


Children's Book Insider

The Children's Writing Monthly  February 2022

MASTERING THE ART OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION



ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE
SUBMISSION OPPORTUNITY:

THE LITTLE PRESS

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At Presstime:

Publisher Seeks Creative Fiction, Nonfiction and Activity Books for K-5

The Innovation Press is an independent publisher that strives to produce memorable children's books that inspire learning, enliven creative thinking, and spark imaginations. They also provide thousands of their award-winning titles to schools and libraries in need each year. At this time, the publisher is looking for fiction, nonfiction, and hybrid texts that blend elements of both for PreK-5th grade readers. Especially interested in humor and creative or engaging presentations that have a unique approach to the topic. Actively seeking #OwnVoices submissions. To submit a book proposal for fiction, nonfiction or a hybrid of the two, paste the following into an email: a synopsis of your book, the first 10 pages, a brief author biography.

Also seeking activity book submissions should inspire children's creativity and/or learning, particularly those that strengthen STEM skills, promote child-led learning, and/or promote open-ended play. Submissions should be written by a single author. Most interested in activity book authors that have a strong blogging platform (a general rule of thumb is at least 300,000 pageviews a month and 10,000 followers on Facebook or Instagram and Pinterest). Potential authors should have advanced degrees and/or several years of experience in their field. To submit an activity book proposal, please include the following in an email a detailed outline of your book (please note which material has previously appeared on your blog in some way), the full introduction and one full chapter (if you are planning a full-color book, at least one set of photos to accompany part or all of the full chapter you are submitting), a brief biography detailing your experience and any degrees you have, any statistics on your blog platform (pageviews, social media numbers, etc).

All submissions should be sent to submissions@theinnovationpress.com. Responds in four weeks if interested. To see current Innovation Press titles, go to www.theinnovationpress.com/our-books

Publisher Seeks Children's and YA Titles About US Hispanic Culture

Piñata Books is the children's imprint of Arte Público Press', an independent publisher at the University of Houston that seeks to authentically and realistically portray themes, characters and customs unique to US Hispanic culture. Established in 1979, Arte Público Press is the oldest and largest Hispanic publisher of contemporary and historical literature written by US Hispanics: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans and others. Piñata Books publishes about 10 titles a year, many with bilingual texts (English/Spanish).

Seeking fiction and nonfiction picture books with themes of contemporary Hispanic culture or history; middle grade fiction (any genre), biography or history that ties in with the publisher's focus; and young adult fiction, biography, history, social issues, or short story collections with Hispanic focus. To see current titles, go to artepublicopress.com/browse-and-order-books/, click on the "View Products By" tab and scroll down to choose an age group of Piñata Books. All manuscripts must be submitted as a PDF via the online Manuscript Submission Form at artepublicopress.com/manuscript-submission-form. Responds in 3-6 months.

Publisher Seeks Picture Books, Activity Books on Mindfulness, Compassion and Meditation

Shambhala Publications, an independent, family-owned publisher founded in 1969 and distributed by Penguin Random House, creates books that contribute to the development of a thoughtful, kindhearted, and contemplative society. Its children's book imprint, *Bala Kids*, is dedicated to encouraging the values of wisdom and compassion for children of all ages with books on Buddhism, meditation, yoga, and mindfulness. Looking for picture books and activity books for children ages 0-8 in the categories above. Email a cover letter that includes a short author biography and book summary. Attach the entire manuscript as a .doc file, and 2-3 JPEG illustrations if you are an author/illustrator. Send to Submissions Editor, balakids@shambhala.com, with the subject line "Bala Kids Submission." Responds within four months. Accepts simultaneous submissions if noted in the cover letter. Study the current Bala Kids list at www.shambhala.com/bala-kids before submitting.

Two Agents Accepting Submissions

Regina A. Bernard-Carreno is a Literary Manager with Martin Literary Management (www.martinlit.com), representing writers for adults and children. In children's book submissions, she's seeking:

Picture Books that deal with a little magical realism, immigrant stories, bilingual picture books, and stories that deal with children and their relationship to animals, earth, and the environment. She'd love to see folktales from a wide variety of places reimaged, especially from authors-illustrators.

Chapter Books and Middle Grade Novels dealing especially with adventures, solving mysteries, and facing/overcoming hardships and developing friendships.

Graphic Novels for Middle Grade, Young Adult, and Adult readers. She'd love to see more writers of color telling stories of MG & YA and has her eye out for BIPOC creators in this genre.

Young Adult interests include rom coms of all kinds, complete with heartbreak, friendships, and triumph.

Send queries to Regina@MartinLit.com In the Subject line of your email, write "QUERY" followed by the title of your work. In your email, provide the text of your query letter (pitch/synopsis + short bio). Also include publisher submission history and previous publishing credits, if applicable. If you receive a pass, you are welcome to query a different MLM agent.

Tia Ikemoto is a Literary Assistant at ICM Partners (www.icmpartners.com) She's building her list and looking for middle grade, young adult, adult fiction and select nonfiction that speaks to a wide audience. In **Middle Grade** she wants contemporary, historical, or fantasy that feels like an instant classic or takes the reader on a voice-driven adventure.

Also seeking **Young Adult** contemporary fiction that captures the unique stage of life of its readers, cinematic commercial storylines, thrillers, high concept and grounded YA fantasy. Some other interests: fiction or nonfiction that explores parasocial relationships, fandoms, fame, and internet culture/citizenship. Adult or children's fiction centered around Japanese American internment, and life after.

Email your query and first 10 pages of the manuscript pasted into the body of the email to tia.ikemoto@icmpartners.com

Matthew C. Winner

Connects Authors, Kids and Ideas Through Empowering Podcasts

interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

Matthew C. Winner is the Head of Podcasts at [A Kid's Company About](#). In this role, Matthew leads the company in creating a podcast network dedicated to helping children and their grownups, have honest conversations about challenging, empowering, and important topics. Each show is hosted by individuals from diverse backgrounds who know their topic on a personal level. Before this, Matthew worked in education for over 15 years, first briefly in the elementary school classroom and then as an elementary school librarian. Matthew hosted The Children's Book Podcast from 2013-2021, and now hosts Worth Noting and A Kids Book About: The Podcast, named one of Apple Podcasts Best of 2021. Matthew resides with his family in Ellicott City, Maryland.

SHARON BLUMBERG: What life experiences led you to your exciting career now involving children and picture books?

MATTHEW WINNER: I've always been drawn to working with children. They speak a familiar language and come from a position of earnestness and sincerity that I find comforting. They're also brilliant. Each and every one of them. Spending time in close proximity to kids has helped me shed presuppositions, listen more closely, and walk with more awareness of the impact of my words and actions. Plus, they are a constant source of inspiration.



When I look back over my 15+ years in education, teaching, for me, seemed inevitable. I learned constantly by listening and looking and, most importantly, by failing. I would try out new things. They would not go as planned. But I knew if my failed attempts engaged kids even for just a moment, there was something there worth pursuing.

My time in the classroom led, not long after, to a career in the elementary school library. And my time in the library, quite naturally, led to a life grown out from books and stories and the ability to see ourselves in the written words and shared experiences of others.

