

Children's Book Insider

The Children's Writing Monthly  January 2021



**ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE
SUBMISSION CODE:**

*Dancing
Flamingo
Press*



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At Presstime:

Publisher Seeks Artful, Innovative Illustrated Books

Flying Eye Books (<http://flyingeyebooks.com/>) is the children's imprint of award-winning visual publishing house Nobrow. Flying Eye Books publishes children's fiction and nonfiction with attention to excellent design and illustrations. The London-based publisher distributes books internationally and publishes authors and illustrators from around the world. Recent children's titles include *Boo!* by Ben Newman (picture book, ages 3-5), *The Little Gardener* by Emily Hughes (picture book ages 5-7), *Mr. Tweed's Busy Day* by Jim Stoten (picture book ages 5-7), *The Wolves of Currumpaw* by William Grill (nonfiction picture book, ages 7-11), One Day on Our Blue Planet series by Ella Bailey (nonfiction picture books, ages 3-5), the Professor Astro Cat series of science books for ages 7-11 (nonfiction).

While Flying Eye Books tends to work with author/illustrators, submissions from authors only are also welcome. Be sure to read several FYB titles before submitting. Submissions should be emailed and include a brief summary of the project as well as the attached manuscript and pdf of illustrations, if applicable (see more details below). Emailed submissions should be less than 5 mb and any images should be in jpeg or pdf format. Text documents should be in Word or rtf format. Include all contact information including phone number.

For picture books and illustrated nonfiction for children: Email your submission to flyingeyesubs@nobrow.net. Fiction picture book manuscripts should be 500-1000 words. Nonfiction submissions can be for illustrated books up to 90 pages. Send a brief synopsis of the story (in the email) and the complete first draft of the text (as an attachment). If you are an illustrator/author or an illustrator author duo, you should supply a minimum of two finished double page spreads, with the remainder of the pages visually roughed out as a first draft (as a pdf or jpeg attachment).

Publisher Accepting Nonfiction for Picture Book Through Middle Grade Readers

Storey Publishing, an imprint of Workman Publishing, publishes books for adults and children containing practical information that encourages personal independence in harmony with the environment. Nonfiction for children can be picture books for ages 4-8 (32-48 pages), or highly illustrated, chapter book nonfiction for ages 7-11 or 8-13 (125-175 pages). Categories include nature, animals, crafts and how-to, mind/body/spirit, cooking, engineering, science and self-help. Activity books are also welcome. No fiction picture books or poetry.

Will review new proposals that include a detailed description of the book and who its potential readers are; market research; ideas for how you can help market the work, and author information. For details on what should be included in the proposal, go to <https://www.storey.com/proposal-guidelines/>. This page also includes the names of editors to whom you can address the proposal who specialize in different topics, as well as email and snail mail addresses for submissions. For a current Storey Publishing catalog, go to <https://www.storey.com/our-catalogs/>.

Independent Publisher Accepting Work from Author/Illustrators

Princeton Architectural Press publishes ten to twelve children's books per year. While the company focuses on architecture, design and visual culture for its adult books, children's books for ages 3-8 can be any general fiction, nonfiction or activity topic, approached in a unique, artful way. Only looking for author/illustrators at this time. Send an email proposal of the project that includes the title; name of author/illustrator along with all contact information; a summary of the book in 500 words or less; manuscript word count (including any back matter); and the number of projected finished illustrations (and whether they are in black-and-white or color). Attach the manuscript along with 5 sample illustrations as a low-resolution PDF. Email to kids@papress.com. Will acknowledge receipt of all proposals within one week. Before submitting, study the current Princeton Architectural Press children's catalog to make sure your work fits with the Press' tone and vision.

