Children's Book Insider

June 2019

How Madeleine L'Engle Changed the World

A Conversation with Children's Book Historian Leonard Marcus

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This issue's contributors

Laura Backes has published *Children's Book Insider* since May 1990, is the co-creator of Writing-Blueprints.com, and WriteForKids.org, and a founder of Picture Book Summit (www.picture-booksummit.com).

Lynne Marie is the author of *Hedgehog Goes to Kindergarten* and *Hedgehog's 100th Day of School* (Scholastic), *The Star in the Christmas Play* and *Let's Eat Around the World* (Beaming Books), Moldilocks and the 3 Scares (Sterling) and more forthcoming, as well as 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

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Pat Miller (www.patmillerbooks.com), a former teacher and school librarian, has nine young grandchildren and nine books for children. Her latest is an award-winning nonfiction picture book, *The Hole Story of the Doughnut*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016). She is also one of the eleven Nonfiction Ninjas (www.nonfiction-ninjas.com)

Candice Ransom is the author of 150 books for children, including 10 *Step into Reading* titles. She has an MFA in writing for children from VCFA and an MA in children's literature from Hollins University. She currently teaches in Hollins University's graduate program in children's literature. www.candiceransom.com

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At Presstime:

New Visions Award Open to Middle Grade and YA Submissions

Tu Books, the middle grade and young adult imprint of Lee & Low Books, is sponsoring the annual New Visions Award for a middle grade or young adult novel by a writer of color or a Native/Indigenous writer. The Award winner receives a cash prize of $2,000 and a standard publication contract, including basic advance and royalties for a first time author. An Honor Award winner receives a $1000 cash prize.

The contest is open to writers of color and Native nations who are residents of the United States and who have not previously had a middle grade or young adult novel published. Writers who have published work in other venues such as children's magazines or picture books, or adult fiction or nonfiction, are eligible. Only unagented manuscripts will be accepted. Work that has been published in its entirety in any format (including online and self-publishing as well as other countries) is not eligible.

Manuscripts should address the needs of children and teens of color and Native nations by providing stories with which they can identify and relate, and which promote a greater understanding of one another. Themes relating to LGBTQ+ topics or disabilities may also be included. Submissions may be any fictional genre novels or graphic novels for children ages 8 to 12 (up to 75,000 words) or young adults ages 12 to 18 (up to 95,000 words). Particularly interested in fantasy and science fiction, but also welcome contemporary, historical, mystery, and suspense. Graphic novel scripts in those categories are also welcome (up to 150 scripted pages). Nonfiction will not be considered. Submissions should include a synopsis of the story plus the first five chapters, accompanied by a cover letter that includes the author's name, address, phone number, email address, brief biographical note, relevant cultural and ethnic information, how the author heard about the award, and publication history, if any. Do not send the entire manuscript. For graphic novels, include the equivalent of 24-30 scripted pages and 6-10 pages of final art samples and optional character sketches in PDF format only if you are an author/illustrator.

Submissions should be submitted online at through Submittable at **https://tubooks.submittable.com/submit** in the New Visions Award category. You will receive a confirmation email stating your submission was received. Manuscripts may not be submitted to other publishers while under consideration for this award. **Submissions will be accepted through August 31, 2019.** The winners will be notified by April 1, 2020. For more information, go to **https://www.leeandlow.com/writers-illustrators/new-visions-award**

Publisher Accepting Proposals for Nonfiction Curriculum-Aligned Series for Grades K-6

Bearport Publishing (**https://bearportpublishing.com**) publishes curriculum-aligned nonfiction series for grades K-6, primarily for the library market. Focus is on appealing topics that get kids excited about reading, with a lot of white space around the text and bold photographs. Nonfiction series include picture books, beginning readers, hi-lo books, narrative nonfiction (such as biographies), and traditional expository nonfiction. Currently series include *Bugged Out! The World's Most Dangerous Bugs, Basketball Heroes Making a Difference, Tiptoe into Scary Cities, America's Animal Soldiers,* and *So Big Compared to What?* Topics of interest include animals, biography, science, social studies, myths and folklore, math, sports and language arts. Authors can either propose a new title in an existing series, or create a proposal for a new series. Send a query letter describing the book or series idea, along with a resume and nonfiction writing sample to Joyce Tavolacci, Senior Editor, at **info@bearportpublishing.com**, or mail query/sample to Bearport Publishing, Attn: Submissions, 45 West 21st Street, Suite 3B, New York, NY 10010. Visit the publisher's website and click on Browse to look at all current series by category and reading level.

New Publisher Seeks Illustrated Young Adult Nonfiction

Street Noise Books, a new independent publishing house specializing in graphic memoir and illustrated nonfiction for young adults, will publish its first list in January 2020. The new company's tag line, according to founder and publisher Liz Frances, is to produce books that are "unapologetic, authentic, and politically relevant." Forthcoming titles include *Stupid Black Girl: Essays from an American African Living in New York* by Aisha Redux, illustrated by Brianna McCarthy; *I'm A Wild Seed: Memories of Oppressed Queerness* by Sharon Lee De La Cruz; *Crash Course: If You Want to Get Away With Murder Buy a Car* by Woodrow Phoenix (exploring the powerful, often toxic relationship between people and cars). Check out other forthcoming titles and the company's mission statement before submitting at **https://www.streetnoisebooks.com**

Street Noise Books is happy to consider unagented nonfiction young adult submissions from authors and author/illustrators with a fresh voice or perspective. All submissions should lend themselves to the graphic novel or heavily-illustrated format. Send a page or two that describes the purpose and main themes of the book; a tentative table of contents, with a short summary of each chapter; a 1-5 page sample of one of the chapters of the book; samples of illustrations or artwork, where appropriate; information about any comparable titles, already published or to be published; your bio, including any publishing credits or experience relevant to the book; your intended writing timetable for completion of the project. Proposals can be mailed to Liz Frances, Publisher, Street Noise Books, 195 Plymouth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201, or emailed to **liz@streetnoisebooks.com** (paste everything within the body of the email). Mailed submissions will not be returned—don't send any original artwork.

Agent Seeks Inventive Works for All Ages

Penny Moore is a literary agents with Aevitas Creative Management (**http://aevitascreative.com/**). She represents standout authors such as Morris Award Finalist, Akemi Dawn Bowman, author of titles, *Starfish* and *Summer Bird Blue*; Beth Evans, author/illustrator of *I Really Didn't Think This Through*; Nicki Pau Preto, author of *Crown of Feathers*; Lyla Lee, author of *The Mindy Kim Series*; and Katie Zhao, author of *The Dragon Warrior*.