Many podcasts and book reviews and picture book drafts later, I was teaching in a private school and the pandemic had just sent us all to teaching and learning remotely. That October I was teaching over Zoom and holding bedtime story times regularly for our school community, but I was also regularly publishing episodes of The Children's Book Podcast and interviewing authors and illustrators. I spoke with Jelani Memory, author of *A Kids Book About Racism* and CEO of A Kids Company About (formerly A Kids Book About). He shared his dream of building a one-of-a-kind kids podcast network and said he'd love for me to be at the helm. In November of 2020 we began talking formally about the possibility of me joining the company full time, and in December

Matthew C. Winner ..continued

he made an offer of what I knew was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Our school went on winter break at the end of December and I began my full time position of Head of Podcasts at A Kids Company About.

SB: What are the qualities of a good read-aloud book?

MW: There are a great number of qualities that make for a good read-aloud book, and the most important ones are ineffable, if not subjective to the reader who's reading the story.

But of the nameable traits, I'd include that a good read aloud book...

...invites us to participate.
 ...has a clear voice.
 ...builds on predictability.
 ...doesn't waste words.
 ...rhymes perfectly (if it rhymes at all).
 and
 ...reads well on repeat.

SB: From your experience as a librarian, what are the elements of picture books that children most respond to at storytime?

MW: If you're reading in front of a class, I think it's impossible to describe a strong read aloud selection without first acknowledging the role of a librarian who reads aloud really well. Picture books are dramas. You don't need to put on silly voices or anything, but you do need to allow yourself along with the readers to be swept into the performance of the book. Allowing time for the pictures to be explored and time for the kids to be drawn in is something, I think, that often gets overlooked or rushed. Inviting kids to react, engage, and participate is also part of the magic.

But the book itself? It needs to use exactly the right words (and the right amount of words) to tell the story it's trying to tell. This is what makes picture books so hard to write, but it's also what makes good picture books stand



out from the rest.

SB: As a former elementary school teacher and elementary school librarian, what led you to hosting The Children's Book Podcast?

MW: I've been listening to podcasts pretty regularly since around 2010. I've always been a slow reader, so it's not surprising to me that the audio

medium would have such strong appeal.

In 2013 I was a recipient of *Library Journal's* "Mover & Shaker" award, among several other school, public, and academic librarians. While attending the reception in Chicago at the American Library Association's annual conference, a colleague asked me, "So, what's next?". I had been recognized for my incorporation of video games and gamification into the library program. I responded that I loved listening to podcasts, but can't seem to find any great shows about kidlit that bring the intimacy of post-conference hotel bar hangouts with friends while also talking enthusiastically with book makers about their craft and their stories.



To be honest, it was basically what was happening in the room as he asked me. I loved being in that space and talking so fluidly about books we loved and prose that we couldn't forget and unparalleled craft the likes that no kid can resist.

"So, when are you gonna start?" he asked me. And I did.

I released the first episode of The Children's Book Podcast (formerly All The Wonders and Let's Get Busy). That began a show I would host for over 8 years with nearly 800 interviews in its time.



I continued teaching while also interviewing authors and making the show in the evenings. My last day of teaching was in late December, 2020. The last episode of The Children's Book Podcast soon followed. The show had

Matthew C. Winner ..continued

run its course and I felt it was time for me to do different things.

I'm grateful for all that The Children's Book Podcast brought me and all of the amazing folks it brought into my life and the life of my family.

SB: What awards and recognitions hold the most meaning to you and why?

MW: 2013 was a big year. I was named a *Library Journal* "Mover & Shaker", a colleague and I were recognized for a collaborative project at the International Society of Technology in Education (ISTE)'s annual conference, and I was invited to the White House as part of the Champions of Change program. It was amazing to be the first school librarian honored by the program and it was super cool to be on President Obama's Christmas card list for the remaining years he spent in office.

But one of the most amazing moments of recognition came this November when Apple Podcasts named [A Kids Book About: The Podcast](#) as one of its Best of 2021.

[A Kids Book About: The Podcast](#) was the first show that launched on our podcast network and it's the show that I host. Apple Podcasts recognized the show "for taking a thoughtful, friendly, and considered approach to explaining the big things in life — fear, failure, and divorce, for instance — but also activism, sharing, and money, to kids." And, as if that wasn't enough, A Kids Book About: The Podcast is the first kids podcast to ever be recognized in the Apple Podcasts Best of the Year lists.

Even so, the greatest praise and words of affirmation I've ever received have come from my students. I've never doubted their sincerity. I've never forgotten their words.

SB: Can you tell us a bit about the focus and mission of A Kids Company About? How does this focus/mission



influence the podcasts you oversee?

MW: Our focus at A Kids Company About is to empower kids through story. Our content lives squarely in the nonfiction space, and frankly that's the space where I think it's most possible to impact children and help them to better understand their world and the things in it. We make books and board books and classes and podcasts and medita-

tions. And every single thing we make is made to help kids have conversations, to help them ask big questions, and help them find answers that talk up to them without leaving them behind in grownup jargon.

In each of our (currently) nine unique podcasts, as well as in our meditations on the A Kids Co app, our hosts seek to engage children in the things they care about most, whether that be emotions or activism, climate justice or peer advice.



I regularly feel and am affirmed that all of my experiences working with and alongside children so far have led me to this place and this role at A Kids Company About. It's an incredible privilege that I do not take lightly, making content for kids. But they are worth it and I will continue

to strive to do right by kids all around the globe with each new audio project we bring into the world.

SB: Regarding your podcast topics, is there a topic you were reluctant to cover, but it turned out great? Was there a topic that had a great impact on listeners?

MW: One particularly challenging interview I had on A Kids Book About: [The podcast was on the topic of sexual abuse](#) with A Kids Book About Sexual Abuse author Evelyn Yang. I am a victim of sexual abuse. I deliberately use the word "victim" because, to me, it holds more power over my abuser than the word "survivor" does. My



Matthew C. Winner ..continued

childhood did not survive my abuser. I still witness the effects of his abuse on me long, long after and far into adulthood.

We talk about a lot of tough topics on the show, but this one was a topic that needed a lot of bravery to bring into the world. I am proud of what we accomplished through that episode and that I was able to take back some of my abuser's power in the process.

It's hard to know what topics are having the greatest impact on listeners because it's so rare that podcasters ever get to hear from their listeners. And even more so if the listeners are kids.

But I am so, so proud of the feedback we've received on shows like [Everyday Feels: A Kids Podcast About Emotions](#), and [Is That True?: A Kids Podcast About Facts](#), and [The Activators!: A Kids Podcast About Activism](#), whose host is the most amazing 8-year-old who continues to impress and inspire me every moment I work with him! It's wonderful to be able to pass the mic, as it were, to such talented individuals who are sharing their passions, ideas, and convictions with the world.

SB: As head of your podcasts, what do you look for in both hosts and guests? For authors who are looking to get booked on podcasts, can you give a few tips on how to be a good interview subject, or how to present oneself to a podcast producer as a possible guest?

MW: Our hosts come from a variety of backgrounds and there's really no one rule that I look for. However, there are skills that hosts can bring into a show that serve them time and time again. These skills include knowing how to engage children, being a content expert, experience with articulating ideas and information, and a readiness to tap into wonder.

For guests, I trust my hosts to find people they want to talk to and also people who have interesting things to say.



In the case of *A Kids Book About: The Podcast*, I interview our authors of our 60+ and growing catalog of titles. And because each of our books are written from a lived experience, I find that every guest brings so much into the conversation just by being themselves.