Publisher Accepting Literary, Timeless Fiction/Nonfiction for All Ages

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers publishes picture books, middle grade and young adult fiction and nonfiction. Seeks manuscripts that are honest, wise, and hopeful; but they also publish stories with unique storylines, characters, or good humor. Stories that celebrate diversity, stories of historical significance, and stories that relate to contemporary social issues are of special interest at this time. Fiction tends to have a timeless, literary feel. Also publishes fiction and nonfiction with Christian themes. They currently publish 12 to 18 books a year. Writers are strongly encouraged to review Eerdmans books in their digital catalog (eerdmans.com/Catalogs/Young-Readers-Catalog.aspx) or on their website at eerdmans.com/YoungReaders/ before submitting.

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers accepts unsolicited hardcopy submissions, but responds only to submissions they are interested in publishing. Submissions do not have to be exclusive, but you should mention in the cover letter if it is also being submitted to other publishers. If you have not heard back after four months, you may assume that your submission does not fit the needs of their list.

For picture book submissions, include the full manuscript. Except in the case of author-illustrators, prefers that submissions not include artwork. For novel submissions, you may submit the full manuscript, or a query that includes a synopsis and at least three chapters of the manuscript. Be sure to include your contact information (including address, email, and phone number) on your cover letter. If you would like confirmation that your materials have been received, please include a self-addressed, stamped postcard with your submission. Submit to: Acquisitions Editor, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 4035 Park East Court SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546.

Agent Accepting Submissions for All Ages

Brent Taylor is Senior Literary Agent at Triada US Literary Agency (www.triadaus.com) who is seeking upmarket, well-written books that appeal to a wide commercial audience in the following categories:

Picture books: Looking for projects from authors and author-illustrators. Open to fiction, non-fiction, and picture books in unusual formats or styles—verse, rhyme, comics, etc. Especially looking for picture books with an energy that pops off the page, that kids have never seen before, and that will turn them into life-long readers.

Middle grade: Interests include all genres including fantasy, contemporary, first romance, and magical realism. Some of the middle grade projects he's worked on include the Kiranmala and the Kingdom Beyond series by New York Times-bestselling author Sayantani DasGupta, YALSA-ALA Excellence in Non-Fiction Award-winner Free Lunch by Rex Ogle, and Smoke and Mirrors and the Silver Batal series from K. D. Halbrook.

Young adult: Though Brent leans more toward realistic/contemporary fiction, his interests encompass high fantasy and lightly speculative projects too. He loves YA that captures the dichotomies of being young—how, as a teen, you yearn for freedom, but at the same time it's incredibly scary for so many parts of your life to be changing. Some YA novels he's worked on include Whitney Gardner's Schneider Family Book Award-winning You're Welcome, Universe, 500 Words or Less by Juleah del Rosario, The Pursuit of Miss Heartbreak Hotel by Moe Bonneau, and Perfect Ten by L. Philips.

Graphic novels (for kids or teens): Open to both text-only graphic novel scripts and author-illustrated projects. Some of his graphic novel clients include Whitney Gardner, Tori Sharp, Rex Ogle, Bre Indigo, and Eric Gapstur.

Nonfiction (for kids or teens): Open to nonfiction in the categories of biographies, memoir, narrative, history, science, and how-to.

Send a query letter and the first 10 pages of the work pasted into the body of the email to brent@triadaus.com. Put "Query" in the subject line. If you haven't heard back in two weeks, it's probably because your submission wasn't received. In that case, follow up by email to ask if you should resend. To see all the books Brent represents, go to www.btaylorbooks.com

Keeping a NOVEL JOURNAL

by Candice Ransom

I started my first novel journal ten years ago when I was writing my middle-grade, *Rebel McKenzie*. I was at a bed-and-breakfast and had only brought clothes and my laptop. After two days scrolling through chapters and not making much progress, I realized I needed a method to communicate with my work-in-progress. Even with an outline, the novel was slipping away from me.

At a Dollar Store, I bought a 69-cent composition notebook. I jotted that day's date at the top of the first page and poured out my concerns. Having a place to pin down problems stopped loose thoughts from swirling around in my head. I wrote in that cheap composition notebook every day as I plowed through the first draft, then tackled revisions.

Now the novel journal is an integral step in my writing process. Author Sue Monk Kidd keeps one to maintain an account of her progress, "the ups and downs of the novel, when I begin this part and what that scene was like."