Moore mainly represents children's literature, including picture books, middle grade, and young adult. She also has an interest in select platform nonfiction projects that speak to younger audiences. Though she's interested in all genres, she's specifically seeking inventive works featuring breakout voices and compelling plot lines that will make young readers feel seen and heard for the first time. Submit a query letter and the entire manuscript of a picture book, or the first 10 pages of longer works, at **https://querymanager.com/query/LiteraryPenny**

Independent Publisher Accepting Picture Book Submissions

Flashlight Press is an independent publisher of award-winning fiction picture books. Currently accepting submissions for picture books for ages 4-8 that are under 1000 words, have a universal theme, and deal with family or social situations in an original, engaging way. It's essential that authors study the current Flashlight Press list before submitting to make sure their work fits with the company's overall tone (go to http://flashlightpress.com/our-books/). Submissions should be emailed to **submissions@flashlightpress.com** and have "Query for [title of your manuscript]" in the Subject line. The body of the email should contain the following: title of story; word count; target age; subject or theme of story (1-5 words); summary (3 sentences or less); your name, occupation, city, state, country; if you have been published previously, list titles, publishers, and pub dates; anything else you'd like to mention about yourself or your book. Attach your manuscript as a Word file or PDF. Multiple submissions are allowed, but please send only one query per email. Within a week, you should receive an automated reply or receipt. Responds within three months if interested in publishing the work.

Counting Down to 30: Part 2
Anyone Can Be a Visionary

by Laura Backes

Dear Reader:

Last month I began my series of editorials counting down the 12 months to CBI's 30th anniversary, in which I reveal 12 industry truths I've learned in the time I've been involved in children's publishing. This month's truth comes from my years of critiquing manuscripts as well as studying the market.

What do *The Snowy Day, Where the Wild Things Are, The Cat in the Hat, Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus, Charlotte's Web, Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* and *The Outsiders* have in common? They were all written by visionaries. They all took a premise that could be summed up in one or two sentences and spun it in a new direction. They ventured outside the boundaries of what was considered "acceptable" in children's literature at the time. They did this not be being vulgar or sensationalistic, but by giving their readers credit for handling big ideas and complex emotions, and acknowledging that children already had deep feelings and thoughts before they ever opened the book. The authors decided that children deserved books that reflected their life experiences, honored the depth of their friendships, allowed them to laugh and cry, and assumed readers had enough sense to know when a character was breaking the rules. They wrote for their readers, not the grown-ups in their readers' lives, and in doing so changed the course of publishing.

These brave authors gave you a gift. They expanded the industry's idea of what a children's book could be, and you get to reap the benefits. Today, no topic is off-limits in a children's book, as long as the subject is handled in an age-appropriate way (and these days a lot more is age-appropriate, especially for middle graders and young adults, than previously thought. Children and teens are aware of, and dealing with, many issues that most of us never had to think about at that age.) All characters are embraced, regardless of race, religion, abilities, and sexuality. Genre-combining, unique formatting and styles of text, illustrations in young adult books, picture books for older readers, creative nonfiction that makes kids laugh while they learn...it seems that publishers will try just about anything.

Then why are so many aspiring writers working so hard to be ordinary?

From 1990-2017, when I was doing critiques, I read *thousands* of manuscripts, mostly from unpublished authors. Guess how many I remember? Twenty-five, tops. That doesn't mean others weren't publishable (some did go on to be published). It just means they weren't memorable. They were nice stories, sweet stories, average stories. When I got my first job in publishing in 1986, children's books were booming and editors acquired a lot more nice, serviceable books than they do now simply to fill the shelf space. However, the ones that are still in print today weren't just average, they were exceptional. Their authors had a vision that has remained fresh years later.

And sure, the *writing* of the book has to be extraordinary and original to keep it on the shelves for years. That's a huge component, and last week I wrote about how I believe skill is more important than raw talent. You can acquire the skill if you work hard enough. But even with skill, it's unlikely you'll save a book built on a ho-hum premise, a predictable plot line, or characters who have no depth.

The legacy of the distinguished titles I listed above (as well as others you've thought of since you started reading this editorial) is that you no longer have to be afraid of your ideas. You don't have to rein in your middle-of-the-night epiphany the next day by thinking, "That's too far out there for a children's book! Would an editor even *get* this?" Editors are making it easier than ever for you to push the boundaries with

Counting Down to 30 continued

your work. They want new perspectives, unique approaches, radical ideas. A subversive picture book that's not message-driven? Great! A YA novel written as slam poetry? Brilliant! (If you don't believe me, read Elizabeth Acevedo's mesmerizing *Poet X* and try to not imagine the entire book being recited on stage.) Humorous creative nonfiction that reads like a pregnancy guide for expectant larvae? Why not?

So here's my challenge to you: Don't waste this gift. If you're going to put all that work into writing and revising your manuscript, if you're going to spend hours learning the ins and outs of submitting and researching appropriate editors or agents for your work, if you're going to agonize over writing the perfect query letter and then spend weeks or months submitting, why would you waste it on ordinary? Instead, why not aim high right out of the gate? If you shoot for sublime and land on terrific, you've probably got a publishing contract. If you aim for great and land on pretty good, you don't.

One thing that trips up a lot of authors is rushing an idea before it's fully-formed. In their excitement to begin the actual writing, some writers latch on to the first appealing idea that they have, and don't take the time to let it develop into something book-worthy. For example, we've got scores of picture books about appreciating your own special gifts and middle grade novels about being the new kid in school. Sure, we could have more, but only if they can stand out in a significant way from what's already published. How will you do that? Most ideas can actually sprout in several directions, and if you are patient, you'll open up numerous possibilities from one idea and then you'll get to choose the best one (you can find several articles on developing ideas on the CBI Clubhouse, **www.cbiclubhouse.com**, by typing "ideas" into the search bar.)

Also, read *a lot*. Reading children's books in the same age group or genre for which you want to write is the single best thing you can do to unlock your own vision. Read touchstone books from the past, those that have defined the industry, but especially read innovative books from the last 10 years. Don't be intimidated by these books; trust me, great literature grows the imagination of the reader. Be sure to keep a notepad near you as you read to capture your own radical ideas.

Ultimately, what I'm asking you to do is to be brave. Open your mind and heart. I absolutely believe you have magic inside you, and children deserve to see it come to life. Embrace the gift you've been given to write what speaks to you. You can be a visionary.

And remember, at one time people said, "A novel about a spider who saves a pig from slaughter with her *writing*? That's absurd!" And they were wrong.

Sincerely,

Laura Backes

P.S. Don't forget to check out William McIlvaine's interview with Leonard Marcus in this issue about the work of Madeleine L'Engle, another visionary.

Index Cards, File Folders, and Notes: Organizing Nonfiction Research

by Candice Ransom

In 2005, I was ready to write the first draft of my picture book biography on Margaret Wise Brown. Or so I thought. Surrounding me were articles, theses, typewritten notes, interviews, exhibition catalogs, and vintage periodicals: two years of research materials, most exploding from a bulging folder. As I sifted through photocopies, trying to find a specific quote, I realized I couldn't write the first syllable until my research was under control.

What was the best way to make sense of so much stuff? A binder seemed logical, with tabs dividing material into subjects. Two file bins corralled the books. Better! Yet I found myself flipping back and forth through the binder, still unable to find what I needed. Next, I highlighted pertinent passages, but too many pages were striped pink. That book took fourteen years from idea to acquisition. The process might have been quicker if I'd figured out a system to handle my research.

Many nonfiction writers find themselves buried in bits of paper and Post-It-marked books. A fact you knew a week ago and need right this minute has wiggled to the bottom of the pile. Here are some methods to sort out the muddle.

Index Cards:

I love colored index cards but hate to use them. Years ago, when I was researching a biography of Maggie Walker, I read her diaries and accounts at the Maggie Walker Historic Site. Unable to photocopy fragile material, I took notes on 4 by 6 index cards. In tiny printing, I crammed notes front, back, and continued on other cards. Organizing them was a nightmare.