For folks looking to get booked on a podcast, I think some of the best advice I can give is to start by being a fan. Podcasters (and bloggers and reviewers and Instagrammers and... and... and...) get a lot of requests and I, personally, tried to read every book that came across my desk. Sometimes it's not the right story. Sometimes the host has certain goals and values that drive their decisions (ie. representation). And sometimes it just feels like the person reaching out only wants a favor.

It always meant the most to me to be seen by the person making the request. Do they know my show? Have they listened to past episodes? Are they really the right fit for the show? Why *this* book? Why *this* interview? What might my listeners get out of it? And will you help to promote the episode once it launches?

I guess it really comes down to being a good human, treating the potential host the way you'd like to be treated, and knowing that if your book is not selected or you don't get an interview, it's not personal.

Trust me when I say it's better to wait and to get one interview with someone who really sees, understands, and "gets" your work than it is to book a handful of shows and walking away feeling like the host didn't even crack the cover.

SB: Is there anything else you would like to add, that I have not asked you?

MW: You didn't ask me if I regret leaving teaching. The answer, of course, is no. The thing I would regret is not getting to work with kids again. As long as I'm in their world, there's no other place I'd rather be.



NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Make It Work For You

by Jane McBride

Did you know that words make up only a small part of communication? As writers, we struggle to make our dialogue interesting, exciting, using it to advance the story and reveal characterization. But non-verbal communication is just, if not more, important as the words we give our characters to say.

Following are some forms of non-verbal communication:

Facial expressions. Did you know that the Secret Service trains its agents to pick up on micro-expressions? These are the small tells or giveaways that let agents know if someone is lying or hiding something. What do you do when you're listening to someone whose conversation bores you to tears? You probably don't say, "Sam, shut up. I can't stand listening to you a second longer," even though you may long to do so. But you may, either consciously or unconsciously, expose your boredom by rolling your eyes. Eye-rolling can also convey disbelief or reveal when someone thinks the person he's talking to is lying. Blinking can be another tell that someone is lying. What about if you are worried about something but don't want to tell others that you're worried? You may furrow your brow. Let's put facial expressions to work in a passage of dialogue. The set-up is Jared, age ten, trying to soothe his sister Penny, age seven, as she worries over their parents who are talking about divorce.

"No way are Mom and Dad getting divorced, Pen," Jared said. He wanted to reach up to smooth away the worry lines that he could feel working their way across his forehead. He couldn't do that, so he pretended that his face was a mask that didn't show anything. If he pretended hard enough, maybe he could make it happen.

Penny rolled her eyes. She wasn't buying it. "I'm not a little kid anymore," she said. "You don't have to protect me."

Body movement. Sometimes referred to as kinesics,

body movements include posture and gestures, like toe tapping or using the hands excessively to make a point. Have you ever held a conversation with someone who continually taps her nails against a table? It can be beyond annoying. What is the individual saying by the incessant tapping? That she's bored? Or maybe she is impatient, waiting for you to finish your part of the conversation. Here's an example of a fourteen-year-old girl using finger-tapping to let her mother know just how much she resented being forced to attend church on Sunday morning, when she could be sleeping in.

Cynthia didn't want to be at church. In fact she'd rather be anywhere else than listening to the pastor drone on and on about sin. Cynthia felt her eyes closing. To keep herself awake, she started tapping out a beat on the hymnal with her nails.

Her mother frowned at her.

Cynthia didn't frown back. Instead she upped her finger tapping, increasing the tempo. The faster she went, the better she felt. Only when the woman sitting in the pew in front of her turned around did Cynthia stop.

Cynthia bent her head and smiled, knowing she's made her point.

Space. We hear a lot about social distancing these days, but social distancing can mean more than just trying to maintain a healthy distance between people concerned about transmitting or catching COVID or other diseases. Leaning forward suggests that you're interested in your partner's words where leaning back indicates that you're probably not paying much, if any, attention. When two individuals are having a heated debate while standing, they may use space as a way to convey disapproval, taking a step or two away from the other. Below is an example of two teenage girls, each with her own agenda, each unwilling to put their thoughts and feelings into words.

Non-Verbal Communication...continued

Wendy leaned away from her friend, putting as much space between them as possible. While Jennifer went on and on about her new dress for the winter formal and how much it cost and how beautiful she'd look in it, Wendy pretended she was tucked in bed reading the new book she'd just downloaded on her Kindle.

Wendy is telling her friend that she's bored to tears. If Jennifer was more perceptive, she would pick up on it. Or maybe Jennifer does pick up on the cue. The way Jennifer reacts shows us a lot about her character.

Jennifer bent forward, tilting her head toward Wendy until their foreheads almost touched. Wendy swallowed and took a step back. "What's wrong with you?" Jennifer said. "Aren't you listening to me?"

Voice. We're not talking the words used but, rather, the tone, inflection, rate of speech, and pitch of a voice.

Maggie's words sped up as she told her mother about where she'd been last night. If she bombarded her mother with enough insignificant details, maybe her mother wouldn't hear the lie in the words. Maggie's explanation tumbled out of her, like a snowball rolling downhill, her voice rising as it picked up momentum.

Maggie is doing her best to disguise the fact that she's lying to her mother. The funny/sad thing is that the faster she talks, the more she convinces her mother that she is, indeed, lying.

Eye contact. Here, we are not talking about rolling one's eyes or blinking. Instead, we're focusing on how individuals use eye contact to let each other know what they're feeling. Let's take a look at seventeen-year-old Jonah and his worried mother who is doing her best to tell him of the dangers of unprotected sex. Here, we are in the mother's point-of-view.

Jonah looked up at the ceiling, apparently fascinated by the textured pattern. He then looked down at his feet, equally fascinated by his shoelaces. The more he refused to look at her, the harder she drilled her gaze in to his.

Jonah's mother is determined that he would listen to her. She sees that as his meeting her eyes. She'd make him do it by sheer force of will.

Clothing. Did you know that clothing choice is a form of communication? In the example of Cynthia, who is being forced by her mother to attend church, Cynthia's manner of dress shows exactly what she thinks of the whole thing.

Cynthia stopped tapping her nails against the hymnal. But her mother hadn't silenced her. The jeans, with their fashionable holes at the knees and thighs, paired with the slouchy t-shirt, told everyone just what she thought of attending church. And what she thought of her mother.

Cynthia has made her statement. Even if she'd kept her hands folded reverently in her lap and had refrained from tapping her nails against the hymnal, everyone at church understood her feelings simply by looking at her clothes. Cynthia is sly enough to adhere to her mother's strictures without saying a word.

Here's another dress statement:

Charlotte sighed and opened her closet. Her date would be here in ten minutes. Charlotte glared at her clothes, recalling how excited her mother had been when she announced that she'd arranged for Charlotte to go out with Brian. A set-up! What year did her mother think they were living in?

Charlotte pulled on her oldest pants, the ones so out of style that she wondered why they were still in her closet. Then she added a prim blouse that looked ridiculous with the pants. She ran her fingers through her hair and decided to pass on the make-up. She briefly considered brushing her teeth, and then changed her mind. Breath from her lunch burrito would make exactly the impression she was going for.

Just as Cynthia had done, Charlotte used her clothes as a weapon. Without saying anything, she let her mother know what she thought of being set up on a date. What's more, she'd let the boy know the same.