When to Start Your Journal

Ideally, sooner than halfway through your first draft! But maybe not the instant you get an idea. It's best to let ideas percolate long enough to know you truly have a book-length project. When that idea keeps tugging at you, when snippets of dialog and pieces of scenes appear, when your character prods you awake at night, that's the time to start a journal.

Handwritten or on the computer? The Dollar Store notebook served well in an emergency, but as weeks passed it became messy and dog-eared. Since I create on a computer, I keep my journal on the computer as well. The journal is the first file established in my project folder.

Using the Novel Journal

Clock in with the novel journal at the beginning of your writing session. Record the date, then put down problems, doubts, books read, weird dreams, quotes. Early in the generation of a novel, there's a lot of random stuff floating around. Stick it all in, it could be useful later. Lift new revelations about your main character or descriptive bits from your journal to your character or setting files. Writing is a solitary practice. Even with a critique part-

ner or writing group, our daily work is done alone. Talk to your journal, confide in it. Here's an excerpt from my 2016 novel journal:

Yesterday I read the blog post of Jon Klassen's talk at the L.A. SCBWI: "Don't think about yourself at all . . . treat the project as something outside yourself." Really? How do I do that? My work always seems to be about myself, even though I want this novel to be different. He also said, "You are not in control of almost any part of this process, except for keeping out what you don't want in a project..." Well, that makes me feel a little better! Some days I feel I'm never in control.

The novel journal is a sounding board. It doesn't judge, even when we whine about the industry!

Stay With It

At each work session, re-read what you wrote the day before as a warm-up. Before bed, you might read over that day's entry, carry those thoughts and concerns as you drift off to sleep (and maybe receive resolutions). Touch base even on non-writing days. Your journal will get lengthy—I print mine every 25 pages or so.

Option: A Second Journal

What do you do with those ideas that arrive while you're hard at work on your current novel? Store them in a second journal file. Sue Monk Kidd maintains two journals with each project: her novel journal, and another to capture "dreams, reflections, and creative ideas." Those ideas will be waiting when you're ready for a new project.

Promotion Bonus

After your novel has been acquired, don't part ways with your journal just yet. It contains an information gold mine you can recycle for publicity. The time span between idea and contract is often years. You won't remember most of that journey, but you have a record. Review your journal, pull out sections that can be drafted as essays, articles, and blog posts. When you're asked interview questions, your journal will handily provide the answers.

WRITING 101:

The Essential Elements of a STORY'S BEGINNING

by Jane McBride

The opening lines and scenes of your book set the stage for what is to come and make a promise to the reader. In effect, they are saying, “This is what my book is going to be about. Come and enjoy the story.”

When I look back at my first attempts at writing a book, especially the beginning of the book, I blush. I cringe. I apologize to myself and to the readers I’d hoped to gain. Fortunately those attempts never made it past the typewriter (yes, I was using a typewriter back then).

Beginnings should sparkle. They should invite. They should entice. They should intrigue. What goes into an intriguing beginning, one that makes the reader think, “I’m going to read the entire book right now?”

OPEN WITH A GREAT FIRST LINE

Let’s take a look at some memorable first lines:

There is no lake at Camp Green Lake. (*Holes* by Louis Sachar)

I have had not so good of a week. (*Clementine* by Sarah Pennypacker)

I shouldn’t have come to this party. (*The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas)

Molly Lou Melon stood taller than her dog and was the shortest girl in the first grade. (*Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon* by Patty Lovell)

Try Googling “great first lines children’s books” and you’ll come up with many lists of examples. Effective first lines do several things: they offer an intriguing introduction to either the main character, the setting, or the current action of the story; they set the tone for the book; and they raise interesting questions in the reader’s mind that the reader will want to answer. A book’s first line is like a story’s front door. If that door is enticing, the reader will

open it and step inside the story.