If only I'd known historian Barbara Tuchman's index card method: subject in the upper left corner of the card, source in the upper right, and the quoted material in the body. Keep cards on related subjects together. Bind with a bulldog clip or rubber band, topped with a subject heading card. When you reach that section or topic of your book, your research is ready. Keep a separate card for each source. Alphabetize that stack, and your bibliography is done. For those who like to use index cards, this works, but only if you write one fact, or quote, or passage per card.

Software Tools:

Software programs can help organize research (and write your book). Evernote is free (though there is a premium version). You might be using the app on your phone now. Its "notebooks" work nicely for organizing notes, files, photos, and even voice memos.

Scrivener devotees are legion. I bought the software when I got a new computer. Even with the *Scrivener for Dummies* guide, I found it too confusing. It's a terrific writing tool, with virtual cork boards, index cards, outliner, and other features. For research, you can view image files, PDF files, websites, and videos within your project document. Software programs free you from dragging a bag of reference materials when you want to work off-site.

I use a desktop computer and at the end of my long writing days, I am done with screens. I'd rather carry a file folder and colored pencils into the den to review after supper.

Organizing Nonfiction Research.... continued

Binders and Folders:

Although I keep computer files (46 for my latest nonfiction picture book), I print out most of that material to store in tabbed three-ring binders. I use two-inch binders with a clear plastic pocket cover and slip an index of what's inside into that pocket. Big notebooks can be unwieldy, but I prefer handling articles and typescript to toggling back and forth between Windows.

Each of my nonfiction projects has a shelf on a tea cart. All books, files, and binders stay together. Even with materials in one place, I find myself wrestling with the research as I write. Children's author Beth Anderson and her "old-school" method came to my rescue on my most recent nonfiction book. Like me, Anderson wasn't keen on software yet needs to see "multiple items at once" as she writes. She came up with the spiral notebook organizer.

Spiral Notebook Organizer:

In a spiral notebook, create a Table of Contents as the first page. You can number the pages, but I apply paste-on tabs instead. Set aside pages for Title Ideas, Timeline, Contacts, Back Matter Ideas, Structure Ideas, Quotes, Questions, whatever works for your project. I re-compiled my binder indexes by subject. Labor-intensive, yes, but having those indexes better organized in the notebook saved me time and sanity in the long run.

I added Melissa Stewart's method for double-checking facts. Stewart creates "Check and Chunk" lists before she begins writing. Her list consists of big ideas and fascinating facts that become "chunks" of related information. Using different colors, she highlights chunks that need checking or that can be connected to other chunks. Under Questions in my spiral notebook, I crossed off each fact or source I double-checked in the color-coded list.

The beauty of the spiral notebook is that it's portable. It's cheap. It doesn't need to be recharged. It's not precious (unless you lose it!). And you can modify it to suit any project.

Writing a nonfiction book or article requires tons of research. There is no single method to organize your material. Find the one that works best for you and start writing your book!

Evernote
https://evernote.com

Scrivener
www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener

KRISTINE ENDERLE, Editorial Director

Magination Press
Books for Kids From the American Psychological Association

interview by Lynne Marie

Magination Press in the children's book imprint of the American Psychological Association, founded in 1987.

In her capacity as Editorial Director, Kristine Enderle oversees a team of editors—Sarah Fell and Katie Moore, Senior Editors, Katie Ten Hagen, Development Editor, and Julie Spaling, Production Editor. Along with the editorial team, Kristine reads and evaluates manuscripts, collaborates with designers, authors and illustrators, thinks up the next best thing, and acquires new children's picture books and teen self-help books.

Preference is given to books that are written by child, school, and developmental psychologists or other mental health professionals working with children and teens, particularly those books with more serious mental health topics (like depression, anxiety, stress, trauma, bullying, suicide). However Magination Press publishes several books a year written by school counselors, teachers, parents, or trade authors. These books are more likely picture books and are closely vetted by their editorial advisory board and other psychologists at APA.

Lynne Marie: For those who remember Magination Press from the late 80s, it has changed drastically, with several of its books being school and library favorites. How would you describe the difference in the approach to the books it publishes now, as opposed to then?

Kristine Enderle: I've been with Magination Press for more than 10 years and with APA for almost 20. We've seen extraordinary changes! We have steadily grown and matured as a press with a thoughtful focus and a bigger front list year after year. Being part of the American Psychological Association and with our expert authors, wealth of in-house resources, researchers and policy-makers, we moved beyond traditional bibliotherapy and clinical resources to publish books that kids and parents might find in schools, libraries, online retailers, and indie bookstores. We rethought our editorial priorities and pushed to broaden our audience outside clinical practices. Many of our books are not tightly focused on "solving-problems" or teaching kids what grown-ups think they need to understand. More and more, we publish books on psychology and applied psychology and mental health, not just bibliotherapeutic guides on clinical topics (and mental illness). As we watched nearly every major publisher release book after book on social-emotional learning, mental health and wellness, it became clear to us that Magination Press really needed to be that publisher bringing relevant, accurate, psychologically-informed, evidence-based information to kids and teens, and to publish rock solid books people could trust.

LM: What would you consider the mission statement of Magination Press?

KE: Our mission is the same as the American Psychological Association, our publisher. Through our work we aim to make an impact and further APA mission—to promote the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives.

So what that means for Magination Press is through our publishing we share with the world mental health expertise and psychological knowledge. Our books reach young readers and their parents and caregivers to make navigating life's challenges a little easier and help kids flourish and grow. It's the combined power of psychology and literature that makes our books special. We also try to:

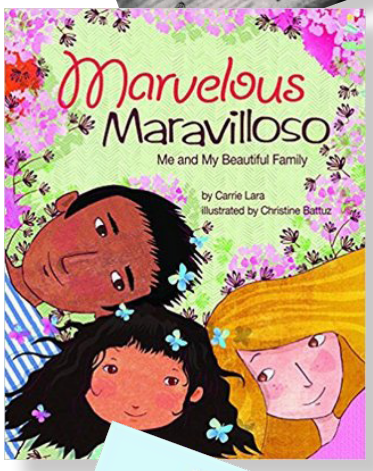
- Champion inclusion and belonging for all children and teens
- Be a progressive, proactive force for social change
- Be a go-to source of books for kids and teens on mental health and wellness, social-emotional learning

Kristine Enderle continued

- Teach kids about psychology and how it can inform and empower them as they apply psychological science to their everyday life

LM: Explain the concept of bibliotherapy that Magination Press strives to facilitate between children and caring adults, whether librarians, teachers, therapists or parents.

KE: Our books are a lot less serious and clinical now—we have eased up on an instructional, prescriptive top-down approach and jettisoned the expectation of two perfect parents modeling behavior, providing lessons and instruction, and supplying coping strategies. Boring! Not helpful! And a tad condescending! Now many of our books are often first-person concept books or told as a greek-chorus narrative or follow a typical storytelling arch that is lighter, lyrical, realistic, layered, and often with humor. And, lots of our books have animal leads. Our books are beautifully illustrated and designed, having moved away from soft watercolors or institutional-looking designs. Grown-ups (or other characters) are still present in the books, but are there to listen, comfort, and support. We want kids to understand the emotions, behaviors, or thinking behind the story, but allow them to take what they need to solve a problem. We want them to feel empowered to change how they feel or think about situation and apply a psychologically informed answer to their own questions. The whole book should convey to young readers that we hear them, we are listening, we respect them, we care, and we can be trusted. Thinking how kids will experience the story is always my first question when looking at a manuscript or proposal.