IN CONCLUSION

You will no doubt find other ways to use non-verbal communication to enhance dialogue and to bring your characters more fully to life. Combine a few of these techniques and see what you can come up with!

Michele McAvoy

Owner/Publisher



interview by Lynne Marie

The Little Press is an independent publisher that works hard to bring new talent and new voices to kidlit. Their goal is to publish books that “offer windows, mirrors, doors, escape hatches, trampolines and bungee cords” to children, because life, even for the young, is full of twists and turns. The Little Press has four imprints: The Little Press (picture books), Blue Bronco Books, Jr. (early readers and chapter books), Blue Bronco Books (middle grade novels), and Bless This Press (picture books through middle grade with Christian themes).

Michele herself is an attorney and award-winning children’s book author. Her love for children’s books and wanting to always be a child in some way inspired her to open her small press. She is also the creator and facilitator of the popular kidlit podcast, My Messy Muse and runs a yearly kidlit learning event, Girl Power Hour, each October. You can visit www.michelemcavoy.com or follow her on Twitter [@michele_mcavoy](https://twitter.com/michele_mcavoy) and Instagram [@michelemcavoy](https://www.instagram.com/michelemcavoy)



LYNNE MARIE: While you are new on the independent publishing scene, you have many books on the horizon, many of which are listed here: Our Books (littlepresspublishing.com). Share with us how being an independent publisher gives you the latitude to make creative choices in kidlit, like with an original fairy tale, a Christmas book featuring a raven, and a middle grade tattoo coloring book!

MICHELE McAVOY: There are two fantastic things about being an indie publisher. First, I get to

help writers’ dreams come true through publication. We aim to bring new voices and new talent to kidlit and, in doing so, many of our creatives are debut authors or early in their kidlit career. I love that we can start their journey with them. Second, we are able to take on projects that we LOVE, period. Our stories always have a message but at the end of the day, I want them to be entertaining for kids. As a kid born in the 70’s and growing up in the 80’s, I am from the era of Saturday morning cartoons, and watching movies on VHS over and over again until you could recite the entire film. I’m drawn to stories with great characters with whom children will want to visit again and again. If the characters are amazing, if the story is amazing, if the art is amazing, we can take chances on new creatives. That’s the best thing about being an indie.

LM: Please share a little about each of your imprints: Blue Bronco Books (middle grade), Blue Bronco Books Jr. (early reader/chapter books), and The Little Press. How many books for each imprint are you looking to acquire each season. How many seasons do you have? What season are you currently shopping for?

MM: The Little Press is our parent company and we publish picture books (target audience 4-8) under this label. Blue Bronco Books is our middle grade imprint (target audience 10-13), and Blue Bronco Books, Jr. is our early reader/chapter book imprint (target audience 5-10). We also have a Christian imprint, Bless This Press, which publishes all ranges of children’s literature from picture books to middle

Michele McAvoy...continued

grade with a Christian undertone/message. We try to stagger our releases so that two titles don't release at the same time. This allows us to focus our attention on that one particular project during his/her release month. The typical seasons are Fall and Spring, but that doesn't mean we won't release in Summer or Winter. We set our release dates based upon the number of projects we have for that year. We are not shopping for a season as much as we are shopping for different types of projects. Right now I would love to see more chapter books/early chapter books.

LM: Please tell us about your first and most recent submissions for the Little Press. Has anything changed in how you approach submissions since then, or in what you are looking for to expand your publishing house?

MM: Our first acquisition was *Bone Tree* by Jenna Lehne, a fantastically spooky middle grade which was released in April 2021. Our most recent acquisition was *Skrum* by Bernard Gumz, a picture book that is insanely illustrated (Bernard has a background in animation) and so funny. We have changed how we approach submissions in that, currently, we are by invitation-only. We find projects through Twitter pitch events or creatives that I find myself (I often see their work on Twitter or Instagram). In the beginning we were open to submissions, but as a small publishing house it was not sustainable to review all of the submissions and run the publishing company (produce the books, direct the marketing & PR, etc.) We have really found some special projects with submissions being limited in this way.

LM: What would you cite as the differences between an indie publisher and a large publisher?

MM: I don't want to generalize too much because I can't speak to what all the bigger houses do or don't

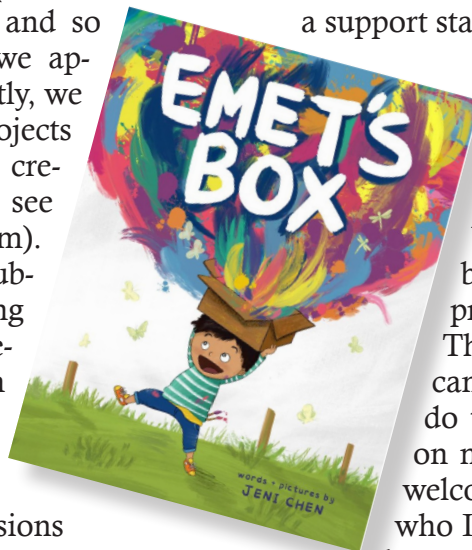
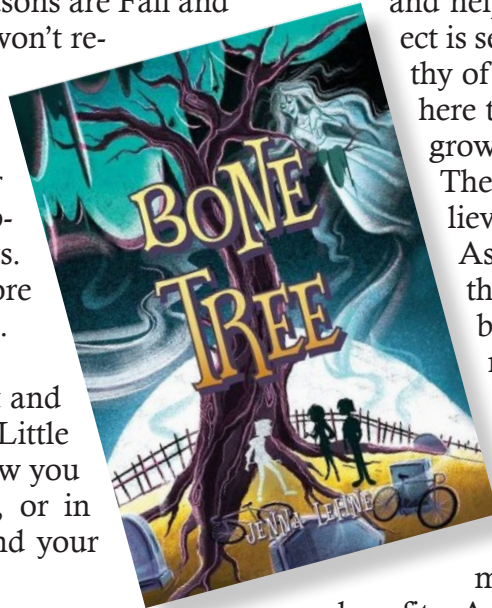
do for their creatives, but as a small press we focus on *all* of our projects. Meaning, all of our projects get our marketing time and our resources. We look for opportunities for all of our authors/illustrators and help to grow their platforms. No project is seen as more important or more worthy of our resources than another. We are here to help grow our business alongside growing the platforms of our creatives. Their success is our success. I truly believe that a "rising tide lifts all boats."

As a small press we can also take risks that perhaps a bigger house can't take because of overhead. This could mean taking on certain projects with a debut author who perhaps doesn't have much of a following or reach. That said, there are distinct benefits that come with publishing with a large house, and that's mass distribution. Both have their

benefits. As a creative myself, I always recommend full transparency and making sure you are not only comfortable with your choice but excited about it.

LM: What are the hats that you wear? What kind of a support staff do you have?

MM: I wear many hats, as I always do! As an attorney and new business owner I'm a bit of a control freak. As a new press on the block it's imperative that we put our best foot forward, which means being professional in everything that we do. That said, I am only one person and I can't do all the things, all the time and do them all well. As we started to take on more projects with more deadlines, I welcomed folks onto The Little Press team who I can trust and love working with. We have a Publishing Assistant (Rose), a Marketing, P.R. and Special Projects Lead (Kelley), Graphic/ Book Designer (Harini), Editor (Meisha), to name a few. You can see our team here: www.littlepresspublishing.com/our-team. It takes a village and I love being able to delegate to team members who are both excited about our mission and about



Michele McAvoy...continued

being a part of a growing company.