Here are some techniques for crafting opening lines the hook your readers:

Start in medias res. Literally, this means start in the middle of things. If the reader needs to know the protagonist’s backstory, hold off on introducing this until the reader is invested in the protagonist’s problem. Then fill in the necessary background information with dialogue and short passages of narration.

For example, suppose you’re writing a young adult novel about the daughter of a US senator who is kidnapped in order to coerce her father into voting a certain way on upcoming legislation. Open with the kidnapping scene to catapult your reader into the action and create immediate sympathy for the protagonist. Then, later on in the chapter, reveal who her father is, and why she’s been kidnapped. If that information is revealed in the opening paragraph, it will pull the reader’s attention away from the present action and from the protagonist, and dilute the scene with too many details.

Pose a question. Make your reader need answers. Posing a question is one of the best ways to start a book since it compels the reader to keep flipping the pages to find the answer he seeks.

On the morning of its first birthday, a baby was found floating in a cello case in the middle of the English Channel. (*Rooftoppers* by Katherine Rundell).

The question is clear: Why a baby floating in a cello case in the middle of the English Channel?

Start with dialogue. Beginning with dialogue immediately pulls the reader into the story.

“Where’s Papa going with that axe?” said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast. (*Charlotte’s Web* by E.B. White)

This dialogue quickly reveals a bit about the main

Writing 101...continued

character and the present action of the story, and Fern's question throws the reader off balance and wanting to find answers.

Start with danger.

Whatever it was, it could only have been dead for a couple of hours. (The Fearful by Keith Gray)

Are you hooked? I am. I want to know what could have been dead for only a couple of hours? This beginning not only starts with danger, it also poses a question, thereby giving the reader two reasons to keep going with the story.

Start with setting. This is not my favorite way of beginning a book. It invites long passages of narration, of telling rather than showing ... unless it is done with the fine hand. In *Mortal Engines*, author Philip Reeve introduces the reader to a setting bound to make readers want to know more:

It was a dark, blustery afternoon in spring, and the city of London was chasing a small mining town across the dried out bed of the old North Sea.

If you can craft an opening like this, go ahead and start with setting. If not, you may be better off starting with another method of opening your book. Consider this beginning:

The trees swayed gently in the breeze. Lilacs and freshly turned soil scented the air. It was a day for daydreaming, for casting aside chores and just being.

Though the writing is not terrible, it doesn't give a reader a reason to care. The setting is important only insofar as it affects character and plot. Unless swaying trees, sweet scented air, and daydreams are going to (quickly) segue to the character and action, get rid of them.

Have the narrator introduce himself. This is tricky, because the author is writing from a first person point-of-view, so the opening lines have to give a clear sense of the narrator's voice and personality. One of the best examples of this in literature is *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger. Sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield introduces himself masterfully. The reader immediately learns that the narrator is snarky, sarcastic, and doesn't particularly care if anybody likes him or not. Wow!

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll

probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.

INTRODUCE SIGNIFICANT CHARACTERS

If the opening line doesn't introduce the reader to your protagonist, the opening scene should. The reader needs to know who she'll be following through the story. The first few scenes can also introduce any significant secondary characters who are involved in the plot events in the first and second chapters. Don't throw in too many characters at once—it's important that the reader create a connection with the main character early in the book, and that may not happen if the reader is forced to care about several characters up front. In picture books, keep the cast of characters as small as possible and make sure every secondary character has a distinct and important role in the story.

SET UP THE STORY'S MAIN CONFLICT

Once you get past the opening scene (or even during the initial scene), you've got to set up the story's main conflict in the early scenes. Conflict is what keeps readers turning the pages as they wonder (and worry) over what will happen next. As you're planning your book's plot, try to clarify the primary problem your main character will be tackling and write it in one or two sentences. Summing up the conflict for yourself in the book's early stages will help you keep the plot on track. (For a more in-depth discussion on plotting for different age groups, check out the free trial versions of **Writing Blueprints**: writingblueprints.com/p/free-trial-editions-of-our-top-blueprints)

Factors to consider about conflict:

How soon do you introduce the conflict? This largely depends upon the length of your book. If your books average 25 chapters, for example, and you introduce the conflict by the end of Chapter 2, that's about 8–10 % into the story. An average picture book text is 800 words, so you would probably introduce the conflict within the first 50-85 words. Word counts such as these are very general, but they can help keep the beginner picture book writer from spending 300 words on description at the start

of the story.