LM: How has the scope of what Magination will publish broadened now? What are some topics that Magination will cover now that it didn't cover then?

KE: We aim to reflect experiences of all kids and create books where children and teens can see themselves and can connect with the characters. We now make room on our list for books that speak to and help kids understand critical societal issues and open a conversation to impact our communities. For instance, *Something Happened in Our Town* is a story about a police shooting of an unarmed African-American man. It is an amazing book that starts a conversation about racial injustice, internalized biases and our country's history of oppression and prejudices. Also *Marvelous Maravilloso* celebrates colorfully diverse families and at its core it is about multiculturalism, inclusion, and biracial identity. *Jacob's Room to Choose* introduces the need for open-access bathrooms for children everywhere and discusses gender expression and gender nonconforming identity.

LM: Are there topics that you see too much of as far of submissions? Too little of? What are they?

KE: We see lots of submissions on grief and grieving, anxiety and anger, nightmares and sleep issues, bullying and teasing, or self-esteem and confidence. These are excellent book ideas for Magination Press, but we already have several books covering these topics. So before submitting a proposal, I tell authors to please review our catalog and research the market to know what has already been written. If the book covers a topic that we have or if the market is saturated with books on the same topic, consider something else. The good news is that our books are evergreen and remain in print for a very long time! Bad news, we don't repeat topics year after year, and are unlikely to acquire new titles on already-covered topics.

LM: Do you have any topics on your submission wish list? If so, what qualifications would you like to see along with a manuscript dealing with this particular topic, if any?

KE: We also are expanding our line of teen books. These books are typically authored by psychologists or experts in their field, but we want the books to be hip and modern, edgy titles and self-help for teens. These are books that will answer

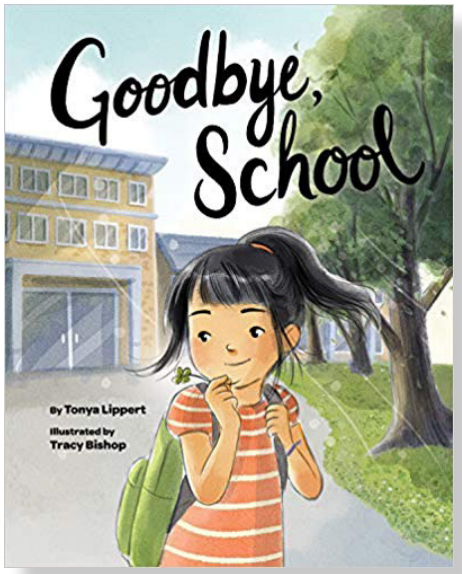
Kristine Enderle continued

questions teens want to know relating to psychological development (identity) and social-emotional psychology (life skills). Or be a safe way to explore values, roles, identities, and ideas.

We are also exploring nonfiction resource books on psychology subdisciplines and research methods and ways to promote psychological science as a STEM discipline.

And someday soon, I hope, we look to develop a series of middle-grade chapter books. Characters, topics, themes, angle—TBD! [Magination Press is not acquiring middle grade fiction at this time.]

LM: What percentage of your list is fiction? What percentage is nonfiction? How important is a well-developed narrative arc in these categories?



KE: Our books are 50/50 fiction/nonfiction although our "fiction" books read a little bit like nonfiction, particularly the concept books. Clever, well-developed narrative arc in our lyrical trade-focused picture books is crucial.

LM: Please specify what you are looking for in a picture book at this time.

KE: Beautifully told stories or solid concept books. We are avoiding didactic, heavy, instructional, or moralistic tales. But staying true to our mission, we would like authors to apply scientific psychological knowledge in clever, fun, interesting ways that will let kids discover (through stealth steering) and problem-solve themselves.

LM: Please tell us a little bit about what you are looking for in a teen mental self-help book at this time.

KE: We are interested in books that will lead teens toward a place of self-discovery and provide honest, uncensored, factual information that may answer questions they have particularly books relating to mental health concerns (anxiety, stress, depression, anger, suicide), psychological development (self expression or identity), and social-emotional psychology (life skills).

LM: Please share a story about a slush acquisition that made it into a current catalog and share why you chose that story. Was it written by a health professional or an author?

KE: I love finding books that have a smidgen of psychology or stories that sneak in important psychological concepts into the story. We recently published a book called, *Goodbye, School*. There are several books about starting school, but I haven't see one about leaving school to go to a new school or at the end of the school year. This book tells a story that guides children through an important period of their life and helps them understand transition or change and acknowledge their feelings throughout the experience. It's beautifully illustrated with charming details (look for the 4-leaf clover and the friendship bracelet!) super sweet and super helpful with the underlying psychology of accepting and dealing with difficult transitions.

LM: Do you have any advice for writers submitting books dealing with sensitive topics of diversity or special needs or gender sensitivities? Is it necessary that authors be telling the stories with their own voices? [Note to readers: Own voices, or #ownvoices, means books written by authors who have personal experience with the particular diverse, marginalized, or underrepresented group portrayed in the book.]

KE: Yes—own voices are required and necessary!

LM: What pet peeves do you have, if any, about the submissions you receive at Magination Press?

KE: We are not interested in autobiography, reflections on childhood, or personal stories about family members, pets, or friends. So I tell authors to keep the appeal wide and general and keep the focus on interesting characters and storytelling, not retelling. Also be careful with first-person narrative and be true to the characters talking. Good stories and excellent topics can sour with unrealistic, adult-sounding, or dated dialogue.

LM: As a general rule, how do you go about finding your illustrators? Do you prefer illustrators that have some kind of connection to the topic, or is that not necessary?

Kristine Enderle continued

KE: We work with several agents to find illustrators. And we prefer authentic representation from our illustrators (and authors) with a connection to the topic, particularly gender expression, cultural or ethnic identity, or race.

LM: Please share your submission guidelines.

KE: Here is what to include in your proposal:

Brief Synopsis. Provide a brief summary of the story or nonfiction work. Be sure to specify the psychological issue or situation you are addressing.

Complete Manuscript. Please send a complete story or nonfiction manuscript, table of contents, and all end matter (reference list, additional resources, and afterword). We do not accept proposals on the basis of a query letter or partial manuscript. Also we do not accept manuscripts by email. Instead, please prepare the complete proposal as outlined below and send it to the following address:

American Psychological Association
Magination Press, Acquisitions
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- Is the topic covered adequately—breadth and scope? Anything missing? Material to omit?

ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE

Kristine Enderle is offering a special **Above the Slushpile** submission opportunity to CBI readers. You may submit a picture book or first ten pages of a teen mental health self-help book with code: **CBI - KE Submission 6/19** (put the code in the first paragraph of your cover letter and also on the outside envelope), and mail to Kristine Enderle, Editorial Director, Magination Press, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street, NE Washington, DC 20002-4242 (include a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want materials returned). Please review the guidelines and submit only what is appropriate for Magination Press. See current Magination Press titles at **https://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/index**

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REVISIONS -A TIERED APPROACH

by Jane McBride

Revisions. We love them. We hate them. Sometimes both. After writing 37 books and hundreds of short stories and articles, I've had some experience with revisions. You'd think I'd get better doing them over the years, but I still struggle.