LM: Who is your distributor? What kind of distribution do you get? Please explain what this means to potential authors and illustrators.

MM: We distribute through Ingram Content Group. As one of the largest wholesale book distributors in the world, being with Ingram allows us to get maximum reach without having an extensive catalog.

LM: What is your slush pile like? What do you see too much of? What do you see too little of? What is something you would like to consider and something you would not consider?

MM: Because we are by-invitation-only my slush pile isn't bad, at all. I probably see a lot of picture book manuscripts that aren't fully developed or middle-grade manuscripts that are too "wordy." As writers we want to show how smart we are but we have to remember our audience. All the flowery words and complicated sentences are often a miss in middle grade. Be sure to have your WIPs critiqued by folks that read and/or write in the space. We are not considering board books or books for the very young. We would consider concept books, like a wordless early reader, activity books (baking, mazes, puzzles). I would love to publish flip books. If you are an illustrator who does flip books PLEASE email me.

LM: Please share a recent acquisition and tell us about it and what drew you to it.

MM: It's hard to highlight just one acquisition because I love them all! They all have fantastic creativity and the potential for greatness. But since I can only pick one, I would love to highlight our upcoming middle grade release *Cabby Potts, Duchess of Dirt* by Kathleen Wilford, coming September 1st. It's if

Bridgerton & Downton Abbey married Little House on the Prairie and had a baby, lol! Kathleen is an amazing writer. She effortlessly transports you into 1870's Kansas. I was immediately drawn into Cabby's world and you will be too! I am a total sucker for historical fiction. Always have been! And I love that there's Native American representation in this story. It's a special middle grade story and I'm honored that we are able to help Kathleen share it with the world.



LM: As a Christian publisher, you likely have very specific needs in that department. How would you describe what you are looking for for Bless This Press. Can you give an example of what drew you to

Raven's Gift?

MM: I think that there is a need for Christian children's books that have Christian values and undertones but are not didactic or preachy. We are looking for stories that can be equally enjoyed by kiddos alongside their secular counterparts. *Raven's Gift* was simply poetic. Claire Noland uses story elements, like a refrain, that pulled me into the creative experience of the story. It was exactly what I was

looking for, a beautiful Christian story that was entertaining and fun to read. I'm excited to have it as our debut Christian title. I am also excited to give Dee Cordón, the illustrator, her debut opportunity.



LM: Just as a general insight, what do you think about using weak words like the, that, etc., in writing? Do you feel they are invisible? Or do you feel the word should be deleted whenever not absolutely essential? I ask this because I love that you don't put a 'the' in front of *Raven's Gift*, and also because many aren't receptive

to removing this word.

MM: Ha! I also took out the "the" in front of *Bone Tree* (our middle grade title, originally *The Bone Tree*). I often find myself removing "extra" words,

Michele McAvoy...continued

like adverbs. As a practicing litigator for 20 years, I spent much of my time drafting persuasive briefs and memos before the court. In law, the use and placement of words (even the smallest conjunction) can make a significant difference. It could change the meaning/application of a law. I think my law background has given me a keen editing eye. I definitely have a preferred style of less is more. But I'm also from NJ and we like to get to the point. ;-)

LM: As a small publisher, your advances are generally lower than what is paid by a traditional publisher. What are some of the advantages of a smaller advance?

MM: We see our projects as partnerships. We are looking to grow our authors and hopefully our authors are looking to grow our company. With a smaller advance, creatives may be more incentivized to market and promote their titles in order to make more earnings. That said, that isn't why we offer smaller advances, it's simply a benefit that can be seen from it. If we had bigger budgets I would certainly give bigger advances, because I think our creatives are 100% worth it! Their work is as worthy as the work coming out of the bigger houses. We just aren't there (yet... ;-)

LM: What is expected from TLP authors and illustrators with regard to promotion and marketing? How can they best be prepared for this task?

MM: This piggy backs on my last answer in that we see the relationship as a partnership. We invest time and money into the production of our projects (art, editing, book design) and in the marketing of our titles (advertising, designated sales/marketing rep.) As a small publisher, we rely on our authors and illustrators to take part in promoting and marketing their titles, as well. We work closely with them to do this. I present a marketing/PR webinar when they first onboard with us (early in the process.) We provide authors with marketing materials and checklists to help them understand what they can/should be doing and when. We work to procure opportunities for them like school visits, book fairs, and bookstore events. We give them resources like podcasters and blog lists to help them with their outreach.

LM: What are your thoughts about pagination in manuscripts and/or art notes? If art notes are acceptable to you, what guidelines should an author use when including them?

MM: I need pagination with a middle grade. It keeps my brain organized. So PLEASE if you are sending a MG manuscript to me be sure it's paginated (preferably at the bottom). I don't mind art notes but I don't love when there are too many. If it's essential for me to understand what is happening then, yes, please include them. But, if it's clear from the text what is happening, no need to tell us what you are envisioning. On the flipside, for picture books, please remember that half of the story should be playing out in the illustrations, so you do not need to describe a scene like you would a middle grade, the scene should play out in the art.

LM: I often have a conversation with clients to explain that editors don't read the entire manuscript before they pass. If they aren't hooked from the beginning, they stop. What are you looking for when you read? What will make you stop reading and move on to another submission?

MM: Before we acquire anything we read the entire manuscript. But, when reading through submissions, absolutely. If I'm not drawn in right away, I stop and move onto the next. For middle grade, plop me right away into your world, your character. I don't love a page of description at the get-go. Get me there immediately. There is always time for world building. Also, think about your POV. I see too much written as 3rd person when 1st person would have been more impactful. I'm not saying always write in 1st person, just consider different POVs. Same with picture books. For picture books I find that I am more drawn to 1st person than 3rd person. Also, please read in the genre/audience that you are writing. Know what is out there and what is popular and selling. We still see picture books that are over 1,000 words, etc.

LM: Please share what you would like to see in a query letter. How important is it that the author has a connection to the story? How important is experience? Do you consider the writer's social media and presence when making a decision on which author

Michele McAvoy...continued

to take on? Please explain.

MM: This is the thing with query letters, I am more a “to the point” person and I don’t love long query letters about everything that you have done (I am guilty of doing this too with my own query letters.) What I look for is no typos (this irks me in a query letter—remember, best foot forward.) I look for how you will market/promote your title (book fairs, school visits, conference affiliation). It’s not important to already have connections but what is important is your willingness to get out there, pound the pavement, show your face and try to get those opportunities. It’s hard work but I’m looking for people that want to shout their book from the top of the mountain. Sometimes creatives can be shy and introverted which is totally fine. But we need people who can put themselves out there. As for social media, having a good social media presence can be a plus. But, the work is what’s important. I’ve had folks with amazing social media presence but the writing didn’t resonate with me.

LM: We’ve touched upon this lightly, but please share anything in particular that you would be looking for in any of your imprints.

MM: I am looking for chapter books (ages 6-9), I would love to find illustrators for flip books (send to me!), activity books/hobby books (yes, please!), author/illustrator picture books, Christian stories that are not didactic or preachy.