How much conflict should you include in the beginning of the book? The answer is it depends. I write 55,000-60,000 inspirational romantic suspense. That sounds like a lot of words, but it's really not, as I have to combine faith, romance, and suspense elements. So I try to introduce conflict in the very first chapter, often starting with the main character facing a life-threatening situation. I want to engage and involve the readers from the get-go. I keep up that pace so that the reader keeps up her involvement. Letting the reader know immediately what conflict the character is confronting early on is key to grabbing their interest and keeping it.

Should the main character (MC) face obstacles in the beginning of the book? Absolutely. The MC should face obstacles in reaching his goal right off. Gone are the days when authors can meander through beautiful passages of description and narrative before the characters "get down to business." As a general guideline, don't put the biggest obstacle in the beginning of the book. Let the intensity of those roadblocks grow in the middle and reach the breaking point near the last chapters of the book. (More on that to come in future articles.)

How intense should the conflict for your book be? The short answer is "very." As always, you will want to make the conflict age-appropriate. The conflict the character faces will be relatively small ones if the story is a picture book. The level of difficulty and/or danger of the conflict the character must face and overcome should increase with the age of your targeted readership. The intensity of the conflicts will grow as the story develops and your MC (and the reader) become more invested in solving this problem. Early in the book the conflicts, or obstacles, should be big enough to force the protagonist to commit to solving this problem, but not so big that your protagonist will want to give up right away.

INTRODUCE THE FIRST SUBPLOT

Will your conflict have layers that need to be explored in subplots? Conflicts in picture books and easy readers should be very straightforward and solvable by the end of the book, with no subplots. Chapter books can have a simple subplot that explores another aspect of the conflict (a relationship with another character, for example, that causes

complications). Middle grade and young adult conflicts can be much more complex and involve several subplots.

Introduce a subplot in the beginning if it makes sense to do so. I like having subplots mirror the overarching plot of the story. Maybe the MC is facing the divorce of her parents. What might a subplot be? In the opening scene, the MC finds out her parents are divorcing. She immediately goes to her best friend's house to vent and get some support, but when she gets there her friend's parents have just returned from the vet, where they learned the beloved family dog has cancer. So the MC bites her tongue and consoles her friend instead. Throughout the story, each character will be facing tremendous loss, and this will have an impact on their relationship. The first chapter establishes these losses and the initial plot threads.

Keep the subplots right for the age group you are targeting, just as you keep the plot to the same. Let the subplot develop naturally, as an organic part of the story. It should never feel like it was just "plopped" in the book solely for the sake of having a subplot or to pad the story.

WRAPPING UP

Is this all there is to writing a great beginning, one that will snare readers, keep them hooked, make them care about the characters, and introduce the conflict complete with subplots and obstacles? Not by a long shot. Here, we have only touched on crafting a book's beginning. Now it is up to you, the writer, to write your own story beginning. Write with verve. Write with passion. Write what only you can write.

Lynne Marie

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR OF



Lynne Marie, who has been our Editor and Agent Spotlight Features Columnist for the past several years, is excited to share with our readers that she will be wearing a new hat. Beginning January 1, 2021, she'll officially become Editorial Director for Spork Books, the children's book imprint of Clear Fork Publishing. Along with those new responsibilities, she will be facilitating her own imprint, Dancing Flamingo Press: A Celebration of Art and Culture, Kindness and Curiosity.