So let me share some things I've learned along the way. We'll do this in the Mini Blueprint format:

STEP 1: Start big. That's right. Don't start with words and sentences. Start with the book itself. We call this story-level edits. (NOTE: We're starting big and working our way down because doing the big-picture edits, which may involve deleting scenes or even whole chapters, before moving on to the micro edits, prevents you from having to re-edit something you've already revised.)

ACTION: Ask yourself the hard questions. Does my premise work? Does the book make sense? Will readers relate to the characters? Does it have a hook? Is there continuity to the book or is it just a string of isolated incidents stuck together in some kind of random order?

What do you do if you can't answer "yes" to these questions? You get to work and keep working until you can answer "yes." Suppose you have a premise that a 13-year-old boy is tasked with saving the world using only his wits and skills. With such a huge goal in front of him, he will need tools to accomplish his task. What experiences have you given him to develop those wits and skills? You won't expect him to magically have them. Or maybe you do. Maybe a wizard or a magician has bestowed upon him everything he will need. Either way, the premise needs the support of having the boy possess those skills, either from his experiences or from an incantation or by some other means. (As a side note, if you do have your protagonist magically acquire certain powers, he better still have conflicts ahead his powers can't solve, or your book will have absolutely no tension.) What if, after reading through your manuscript, you decide that the main character (MC) isn't very likable. An unlikable MC is a surefire way to keep your manuscript sitting on the shelf or in the computer. What can you do to make him more relatable? Give him strengths; give him flaws. Make him honest and genuine. By now, you're probably getting the idea that if your story doesn't work on these levels, it's going to need major revisions.

How can you objectively analyze your own manuscript on the story level? First, put it aside for a length of time. Two months is optimal, but most writers can't wait that long. But try, at a minimum, to step away for two to three weeks. During that time, start working on another project. You want to create enough distance from this manuscript so you can begin to see it as an editor, not its artistic creator. You can also take it to your critique group and ask them to look at these big-picture elements only. Use their feedback to point you in the direction of your revisions.

Complete your story-level edits before moving on to the next step.

STEP 2: Downsize. Nope, you're not downsizing your house, but you are downsizing in your revision structure. Move on to your scenes. Scenes are the building blocks of chapters.

ACTION: Once again, start with questions. Does each scene have a purpose? If the sole purpose of a scene is to simply showcase your writing talents, delete it, no matter how much you love the scene, how flawlessly it is written, how you have captured the beauty of a setting. Every scene should accomplish something—either develop character, move the action forward, illuminate relationships between the characters. Ideally, a scene will accomplish a couple of purposes. Does the scene have a cliffhanger ending? It should. It need not be a major cliffhanger fraught with danger and live-or-die suspense; it can end with the MC asking herself a question, the answer of which will impact the story journey. Or it can end with the MC in mortal danger, her very life in question. Vary the kind of scene endings. Don't always have the character in peril … unless you are writing a melodramatic or humorous book with over-the-top suspense.

STEP 3: Move on to paragraphs. Just as scenes are the building blocks of chapters, paragraphs are the building blocks of scenes. Paragraphs should flow from one to the other in a natural sequence.

ACTION: At the risk of being repetitious, start with questions. Are your paragraphs related? Are they coherent? Or do you jump from one subject to another with-

Mini Blueprint continued

out thought to continuity? Do the paragraphs in a scene build to a climax? Then look at the sentences that compose the paragraphs. Do you vary the sentence length in your paragraphs? Or are all the sentences approximately the same length? Do you vary the kinds of sentences? Do you vary the tone of the sentences? Like every scene, every paragraph should serve a purpose. If, in your revisions, you come across a paragraph whose sole purpose it to wax poetic about a sunset without that sunset in some way giving insights into the character or affecting the plot, get rid of it. We have all seen beautiful sunsets. We don't need to be treated to a lyrical description of it, however artfully you describe it.

Complete all your scene-level and paragraph revisions before moving on to the next step.

STEP 4: Look at your word choice.

ACTION: Word choice is a subjective thing. The words you choose are a product of your education, experiences, personal taste, and a myriad of other things. First, check your word darlings at the door. Consider doing a search of your manuscript to determine if you have some of these darlings which you use over and over (and over). When I did that with a recent manuscript, I discovered that I was in love with the word focus. Every character was focusing on something. Every plot point used focus to … well … focus in it. My use of the word was more than redundant; it was downright embarrassing. Painstakingly, I went through the whole book and rewrote dozens of sentences, limiting my use of the word to only a few times. What are your pet words? One author I know (a very successful author) uses mutter repeatedly. Her characters are always muttering their remarks. In this case, a simple said would work far better.

Another consideration in word choice: are the words your character uses right for her? If you are writing a coming-of-age novel set in a small town in Tennessee during the Great Depression, your character might not use sophisticated words. If she does, give her a reason for her choices and the appropriate background to make her using those words make sense. A cowboy might not use the word "salacious," and a city girl might not use the word "over yonder." These are, of course, exaggerated examples, but you get the drift. What about your word choices in descriptions? Have you relied on tried-and-true (and boring) cliches? Or have you found new and fresh ways to describe a graffiti-marred warehouse where drug deals are made? Have you dug deep for a new way to describe a bucolic setting with fields and cows? Have you done the hard work necessary to search for not just an okay word, but the absolute best word? Have you used a precise noun rather than a generic one? Can you say that "Azelas lined the sidewalk" rather than "Flowers lined the sidewalk?" Have you employed active, vivid verbs rather than prosaic ones? Is your six-year-old MC skipping along beside her mother or is she just walking? Maybe she is hopping over the lines in the sidewalk or jumping from one square to the other. These are small but telling changes that will strengthen your writing.

Revisions can turn a ho-hum manuscript into one that shines and sparkles. They can elevate a second-rate story into a first-rate one. They can take your story from an almost-sale to a "Yes, I sold my book" one. And isn't that what you want?

For detailed, step-by-step guidance on how to analyze your manuscript on the story, scene and sentence levels (including a list of exactly which questions to ask), as well as in-depth instruction how to fix any problems, check out **Manuscript Magic** from **www.WritingBlueprints.com**

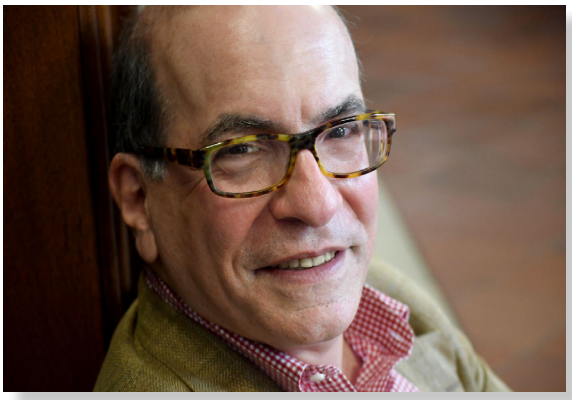
writing blueprints

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, editing, submitting, marketing, or self-publishing your book, go to **www.writingblueprints.com**

How Madeleine L'Engle Forever Changed Sci-Fi and Fantasy for Young Adults

interview by William McIlvaine

2018 was quite a year for Madeleine L'Engle. In the centenary of her birth, she was feted as a pioneering author of books that created inroads into a market for teen and young adult fiction that barely existed before and was profoundly influenced by her work afterward. She was the subject of reminiscences, retrospectives, and conferences. Her landmark novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*, was made into a feature film. A large number of her literary papers were donated to her alma mater, Smith College, and Smith's alumni magazine ran a series of articles and reminiscences about her. Two of her granddaughters, Charlotte Jones Voiklis and Lena Roy, published a memoir, *Becoming Madeleine*. And her complete series of Kairos novels, which began with the groundbreaking *A Wrinkle in Time*, was reprinted by the Library of America in two volumes, edited by children's literature authority Leonard S. Marcus.