LM: Thank you so very much, Michele, for your honest and informative responses. It is encouraging to see a publisher willing to take risks on engaging, out-of-the-box ideas. And it is always a pleasure to hear fresh voices and see different stories!

Michelle McAvoy is offering a special **Above the Slushpile** submission opportunity for CBI subscribers. Until **February 28, 2022**, you can submit a 350-character pitch/synopsis of your easy reader or early chapter book (ages 6-9), picture book (if you are an author/illustrator), activity/hobby book, Christian-themed story (picture book through middle grade), or sample illustrations for a flip book, along with other information, via the online form at bit.ly/ATSEbruary2022TheLittlePress. Michelle will read all pitches and respond to those she’s interested in by **May 31, 2022**. If you haven’t heard back by the end of May, consider it a pass.

---Please Read Before You Proceed---

Before you submit your manuscript please run the following checklist. This will ensure that editors will continue to offer us Above the Slushpile codes:

- For a detailed explanation of the Above the Slushpile submission form, as well as tips for writing your pitch, see cbiclubhouse.com/clubhouse/slushpile-new/
- To watch Laura’s Kidlit Social interview about how to know when your manuscript is ready to submit, go to writeforkids.org/blog/kidlitdistancingsocial70/
- You’ve chosen one manuscript to pitch for each Above the Slushpile opportunity. If the editor or agent shows interest in that submission, you’ll have the opportunity to mention your other work.
- You’ve studied the submission guidelines and verified that your manuscript falls within those guidelines.
- You’ve confirmed your work matches the interests of the editor by reading their CBI interview, and studying recent books on their list.
- Your work has been critiqued by a beta reader, critique partner/group, or a freelance editor.
- You have thoroughly revised and polished your manuscript so it is ready to submit should the editor ask to see the entire work.

CONFLICT

IN STORIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

by Jane McBride

Occasionally I'll hear writers for young children complain that they can't use conflict in their stories because small children don't understand conflict and have never experienced it. Nothing could be further from the truth. Little children understand conflict, though they may not be able to explain it. The four-year-old girl who wants blond hair like her mommy must learn to live with her (what she believes) plain-old brown hair and her disappointment. The six-year-old boy who doesn't think his first-grade teacher likes him tries to get out of going to school. The conflict of trying to do something yourself but not being able to (tie shoes, make own breakfast without spilling milk all over the place, etc.) is a constant source of conflict for young children. Writing conflict doesn't stop at these relatively simple matters, though; many picture books are now dealing with more complex interpersonal skills, such as being kind, accepting differences in others, and having empathy when a friend is scared. Picture books can even explore larger societal issues, like struggling to feel safe at home when violence has scarred a community, or being displaced due to war or other catastrophic events.

Let's take a look at some ways you, the writer, can introduce conflict in a story for young readers:

Create stories that are easily relatable. What do I mean by "easily relatable?" Pay attention to what little children are interested in and what they struggle with. I am fortunate to have my youngest grandchildren live nearby. I see how they work hard to learn something new. If you don't have young children or grandchildren close by, go to a park and observe. Or volunteer at a nearby elementary school.

What might a relatable story be for the youngest

readers? (Or listeners, as usually it's a parent or older sibling reading to the preschool set.) Three-year-old Sammy's mommy isn't feeling well. She has been having chemo sessions, and even though Sammy doesn't understand what that means, he knows that they make her sick. Sammy wants to help Mommy, especially when Daddy's at work. Sammy decides to make her a snack. He remembers that she likes hot chocolate and proceeds to get out the ingredients for that. He assembles milk and chocolate mix. Then he realizes he can't use the stove. How can he make hot chocolate without using the stove? The problem stumps Sammy. He decides to make cold chocolate milk. He pours milk in a glass, but the milk spills all over. He cleans that up. Then he stirs five heaping teaspoons of chocolate mix into the glass of milk. Unfortunately the chocolate powder goes everywhere. He manages to clean it up—sort of. When he is ready to take the chocolate milk to his mommy, he decides to taste it. When he takes a sip, he makes a bad face. The milk is way too chocolatey. Mommy won't like it. Sammy has failed. He knows it and goes to his room where he flops on his bed and cries. When Mommy gets up to get a drink, she hears him and asks what is the matter. Between sobs and hiccups, Sammy tells her that he wanted to make hot chocolate for her, but that he couldn't do it. He couldn't even make cold chocolate milk. Mommy gathers him close and tells him that what matters is that he tried to do something for her. Together, they make hot chocolate. Sammy tells her that he loves her.

Sammy faces conflict all along the way. First, he can't use the stove. Then he spills the milk, followed by spilling the chocolate powder, followed by realizing that the chocolate milk tastes awful. Do you see how each step creates more conflict for Sammy to overcome? Finally he realizes that all he

Conflict in Stories...continued

really needs to do for his mommy is to tell her that he loves her.

Even when your protagonist is living through a complex, layered issue (such as escaping war by fleeing to another country), break it down to the most personal, relatable level that matters to a child under eight years old. Having family nearby makes a refugee camp less scary; making a friend helps a new country feel more like home. (See *Lubna and Pebble* by Wendy Meddour as an example.)

Use strong words and dramatic plot points that can easily translate into pictures. The above example is filled with situations that easily translate to wonderful illustrations: Sammy gathering the ingredients for hot chocolate. Sammy staring at the stove and realizing he can't use it. Sammy spilling the milk and then the chocolate mix. Sammy crying on his bed. Sammy and Mommy working together. You probably won't be doing the artwork, but you do have the responsibility of writing a story that can be shown visually.

Appeal to common emotions. Not all three-year-old children will try to make hot chocolate by themselves, but they will try to do other things beyond their skill and ability. They will experience satisfaction when they can accomplish their goal. They will also experience frustration when they can't master a skill, though they probably won't be able to identify it in words. It's your job to show those emotions, show how invested a small child can be in a task and how he feels bad when he can't accomplish it. (A great example of being frustrated when something doesn't work out is *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires.)

Make the conflict age-appropriate. A four-year-old boy is not going to relate to the problem a fourteen-year-old boy might have in trying to get a girl to notice him. But he can relate to the problem of trying to be noticed by his overworked parents who are too tired to do anything with him when they pick him up from day care at the end of the day.

What about conflicts in interpersonal relations? Children are very perceptive, even when they don't have the vocabulary to express their feelings. They

know if a sibling is hurting, if a parent is upset, if something is wrong in the family. They experience emotions just as adults do. Books about kindness and grief and anger are becoming increasingly popular. But how do you go about writing about such things?

Turn the concept into a plot. Are you writing a book about how sometimes it takes courage to be kind? What if five-year-old Mitch sees a boy, Howie, in his kindergarten class who is different from others in that he has muscle spasms and can't do many of the things the other children do? Some of the other children tease the boy. Mitch knows how it feels to be teased (his older brother teases him all the time at home), and wants to help Howie. Can he do it, knowing that some of the kids may make fun of him as well? He asks his teacher if he can bring in his favorite board game to play with Mitch during lunch. That way, Mitch can be friends with Howie outside of the teasing eyes of their classmates. The teacher agrees, and Mitch and Howie enjoy many lunchtime game sessions. One day the weather is too cold to go outside after lunch, so the whole class has indoor recess. Howie asks Mitch to play a game with him, and Mitch agrees, in full view of class. Several classmates ask if they can join in, and by the end of lunch Mitch and Howie have established a regular lunchtime game club.

