Please give an example.

SE: Yes, absolutely. I always encourage clients to think long-term about their careers and what projects they might want to pursue as their next books. I'm brainstorming now with my client, Dr. Sharon Shaline, whose parenting book, *What Your ADHD Child Wishes You Knew*, comes out in 2018 from TarcherPerigree/Penguin Random House. And while it's important to think long-term, it's equally important to be passionate enough about an idea to be excited to spend the next couple years thinking, talking, researching, and writing about it. Passion pops off the page and it's exciting to see it. Make editors feel that they have to publish your book. That's the litmus test. That's what we're after!

LM: In my experience, agents have differed greatly in their marketing strategies. Some agents never give up trying to sell a book they like, others pack it in after 2 or 3 submissions. What type of agenting style would you say you have?

Suzy Evans continued

SE: If a submission doesn't sell in a first round, we'll take a careful look at the editorial feedback and strategize about how best to revise to increase our chances of getting an offer (or multiple offers) in a second or even third round. And as I always remind writers: publishing is a very subjective business, and remember — it only takes one "YES!"

LM: In the children's book market, you are seeking nonfiction, middle grade, young adult and picture books. Please share some qualifiers as to what you are looking for in each genre.

SE: In nonfiction, I'm on the hunt for lively, original nonfiction that pops off the page and makes kids excited about reading and learning. In MG: wacky/silly/hilarious commercial fiction with series potential (think *Wimpy Kid*, *Dork Diaries*, *Jimmy Failure*) and heartwarming, coming-of-age novels with warm, honest voices (think Because of *Winn Dixie* and *El Deafo*). In YA: contemporary fiction that tackles difficult issues in bold, daring ways and with inventive formats that can be brought into the classroom to stimulate meaningful discussion and debate, as well as graphic novels that bring history, literature, and fascinating historical figures (think Socrates! Machiavelli! Cleopatra!) to life. I also have a soft spot for sweet, lyrical picture books that capture the imagination and call for multiple readings (classic favorites include *Stellaluna* and *The Cat Who Walked Across France*) and bonus points for humor and surprising twists at the end (think *Bad Seed*, *After the Fall*, *Finding Winnie*, and the brilliantly illustrated and written *Handel, Who Knew What He Liked*).

LM: Of the submission categories named above, what would you like to see more of? Less of? Also, please share some of the things you are NOT looking for.

SE: I'm endlessly curious about the world and pretty much open to anything, except vampires, unless it's a history of vampires, then I'd be happy to take a look! And I'd love to see more comic and graphic novels. Bring it!

LM: What elements do you look for in query? In the bio paragraph of a query?

SE: Back to my trifecta: Great Concept, Great Writing, Great Platform. Write clearly, crisply, compellingly, and concisely. And a quick, friendly tip: resist the temptation to hit "send" too quickly. Revise, revise, revise and THEN hit send.

LM: For those who will submit a synopsis to you, is there a particular resource that you can recommend they check out?

SE: Synopsis are hard to write and the shorter the better for me. Three to five paragraphs showing beginning, middle and end. And a great resource and quick, fun read that can be applied to writing is Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat!* I'm also writing a little guide in which I share my own children and adult nonfiction proposals that resulted in book deals with Simon & Schuster and HarperCollins. It's short, but I dissect both proposals, section by section, showing what worked and why and what will hopefully work for other writers.

LM: Do you respond to submissions? If so, generally how long does it take?

SE: I read all queries personally and my request time can be anywhere from a few minutes to a few weeks. Thanks so much again — and thanks for sharing your work with me!

Suzy Evans is offering CBI subscribers an **Above the Slushpile** submission opportunity. For fiction, please send a brief synopsis and first chapter of your polished manuscript pasted below your query. For nonfiction, send your query with concise author bio to: **suzy@dijkstraagency.com**. Include the code: CBI — SEDA in your subject line to take advantage of this above-the-slush opportunity. Please note this offer expires on: February 15, 2018.

35 Things I've Learned in 35 Years of Writing

by Jane McBride

Thirty-five years have passed since my first writing was published. Thirty-five years in the crazy business of writing have taught me a number of things. Thirty-five years have also taught me that I have much still to learn.

But today we'll start with what I've learned thus far. My hope is this list will shorten your own learning curve.