Lynne Marie is the author of the picture books *Hedgehog Goes to Kindergarten*, illustrated by Anne Kennedy (Scholastic 2011), *Hedgehog's 100th Day of School*, illustrated by Lorna Hussey (Scholastic 2017), *The Star of the Christmas Play*, illustrated by Lorna Hussey (Beaming Books 2018), *Moldilocks and the 3 Scares*, illustrated by David Rodriguez Lorenzo (Sterling 2019 and Scholastic 2019) and *Let's Eat! Mealtime Around the World*, illustrated by Parwinder Singh (Beaming Books 2019), as well as another forthcoming picture book. She's also the owner and administrator of RateYourStory.org. When she's not cruising around the world, she lives on a lake in South Florida with her family, a Schipperke named Anakin and several resident water birds. Visit her at www.Literally-LynneMarie.com.

CHILDREN'S BOOK INSIDER: This is big news! How exactly did this exciting opportunity come about?

LYNNE MARIE: Several years ago, in my capacity as the Editor Spotlight Columnist, I arranged an interview with Callie Metler, Publisher of Spork Books. Spork was new on the scene then and accordingly, I asked a lot of hard questions. Despite this, Callie was gracious and kind and didn't shrink from answering transparently and honestly. I came to respect her desire to help writers become

authors, as well as her kindness, candidness, and generosity. We became fast friends! Since that time, I have edited a few Clear Fork Books, including *Ben's West Texas Snow*, *How to Babysit a Logan*, *Lola Can't Leap*, *Ready Set, Gorilla!*, *Rock-n-Roll Woods*, *Sarah's Song*, *Ten Little Ninjas*, and the upcoming *Planting Friendship: Peace, Salaam, Shalom* to name a few. I've always been vocal with Callie, including compliments and constructive criticisms and she has always been respectful and receptive of my feedback. Then, one day late in this year, she asked me to run Spork.

CBI: What did you do when presented with this opportunity?

LM: I actually had two responses. The first was that I cried—I was so touched that she would trust me with her “baby.” Next, I laughed and said, “You know I’m going to be tough, right?” And she said, “Oh, I know!” All kidding aside, I feel like I am the right person for the job. I really love and support my friend who is a single mother with special needs children (like myself) and a

breast cancer survivor as well as a female entrepreneur. I don't think there's anyone who wants to see her succeed more, except her mother!

CBI: What are your plans as far as taking over Spork Books? Are there any changes that will be made?

LM: Yes! I immediately started implementing changes. As many of you know, Spork does not currently pay an advance except in special cases (although their royalties are higher than many larger publishers), so I wanted to institute a plan to change that. To quickly increase revenue we hired writer/graphic designer Andrew Fairchild to digitize our best-selling titles and make them available on Amazon Kindle. I'm proud to say *Ben's West Texas Snow* (which Callie wrote and I edited) is the first



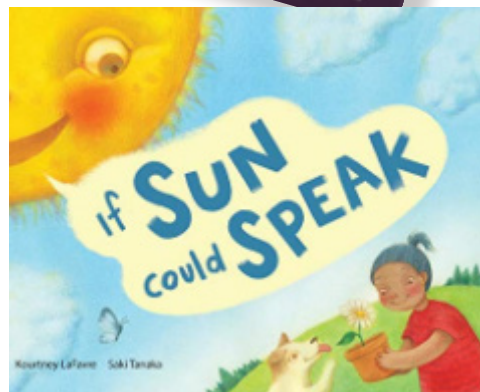
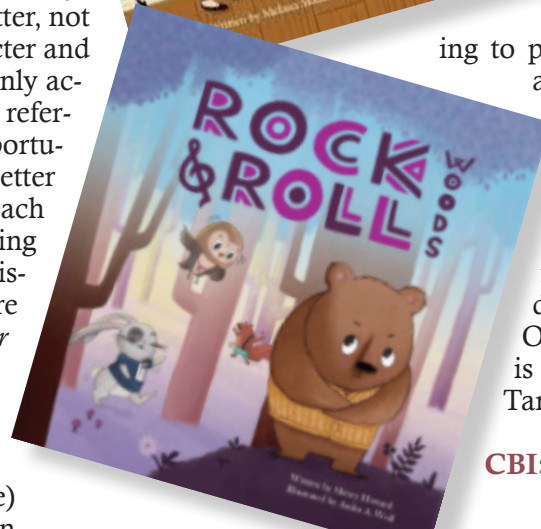
Lynne Marie...continued