Marcus has written or edited more than 20 books on children's literature and lectured widely. He spoke at the *Telling Lives* conference on picture book biographies at New York University in 2018. Marcus, who met and interviewed L'Engle (*The Wand in the Word: Conversations with Writers of Fantasy,* 2006) speaks about L'Engle's legacy, her methods, and her relevance for today's writers of fantasy for young readers.

William McIlvaine: You edited the Library of America edition of the Kairos novels, participated in a symposium about her. You've interviewed her and written a book about her. (*Listening for Madeleine*, 2012) What fascinates you personally about Madeleine L'Engle and her work?

Leonard Marcus: She was a powerful storyteller but she also occupies an important place in the history of American children's books in that when she published *A Wrinkle in Time* she was working in a hybrid genre, most of the elements of which were unpopular and she changed a lot of the perceptions of critics and the reading public about the genre of science fiction and fantasy for young people.

WM: Did you read those books at the time?

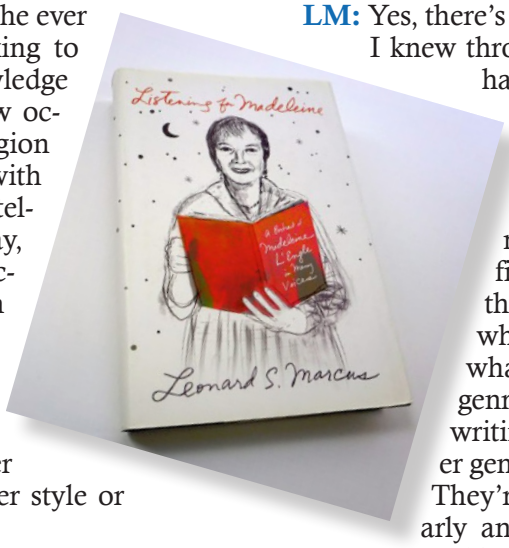
LM: No, I didn't have a good librarian who could have directed me toward them; I didn't find them on my own. In general, from then onward I've been mostly a nonfiction reader. It's an individual temperament. Some people are interested in the question What if, and others in the question, Is it true? And I'm more in the second group. So when I came to writing about her and went to interview her for a book about fantasy writers, I felt that I was operating as a journalist trying to understand a world I was unfamiliar with.

WM: Sci-fi/fantasy, whether for kids or adults who were fans, was considered "Buck Rogers stuff" or Tom Swift-like formularized pulp that talked down to its readers, and out of the blue, it seems, she took a different approach.

LM: What I've been told by people working in the industry in those days as publishers is that science fiction had a very down-market reputation, associated with pulp magazines that you might buy at cigar stores, and children's librarians and people who gave awards, saw their purpose as elevating children's books to literature and they wanted to avoid association with anything like that. And it may also be that they were just uncomfortable about science because it was just something that they didn't know a

Madeleine L'Engle continued

lot about. I wouldn't be surprised if that was an element in the resistance to science fiction. There was one editor at Scribner, Alice Dalgliesh, who bucked the trend and published some of Robert Heinlein's books, so there was some precedence for science fiction for adults being published by mainstream houses. But L'Engle was always trying to put things together that other people didn't think were connected, and she was very interested in science and religion. When she was thinking about writing *A Wrinkle in Time* she was reading about Einstein and feeling alienated from the church and religion, because she had spent 10 years with her family kind of in exile in this small town in Connecticut where there was no Episcopal church, which was the church she had grown up with. As a default, she had become associated with a local Congregationalist church and became immersed in that, but I don't think she ever really took to it, and started looking to science as another source of knowledge and wisdom. And then it somehow occurred to her that science and religion were not necessarily incompatible with each other. And she made it an intellectual and, I guess you could say, spiritual challenge to herself to reconcile those two, and she did that in *A Wrinkle in Time* for the first time.



WM: She turned one book into several, some not as well known. But do you feel that by extending her storylines so far that she diluted her style or her ideas?

LM: I think it did, and I don't really love her other books as much. I feel she could have done what she wanted to do with just one book and that's why I like *A Wrinkle in Time* so much. There's no other one book that I would put on that same level. At the same time, you have to admire her; in *A Wrinkle in Time* she was looking at the cosmos and in the second book [*A Wind in the Door,* 1972] she was looking into what you could call the "microverse," going into the cellular or atomic level, saying that these things are parallel universes and basically indistinguishable from each other. In *Many Waters* she's rewriting Noah and going back into Biblical times, so she was kind of trying everything. [Chuckles.] There is an overarching structure in the choices she made. She loved music —Bach was her favorite composer—and you can kind of see her thinking the same way, with different variations on a theme, seeing what can be done with the next one. She was good at dialogue, and her acting career at the beginning of her professional life served her well in that regard with the result that when you read anything she writes involving characters, the characters feel present on the page. And that's not true for every writer. And you become absorbed in the world of her stories as a result of that, I think it's one the most compelling things about her as a writer. And it carried over into her private life because unlike many writers at the time, she went out and met her readers, giving public talks, leading intimate workshops, and corresponding with them, she had a voluminous correspondence for many years. So in a way she was always engaging in dialogue with the people who were readers. And that characteristic of hers on the page is palpable, I think.

WM: For the recent boxed set, published by Library of America, of all her Kairos novels, which you edited and made notes for—did they approach you?

LM: Yes, there's an editor there named Max Rudin, who I knew through some other associations, and they had about reached the point where they had published all the canonical works of American literature back to Hawthorne and Melville and so on. [The project] was based on their entrenched model, the idea that there should be definitive editions of the classic works, and they were at the point where they thought, what's next for us? And they looked at what were considered some undervalued genres. There's a collection of great sports writing, for instance. They've gone into other genre writing like science fiction and so on. They're a wonderful group of people, scholarly and committed to what they are doing. Working with them was really a joy. So they recognized that children's literature was an underappreciated genre and were looking for ways to change that. A few years ago they had published the Little House on the Prairie books and I think they saw the L'Engle books as their next venture into that area.

WM: How long did it take?