1. Writing is a business. Treat it as such.

2. Treat yourself as a business person. If you don't respect yourself as both a writer and a business person, how can you expect others to treat you that way?

3. Keep records. Keep very, very good records. You never know when you'll be audited, as my husband and I were five years ago.

4. Keep on top of your taxes. Do you need to make quarterly tax payments? Penalties are no fun.

5. Keep track of your expenses. Do you think that it's too much trouble to record your mileage to a meeting or postage costs? Think again. Every penny counts.

6. Invest in yourself. If you can swing it, attend writers' conferences. Subscribe to industry periodicals such as *CBI*, *The Writer*, *Children's Bookshelf* (twice-weekly newsletter electronic newsletter from Publishers Weekly), etc.

7. Invest in good equipment. You wouldn't try to cook professionally without the right tools. The same applies to writing.

8. Network. Even if you are an introvert, as many writers are, learn to network. You needn't become a social butterfly at conferences, but don't spend all of your time in your room. Engage others in conversation.

9. Have a support group. Writing is a solitary business. One of the best things you can do for yourself and for your career is to find a group of like-minded people. If you belong to a professional organization, see if there is a chapter in your area. If there isn't, consider starting one. Or join an online group.

10. Find a mentor. A mentor can guide you in your writing, offer critiques, and tell you when you've gone off track.

11. Be a mentor. I'm a firm believer in giving back. Mentor a less experienced member of your writers group. Mentor a young writer at your local high school. You'll learn much in teaching others.

12. Work to first learn and then improve your craft. Do you expect a surgeon to decide he wants to practice medicine and then start operating the next day? Of course not. You want a surgeon to have the necessary training and skills before he performs an operation. Then why do we expect to be skilled writers without learning how to write? Take classes. Attend workshops and conferences. Above all, practice your craft and write.

13. Don't take the first offer that comes your way. In our eagerness to sell a book, especially a first book, it's tempting to take the first offer, even a bad one.

14. Be wary of scams that pop up in the industry such as book doctors and others who claim they can fast-track your career. Some are legitimate; some are not. Always do your research before paying anyone to edit your manuscript or help you self-publish.

15. Remember that no agent is better than a bad agent. Don't be in such a hurry to sign with an agent. Do your due diligence and check out any agent or agency before you sign.

16. Understand that a contract with an agent does not

mean you are married to him or her, but that you will be "bound together" for the lifetime of any book he or she sells for you.

17. Don't burn your bridges. Leave any agency or publishing house with good feelings on both sides. Any bad-mouthing about editors or agents on your part can and probably will come back to bite you.

18. Keep in touch. When an editor leaves your publishing house, it pays to stay in touch. The same goes for agents and other industry professionals.

19. Volunteer. Volunteer at your writers' chapter, at conferences. Volunteer at bookfairs and the library. You will not only be giving back, you will also be making valuable contacts.

20. Establish working hours. When you're writing, you're working. Let your family and friends know that.

21. Don't be afraid to say no. A few years ago, I received an offer to buy a book from a new publishing company. Something felt fishy about the offer, and I turned it down. In the end, I'm glad I did. The company proved not to be reputable.

22. Don't be afraid to say no to family and friends. This goes back to treating yourself as a professional and expecting others to do the same. It's tempting for others, when they learn that you work from home, to say, "Since you're not working, will you 'Let the repairman in,' 'Watch my sick child,' Bake seven dozen cupcakes for the school bake sale,' etc." Smile politely and say, "I'm sorry, but I am working."

23. Give yourself a break now and then. It's wonderful to write every day (or whatever your schedule is), but it's okay to take a break once in a while. You need to experience life to write about it.

24. Don't beat yourself up when you can't make your word count. Double down the next day. The important thing is that you keep writing.

25. Treat rejection as part of the learning curve. Rejections are a way of life for many writers, including me. After selling 36 books and hundreds of stories and articles, I still receive rejections with depressing frequency.

26. Respect your editor and/or agent. Don't pester them with constant calls, texts, or emails. It's okay to stay in contact, just don't overwhelm them.

27. Meet your deadlines. Publishing houses operate on strict deadlines. If you don't meet yours, you may put a crimp in the entire schedule.

28. If you can't meet a deadline, let your editor know as soon as possible. Editors realize that emergencies happen. Give yours a heads-up if it becomes apparent that you can't meet a deadline.