If you turn your concept into a plot, you're much less likely to preach to the reader. Let your characters wrestle with the issue, overcome their conflicts, and learn to grow. In this way, your readers will learn as well. For some published examples, check out this list of [35 Children's Books that Teach Empathy and Kindness](#).

FINAL WORDS

Conflict is part of life, whether a character be a small child or a young adult. The four-year-old who wants the latest toy has the same feelings as does an eighteen-year-old who wants a new car. How does he set about getting it? Showing that is your job as a writer.

JAY HARDWIG

Debut Middle Grade Author on Letting Characters with Disabilities Be Real Kids

interview by PJ McIlvaine

Everyone's writing journey is personal and different; no two people are alike. For Jay Hardwig, who calls himself a "lazy writer", it was pivoting to teaching the blind and visually impaired. It was a decision which led him to eventually write his debut middle grade novel called *Just Maria* (Fitzroy Books/Regal House, January 2022), about a blind sixth-grader who just wants to be "normal", which *Forward Reviews* hailed as a "loving novel at living with disabilities." Now living in North Carolina with his family, Hardwig currently works for a non-profit where he manages programs for children with vision loss.

PJ McILVAINE: For someone who professes to be a lazy writer (per your hilarious blog posts at your website), you certainly seem to be adept at it. Do you remember the first thing you ever wrote? Did you ever have an "aha" moment or was it more like an "argh" epiphany that this was too hard and complicated to pursue as a living?

JAY HARDWIG: I'm not sure I can remember the first thing I ever wrote, but the first piece I ever got published was the product of a writing seminar prompt to write about a body part. I wrote a sweet and gentle paean to my sweet and gentle belly. (I've cultivated a modest and friendly paunch at least since college.) I sent it cold to the *Austin Chronicle*, and they published it.



I haven't had a lot of "aha" moments, but the decision not to pursue writing fulltime struck me when I was tubing down the San Marcos river south of Austin, fretting about my literary prospects and realizing that I didn't want the unfilled page to be my constant companion after all. The next day I applied to be a teacher at the Texas School for the Blind.

PM: You've been a teacher for the visually impaired for many years—but it seems that once you fell into it, it became your passion and motivational force. How did you blend the two passions together? Did you do that deliberately or was it more organic?

JH: I did not become a teacher in order to write about my students: that was never my intent. But anyone who spends any time in special education knows that it is fertile ground. I kept meeting fascinating, big-hearted kids who had stories worth telling. The trick is to find a way to tell that story without dipping into sentimentalism or, worse, exploitation. I like to think I've pulled that off, for the most part, but I am sure there are times I have missed that mark.

PM: Your debut book is about a young, visually impaired teen who just wants to be "normal". Since (I assume, but you know what they say) that you're not visually impaired yourself, why did you feel compelled to write this story? And why now?

Jay Hardwig...continued

What's the one thing you like most about your main character—and the least? What do you hope is the takeaway for readers? Do you see the book as a standalone or a potential series?

JH: First, your assumption is correct: I'm a "sightie," as my blind friends say. I have typical vision. My understanding of blindness is through observation and conversation, not lived experience.

I wrote *Just Maria* because I thought it needed to be written. I saw a dearth of books for young readers that had kids with disabilities as protagonists, and the ones I did find tended toward the sentimental or mawkish. I wanted to write a book that had a character who was blind but also flawed – one who makes mistakes at times and gives in to her baser impulses. To put it another way, so often in books featuring characters with disabilities, the narrative purpose of those characters is to motivate others to change and grow. I wanted to explore what would happen if it was the kid with the disability who needed to do some changing and growing herself. Like all kids do.

The thing I like best about Maria is that she is not perfect, and that she makes mistakes. Like all of us, she struggles to do what she knows is right, and to not be held captive by the fickle demands of public perception.

My hope for the reader is that they see all these competing motivations and conflicting feelings within Maria, and recognize something of themselves in these conflicts, and understand once again that what makes us the same is greater than what makes us different.

I think Maria could be a series, but I'm not sure it will be. Sometimes I'm more interested in writing the next book from JJ's perspective than from Maria's.

PM: How did you know the book was finished? How many drafts did it take before you felt it was in good enough shape to query? What was the query process like? How has the publication process been? Any surprises?

JH: I have always known how this book would end – what Maria's fourth and final challenge would be – and the process of writing was just getting to that point, and then wrapping things up and putting a pretty bow on it.



My query process was initially as dispiriting as they all are – I received 13 rejections before Regal House/Fitzroy asked to see more. I know for writers this is an average number, maybe even a small one, but each rejection still stings. After I sent the full manuscript to Regal House, things got a lot more fun: they liked it and asked for a comprehensive pitch, and two months later they agreed to publish it.

It's my first time through the book publication process. I've enjoyed working with Regal House; I've found them to be great partners. The biggest surprise for me has been how hard it is for me to keep reading the same words over and over again, and

still pay attention to them. I've missed plenty of errors in various drafts – mostly typos, but some more substantive – because I could no longer read the work with fresh eyes.

I have a blog post about finding a publisher at jay-hardwig.com/how-i-found-a-publisher/ if anyone wants to dive deeper in.

PM: What is your writing routine like? Do you write every day? Do you have any tips or tricks for plugging away when the writing is ragged? Do you revise as you write or do you wait until you have a first draft completed? Where do you get your ideas from? Do you plan to write in other genres?

Jay Hardwig...continued

JH: This is also the topic of a blog post (jayhardwig.com/how-i-write-in-which-i-describe-a-man-trying-to-think-up-words-all-by-himself/), but I can give the short version here.

I write best by talking. I dictate into a tape recorder or phone, and later go back to transcribe my words. I use the transcription process as a chance to edit on the fly, changing what sounds wrong or weird or just full of too much blather. Only after that part is done do I submit to the more staid process of scribbling revisions on paper. When all is said and done, each batch of writing goes through several drafts.

But my first draft is almost always spoken aloud. While I've done plenty of this while driving down the road, I have found my mind works best of all when I am walking outdoors, muttering into my phone. Plus I get a little fresh air and sunshine. That never hurts.

As for plugging away, my strategy is the same one you hear everywhere: just write. It rarely sounds

great in the first draft, but once the words are out, you've got something to work with. I'd rather have a garbled mess than a blank page any day.

PM: In an earlier phase of your writing journey, you were a freelance journalist for regional publications. What was the strangest or offbeat story you ever did?

JH: While I greatly enjoyed a 5,000-word feature on the central Texas polka scene, the most offbeat piece I ever wrote was about a barber in Austin, Texas who spent his spare time trying to invent new uses for the hair clippings he swept from his floor every day. From miracle hair tonics to literal hair shirts to the ideal compost for his home-grown tomatoes, he had every angle covered. He was an odd bird, and I loved talking to him.

(I just went looking for that story, which is archived on the Weekly Wire at http://weeklywire.com/ww/08-30-99/austin_xtra_feature1.html . . . although the formatting is a bit weird.)



interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

Editor's note: If you're working on becoming a full-time author, living exclusively (or mostly) off of your writing, then you'll need to write for a wide variety of markets. Though *Kaleidoscope* is for adult readers, they accept articles that have parenting or teaching-related themes as well as pieces that weave childhood, the arts and living with disabilities. Be sure to study their back issues to get a good sense of what they're looking for before submitting.