LM: [Laughs] I worked on it for about a year. I already had some knowledge of her at the start. She was widely read herself. Like the three guardian angels in *A Wrinkle in Time*, her conversation was peppered with allusions to literature and she had a great memory for that and it found its way into her fiction writing. Sometimes she would just work an allusion in; after a while, when I didn't recognize an allusion I had the feeling I had come to one. Thanks in large part to the Internet I was able to track those kinds of things down. And she was a fiction writer, so sometimes she stayed true to things of her story, and other times she might put a fictional planet in a real galaxy. There was a lot of mixing matching and that

Madeleine L'Engle continued

became a big puzzle that I wanted to unravel—categories of research I wanted to get involved in.

WM: I always thought that if she had a rival or a precursor in her style it would have been C. S. Lewis.

LM: She certainly had read him and been influenced. I've also read that writers' papers often go to a place where an enterprising curator makes the invitation. At the time she gave a portion to Wheaton, she felt very on the outs with Smith, for various reasons. She'd had a very complicated experience as a student there; she was very independent minded and she felt at times that she was thwarted by the rules and regulations of the school. It was a mixed experience. And also she was a creature of whim, and various other drafts of her books have gone to the University of Southern Mississippi, with a collection of related materials. And it was because she was down there once, they gave her an award, and she wanted to give something back. So things are scattered, but I think her granddaughter, who runs the estate, still has some really significant items.

WM: You used some of these materials to restore some passages that had been deleted.

LM: She loved to revise. And a lot of young writers and beginning writers don't want to get into that a lot. Her editors could get overwhelmed sometimes by the numbers of revisions she would send in for a book or a chapter, so it became difficult to disentangle these and determine what was the final version. Some of the passages show her honing the story of *Wrinkle*; there were episodes on that evil planet Camazotz where a character was introduced—a zombie-like guide was taking over as the one who would show Meg and Calvin around and at a certain point Madeleine decided he wasn't needed and removed him from the narrative and had Charles conduct the tour. I think the purpose for that change was to keep the focus on the family and their relationship to the story. So it makes sense that she would make that choice, but before she did she was kind of going off in a more sci-fi direction and wanting to elaborate the world of Camazotz in greater detail. She probably has fun creating that character because he was so creepy. And in the end you actually see his demise because he gets done in by some of his cohorts for having done some little thing wrong, and they put him in a machine like a shredder. [Laughing] You see him going through the door knowing he'll never come out again.
WM: Kids would love that today.

LM: [Laughs] Yeah. You have to realize *A Wrinkle in Time* was a work of the Cold War era. The father was off to advise the President, on a secret mission, things like that. Some of the sequels suggested nuclear annihilation. The granddaughter Charlotte, I think, suggested to me that one of the reasons their family moved from New York was to be farther from the epicenter of a nuclear attack. I don't know if it's true or not, but it entered into her thinking.

WM: From a publishing standpoint, it seems that even as unique and different as her books are, and even difficult or controversial for some, she stuck with a publisher, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, or they stuck with her.

LM: It wasn't as unusual then as it is now. Writers were often identified with one publisher. That was more the norm in those days. Then, too, she won a big prize early in her career and that cemented their relationship. She was a very social being and became very good friends with Roger Straus, one of the owners of the company, and he would not have continued publishing her if he was losing money from her. I interviewed some of the people at Farrar, Straus who worked in publicity and promotion and she was such a public figure and out on the road so much of the time, they said they often felt they were working for her, because she was such a big part of the company.

WM: What should aspiring writers today get out of her and her work?

LM: She taught a lot of writing workshops, and influenced many young writers coming up in the field. Her advice was always that everyone has a story to tell, you have to look inward to find it. Which may sound like hackneyed advice except for the fact that the way publishing has evolved over the last 50 years it's become much more market driven and publishers like Scholastic have made an art of anticipating trends and then creating projects to capitalize on those trends. She was in the camp of following your inner inspiration. She also came along at a time before SCBWI [Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators], when there wasn't an established resource for an unpublished writer to turn to for guidance and advice on how to think about one's work. And she more than anyone of her generation set out to be that go-to source for inspiration and guidance. She showed a lot of daring in mixing of genres in various ways and not settling into a routine. I think that's a lesson people can learn from her career.

10 Ways to Overcome Your Fear of the Blank Page

by Pat Miller

Alone with your blinking cursor or blank page, it's easy to feel stalled. You want to produce your best writing, but fear of failure may keep you from even beginning.

Actor Will Smith tells a story about when his father asked him and his brother to build a brick wall when they were teens. The job seemed overwhelming. The way he chose to approach the wall can speak to us writers. "You don't think about building the best brick wall ever built. Instead you think, 'I am going to lay this one brick the best way I can.' You do the same for each brick, and eventually you have the wall."

Here are ten ways to lay the bricks of your manuscript:

1 Surrender perfectionism. When we say "I can't write because it won't be perfect," our self-defeating subtext is, "I am capable of perfection." One comfort of writing is that revision is not only possible, it's a requirement. Get the words down in any form. Improvement will come later.

2 Take small steps. When frozen into inactivity and negative thinking, it's important that you take action, even a small one. Put some words down. Do a bit of research. Read a mentor text.

Anne Lamott says it best. I have her words framed on my writing desk: *"When I panic about what to write, I go back to trying to breathe, slowly and calmly, and I finally notice the one-inch picture frame that I put on my desk to remind me that all I have to do is to write down as much as I can see through a one-inch picture frame."* --from Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life. http://tinyurl.com/lamott-bird

3 Create a habit. Stephen Guise, in *Mini Habits: Smaller Habits, Bigger Results* (http://tinyurl.com/guise-habit), reveals the secret for overcoming procrastination. Create a goal so small that your inner perfectionist can find no fault with it. For Guise, it was one push-up a day. Do the push-up. Check the box. Celebrate. Sure, he could do more, and he often did, but one push-up was the goal. The habit of action is more important than what's created at first. Action will lead to results. My daily writing goal is 10 minutes. Then I get a gold sticker on the calendar!

4 Exercise. We've got to spend time in our chair, but not for too long. I use a simple Tomato Timer, http://tomato-timer.com. A click sets it for 25 minutes. Proceed with work until it rings. Then click "short break." Get up and move, even if just to empty the dishwasher. Or use the desk stretches from WebMD, http://tinyurl.com/stretchies. Then return to your work, eager and refreshed.

5 Choose your optimal time. When's your most creative time? Carve your 10 minutes from that time. Leave a paragraph unfinished at the end of each writing session. It kick starts momentum for the next session.

6 Work when you don't feel like it. On his way to the South Pole, Capt. Robert Scott required his men to travel as far as possible on good days and rest on bad days. Roald Amundsen required his men to travel 20 miles every day, no matter the weather, then stop. Amundsen reached the Pole five weeks ahead. Be faithful to small time periods of daily writing no matter your feelings.

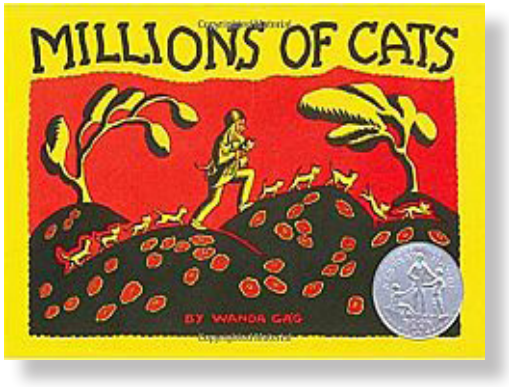
10 Ways continued

7 **Be realistic.** The path of progress looks more like a tangle of spaghetti than a straight arrow. Bryan Harris, online entrepreneur, says, "The first time you do something, it takes 100 times longer. Know that. Understand it. Lean into it."