29. Be prepared to have financial dry spells. What happens if your last book doesn't sell well? Can you still make the mortgage and buy groceries? (See # 30.)

30. Think twice before quitting your day job. Royalties can be delayed and/or be spotty. It helps to have the cushion of a regular paycheck to fall back on.

31. Know how many books you can reasonably expect to produce in a year. Set a realistic goal and then do your best to meet it.

32. Don't be so quick to send off a book. Revise and polish, revise and polish again.

33. Stay current. Know what's happening in your genre. Keep up with the latest trends. You don't have to write to them, but you should know what is going on.

34. Find an outlet outside of writing. Writing is not just a business, but a form of expression as well. It helps to have another outlet to replenish your well of creativity.

35. Keep learning. A woman in my writing chapter expressed surprise when I mentioned that I had just returned from a writers' conference. "With all the books you've published, I'm amazed that you that you still attend conferences," she said. I replied, "I hope I never feel that I don't need to learn something."

Well, there you have it—**35** lessons learned, many of them the hard way!

Bumples Ezine Offers Opportunities for Writers

interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

Bumples (http://www.bumples.com) is a story based, interactive ezine for ages 6-10. The publisher, Jennifer Sheehan, created Miss Bumples and the other Bumple characters over 40 years ago as craft kits. In 2009 she was checking out children's magazines and realized that there was a niche for an internet magazine that was interactive and fun to read. And so *Bumples* was born. In the fall of 2017, she added Bumple Buds, for ages 3-5. Both are subscription based ($19.95 for five issues plus 2 game issues. A subscription lets you read both magazines plus back issues.) You can read a sample issue for free at http://www.bumples.com/User/Register.aspx

Sharon Blumberg: Please tell us a little bit about your background.

Jennifer Sheehan: I was a physical education teacher for eight years and continued to coach girls in different sports. I became an accountant and did that for 30 years. I learned publishing from a medical publishing company that I helped start.

In my 30's, I developed a craft kit called Bumples. The child opened a surprise ball and inside was a Bumple animal to make, and also a story about the Bumple. I sold them all over the country. I have written five children's books and four are listed on Amazon. The fifth book is coming out this summer.

SB: How would you describe *Bumples* as an ezine for children? Also, please tell me about the two levels.

JS: In 2009 a friend and I started *Bumples* as an online children's magazine. We were the first one to offer an online magazine with interaction. I wanted a magazine that kids, who did not like to read, could start enjoying reading. Last fall I divided the magazine into two magazines: *Bumple Buds* for 3-5 year olds and *Bumples* is for 6-10. They both have fiction stories and poems, including facts and a game relating to the stories. We will remain an interactive online magazine.

We also publish children's soft cover and Kindle books. We hope to have them up and running on the *Bumples* site soon for purchase. We help turn stories that were in the magazine into books. We also offer in the books links to games they can play on the Bumples site.

SB: What kind of writing do you accept for *Bumples*? What are your word count requirements?

JS: Authors can go to http://www.bumples.com/WritersGuidelines.aspx to see our writer's guidelines. The word count is up to 800 for the *Bumple Buds* magazine and 2,000 for *Bumples*. All poems and stories have to be fiction. We look for stories that make you laugh or the animal or child has a problem to solve. We love animal and sports stories. We also like mysteries or stories that a child can relate to. Our decision to accept a piece often comes down to whether we can create a game from the story or create animations with the characters. We also accept stories from children; in fact, we encourage it.

SB: Why would you reject a piece for *Bumples*?

JS: We receive over 1,000 stories or poems a year and we read every one. Each issue contains only 6-8 stories and poems so we put many stories on hold. If a story is poorly written, we tell the author. We also tell authors that we can't use their stories if we can't animate the characters.

SB: What kinds of rights do you license to writers after you accept their writings?

JS: We license one-time rights. It is a very tough world for authors, and I feel very strongly that they retain the rights to their stories. Most authors reuse their stories and some turn them into books. We are paying $30.00 for stories, $20.00 for poems and games. Illustrations based on number of pictures (if writers are also artists they can submit illustrations with their work, but it's not necessary). Payments are made 3-6 months after publication.

SB: Is there anything else you would like to add, that hasn't been mentioned yet?

JS: I feel very blessed to have this magazine. The support from the families and the authors has been overwhelming, and I thank everyone. We have authors from all over the world.