This month we're chatting with Lisa Armstrong. Ms. Armstrong is the Director of Communications of United Disability Services and the Managing Editor of *Kaleidoscope* magazine. *Kaleidoscope: Exploring the Experience of Disability through Literature and the Fine Arts*, published by United Disability Services in Akron, Ohio, is a pioneer in the exploration of the experience of disability through the lens of literature and fine arts. Lisa will explain to us how her life experiences and education brought her to these exciting and meaningful roles. In addition, her talents in storytelling paved the way nicely for the creative freedom she enjoys and embraces within her current career.

Sharon Blumberg: Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to hold your current position of Managing Editor of *Kaleidoscope*?

Lisa Armstrong: I did not take the most direct path to my role as managing editor of *Kaleido-*

scope: Exploring the Experience of Disability through Literature and the Fine Arts. I started freelancing for a local daily newspaper in my teens and went on to earn a BA in business and organizational communication from The University of Akron, and an MA in journalism and mass media communication with a public relations concentration from Kent State University. I've always liked storytelling but found I wasn't really cut out for the deadline pressure of working on a newspaper and wanted something that offered a little more creative freedom. I discovered public relations while in college and it has led me down some very interesting roads. I have always been service minded and have spent my 30+ year career in healthcare and nonprofit public relations. My career was on a pretty traditional trajectory until taking my most recent position with United Disability Services 25 years ago. Becoming the managing editor of a literary and fine arts magazine was definitely not on my radar and an opportunity I most likely would not have found with another nonprofit. I am also the agency's director of communications so, in my opinion, my job is the best of both worlds. I manage a small staff of four with all of us working part-time on the publication.

SB: How do readers find your magazine?

LA: Unfortunately after many years, *Kaleidoscope* is no longer available in print due to budget constraints but it can be downloaded online from our

Kaleidoscope...continued

website at no cost (www.KaleidoscopeOnline.org). Funding for small presses without a university affiliation is always a challenge.

SB: What kind of audience reads your magazine?

LA: People who read our publication come from all walks of life. The common denominator is that they all are interested in learning more and sharing the experience of disability.

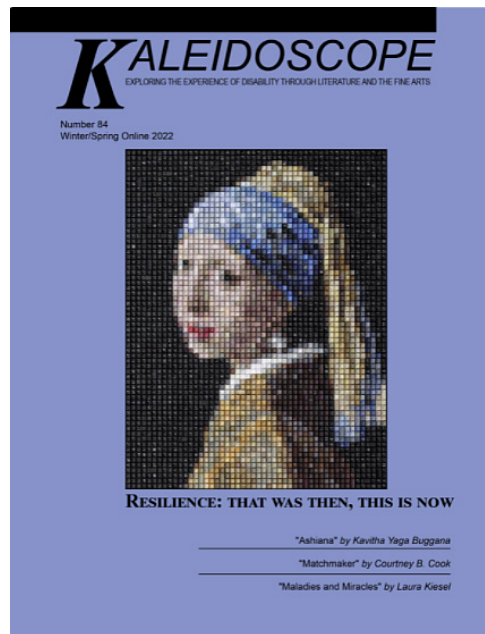
Kaleidoscope, published by United Disability Services in Akron, Ohio, is a pioneer in the exploration of the experience of disability through the lens of literature and fine arts. This internationally recognized, award-winning publication expresses the experience of disability from a variety of perspectives including: individuals, families, friends, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and educators, among others. The material chosen for *Kaleidoscope* challenges stereotypical, patronizing, and sentimental attitudes about disabilities and is selected solely on merit—not disability. For many individuals with disabilities, the arts are an empowering means of individual expression. The publication provides a powerful medium to create meaningful conversation and a deeper understanding of issues of disability, diversity and inclusion. The greatest success of *Kaleidoscope* is our 40-year legacy of helping to change perception of disability by presenting the work of hundreds of talented writers and artists over the years. What began as a project for participants in a sheltered workshop has grown into both a nationally and internationally respected publication.

There may be many online magazines but only a small number exist in the disability literature community. Disability literature is a genre that is growing and one that is also becoming more accepted within academic circles. *Kaleidoscope* has

more than doubled our submissions since going online and we were somewhat surprised by the number of people who have been writing during the pandemic. We received approximately 450 submissions for one of our recent issues.

SB: What kind of background do your future writers need to have to write for you?

LA: The individual writers and artists who submit to *Kaleidoscope* come from a wide variety of socially, economically, educationally, ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds—disability does not discriminate. We accept the work of both emerging and established writers, and writers with and without disabilities; however, the work of a writer without a disability must focus on some aspect of disability. The criteria for good writing apply: effective technique, thought-providing subject matter, well-developed characters and in general, a mature grasp of the art of story-telling.



SB: Also, can writers focus upon experiences from the point of view from childhood, parenting their children, educators with children, health workers with children, childhood experiences with family members, and childhood friends?

LA: In a word, yes. All of these themes and more make up the very fabric of *Kaleidoscope*.

SB: What is the best way for writers to submit to your magazine? Also, what are your regular departments?

LA: Fiction, creative nonfiction, personal essays, poetry, articles, book reviews, and various artistic media including two-dimensional art, three-dimensional art, drama, theater, and dance are featured in the pages of various issues. We would

Kaleidoscope...continued

recommend someone look at several issues of the magazine before submitting to ascertain a better understanding of the types of material we accept for publication. Online submissions at udsakron.org/kaleidoscope-magazine/submit-article are preferred, but we will also accept hard copy submissions. If submitting a hard copy, send copies of originals with SASE if you want your work returned. The editors do not assume responsibility for returning submissions without ample return postage. Address all correspondence to: United Disability Services, Attn: Kaleidoscope, 701 S. Main St., Akron, OH 44311-1019

SB: How do you respond to writers' submissions, and how long does it generally take for you to respond back?

LA: *Kaleidoscope* publishes twice a year – January and July. *Kaleidoscope* acknowledges receipt of submissions immediately but it may take 6-9 months for an acceptance or rejection. Various considerations prevent us from accepting as many submissions as we might like due to factors like available space in each issue, similar submissions on the same theme, and efforts to select writing that most closely represents our magazine's focus as it relates to our readers' interests.

SB: What kinds of rights do you buy from writers?

LA: *Kaleidoscope* retains non-exclusive world rights to published works for purposes of reprinting and/or electronic distribution. All other rights return to the writer/artist upon publication.

SB: What is your pay rate for articles?

LA: We are deeply committed to recognizing the value of the work submitted to *Kaleidoscope* and pay contributors for their work. Payment can range from \$10-\$100 depending on the genre submitted.

SB: Is there anything else I have not asked you, that you would like to add regarding yourself or the magazine?

LA: We are excited to be launching a podcast for *Kaleidoscope* in the first quarter of 2022. This is an opportunity to expand the outreach of the publication by enhancing the online edition to amplify the voices of the writers and artists who contribute to *Kaleidoscope* through a series

of insightful and thought-providing interviews. Included will be readings of published pieces, an exploration of the arts, and a discussion of issues important to our readers and contributors from the perspective of the arts and culture. Podcasts are a portable and effective means by which to reach individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities for whom reading can be challenging as well.