8 **Don't self-limit yourself.** An invisible fence keeps our dog in the yard. An underground wire sends a mild shock to his collar if he crosses it. After two shocks, he didn't cross again. That was five years ago. He hasn't worn the collar for years, so he could easily cross the line without a shock. But his memory limits himself to the yard. We do something similar when we tell ourselves. "I can't write nonfiction" or "I can't write while my children are young." Is your perceived "shock" keeping you from crossing into an opportunity?

9 **Don't be afraid of failure… expect it!** Watch a toddler try to walk. It can't be done without lots of falling and getting back up. The same thing will be true of you as you improve your craft. Take the advice of writer Joseph Michael, "Reframe the way you view failure by simply thinking of it as experimenting."

10 **Gather ideas constantly.** In *Millions of Cats*, Wanda Gag wrote about an old man who went out to find a kitten for his wife. He found a cute little kitten and headed home. Then he found another and picked it up. By the time he arrived home, he had hundreds of cats, thousands of cats, millions and billions and trillions of cats. Ideas are just as readily available.



Challenge yourself to keep an idea notebook handy. I've recently gotten ideas from a TV commercial, a newspaper article, something my granddaughter said, and from an offhand remark made by a conference speaker. Tara Lazar's *StoryStorm* provides a motivational post each day in January while encouraging you to simply come up with a single idea per day for one month. You can access it (and previous years) at **https://taralazar.com/piboidmo**.

It's good to remember what Henry Ford said, "*Whether you think you can do something or think you can't… you're right.*"

This is the sign I have hanging near my writing desk. When all else fails, type or write this mantra until you have primed the creative pump and are ready to write something else. You can do it!

Author Channels Faith Into Debut Picture Book

interview by Jane McBride

Sheri Carmon's debut picture book *When God Made Color* (WhiteSpark Publishing, 2019) entered the publishing world with a splash of … what else … color. Please join me in learning more about Sheri and how she came to write this book full of vivid imagery, gentle prose, and a theme that resonates within the heart.

Jane McBride: What was your purpose in writing *When God Made Color?*

Sheri Carmon: There are three main messages woven into *When God Made Color:*

1. A Creation worldview is presented.
2. The joyful and loving nature of God is expressed.
3. Ethnic Diversity: God takes great delight in all ethnicities and loves them all equally.

I wanted children to experience the JOYFUL side of God. The God who loves them with an everlasting love and takes great delight in each of them as His special creation. I wanted to encourage children (and the adults that surround them) to observe that God truly does not have a favorite color… He made fish, bugs, birds and kids in many different combinations and shades. ALL colors of kids are wonderful!

JM: What was your process?

SC: The process was organic and slow, like the changing of a forest over many years. The idea for the book began 29 years ago when my daughter (about three years old at the time), was sitting at the kitchen counter, using a pencil to draw a picture. She had drawn an oval (lying on its side) with two pin dot eyes and a wide, lazy, wonderful smile. (There were no arms or body.) From the head came two very long, wavy, spaghetti legs with small ovals (the feet) at the end of each pencil line. I asked her to tell me about her drawing and she said, "It's God, dancing across the world." That treasured moment, of seeing our joyful God, through the eyes of a child, was the beginning of the picture book *When God Made Color*.

JM: What was your submission process?

SC: I am a member of Front Range Christian Fiction Writers. One of our well-published group members belongs to American Christian Fiction Writers (ACFW). She told me that a publisher in Maryland, WhiteFire Publishing had just announced that they were developing a young reader's division, WhiteSpark Publishing. ACFW had notified members that WhiteFire had put out a call for submissions for children's books. I submitted *When God Made Color* to be considered for the launch of their new line. After many months of waiting, the news came that When God Made Color was the pub-board's favorite submission and they would like to contract it. Needless to say, we were so thankful and delighted.

JM: What did you learn in negotiating/navigating your first contract?

SC: The cover letter, book proposal, hook line, blurb, elevator pitch, and finally the contracts are challenging (actually daunting for the first-time author) and it takes a team to deliver a live book. I learned that without the

Sheri Carmon continued

talent, teaching, wisdom, experience, kindness, generosity, encouragement and help of friends and family, my picture book would not have made it into publication.

JM: What would you tell aspiring picture book writers?

SC: The picture book, a child's first book, is like the first flower of spring, radiant as it blooms surrounded by snow; it is a marvel. A picture book is a gift of the author's heart, given to a precious child, with wonder in their eyes. Picture books are freely given…not written to be bestselling money-makers for the publisher or for the author. The riches are stored in the heart of a child…and someday perhaps they will pass those riches on to the next generation of children. Focus on your message. For the maxim is true: "When the HEART speaks…the heart hears." As you speak from your heart, the child's heart will hear your voice and your message.

JM: What is the best thing you have done thus far to promote your book?

SC: This may surprise you…I love email communication/promotion and have had great success with it. I write a personal note with each email, add a link to a colorful 1-minute video about the picture book, and include a large illustration: "God had fun when God made fish." The fine art paintings created for *When God Made Color* are exquisite, vivid, detailed and overwhelmingly beautiful. The paintings were created by Silver Bluebird Studios and took over a year to complete, because they had many other fine art projects in process at the same time. The artist selected gouache, a difficult-to-use artistic pigment that dries to a matte finish and transfers vividly into print. Only this ancient opaque paint would bring forth the needed depth of color to communicate God's gloriousness as expressed in Creation. A core value for the artist is "gloriousness" and you will feel her joy in each of the paintings.

JM: What are your writing plans in the future? Do you plan to write other books in the same vein?

SC: My work-in-progress is *Cookies from God: Bite-size Devotions for Kids*. Each day's devotion features a tiny-tale (the cookie), two supporting Bible verses, a "let's talk about it" section that connects the Bible verses to the tiny-tale, and a child's prayer that references the theme of the devotion. So often authors are told about the power of story. And I've found it to be true…when the pastor tells a story, I can remember his teaching. As little kids, we would all scooch up to sit close to the teacher to see and hear 'the story'. We love stories! A compelling story makes a faith concept easier to remember. The master storyteller, our Lord Jesus, speaks powerfully to us through parables. And across the years, I've noticed that those parables have come to my mind with the most perfect timing. My goal in writing *Cookies from God* is to package Biblical concepts for children, and weave them together in intriguing, yet everyday-sort-of-stories, that the kids will relate to and remember.

JM: What tips can you give for the querying process?

SC: My best tip: scan the publishing horizon for publishers and/or agents who are actively looking for the kind of books you write. You may be tempted to knock and continue knocking on the doors of the biggest publishers, but it's okay to start small, learn, work hard and grow… and ask God to multiply the loaves and the fishes.

JM: Do you have an agent? If not, do you plan to get one in the future?

SC: I do not have an agent. To the best of my knowledge there are not many literary agents that have a strong interest in representing children's Christian picture books. Picture books are very expensive to print as each page is full color. In addition, profits tend to be low which might account for some of the lack of interest. I am, however, interested in working with an agent for my (nonfiction) devotional book.