of many to come! In addition, we've weeded our list to make sure that most, if not all books, will be representative of the quality story and art we want to portray moving forward. I brought author Heather Macht on to run our IT Department and also as a junior editor. Heather has totally revamped and modernized the website and made it visually outstanding. By the way, she also gave the Rate Your Story website a facelift (www.rateyourstory.org) and that is beautiful now, too! She's also designing a website template for our authors to use who may be challenged in website building and/or be unable to afford a designer. I am currently putting together an advisory board to run acquisitions by (in addition to Callie, me, and Heather).

Callie and I have worked hard these many months to identify ways to work better, not harder, and have come up with stricter and more specific guidelines. We now only accept agented submissions, personal referrals, or rare special submission opportunities. We've decided our time is better spent on improving our brand, reach and author support, than in wading through miles of untargeted submissions. I'm happy to offer this rare opportunity to *Children's Book Insider* members to thank them for reading my column each month!

But that's not all—we have a contest (with a small reading fee) planned for March that will bring in entries on a targeted topic we seek. And we have a monthly "First Pages with Callie and Lynne" session which allows people to get to know us and our styles as well as to see what we like. We even make requests from these sessions from time to time and one that caught both our eyes is currently pending a contract.

Further to that, because marketing



is such an important aspect of being a children's book author, Callie has developed a book marketing course to facilitate author success and we are putting together resources to help our authors.

CBI: What are your thoughts about this marketing course? How important should this aspect of publishing be to a writer?

LM: Unfortunately, there are many writers who love to write but don't even consider or anticipate having to promote, market, and sell their books. They live in a false sense of security that once they've sold a book, their job is mostly done. The truth is that it has only just begun. They don't realize that if they don't earn out their advance, or that if their book doesn't do as well as the publisher needs/expects, they may have trouble getting another deal, and their current publisher won't be too pleased with them. As a small, independent publisher striving to pay even a small amount to authors and illustrators across the board, we can not afford to work with authors who will not work with us to make the book a success. As to what it means to be an independent publisher, Alayne answered that nicely (as well as spoke to Spork's distribution) in last month's interview. One thing she didn't mention though, is that our books are available through Target.com and Walmart.com.

CBI: What do you feel are the benefits of working with a small publisher?

LM: As such, we personally have a vested interest in each book's success. And because our staff is small, we are on the team to assure this success. But still, we can only do so much and the author really needs to get out and promote him/herself and the book. In fact, we are toying around with the idea of having a marketing agreement that outlines the roles that we will play and the

Lynne Marie...continued

author will play in promoting and marketing the book. I'm thinking of putting a link to this on our submissions page, which will weed out anyone who doesn't want to work and be a part of the team.

Also, we care, and we are accessible. Callie has been like a piece of my family for many years now, and she has cultivated that relationship with her authors as well. We expect to continue that mindset and offer a helpful and supportive environment for our authors and illustrators. Honestly, we're all in this together and working together will only allow us to go further down that coveted road to success.

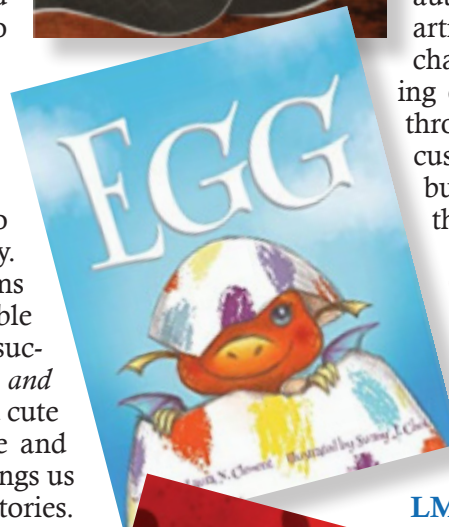
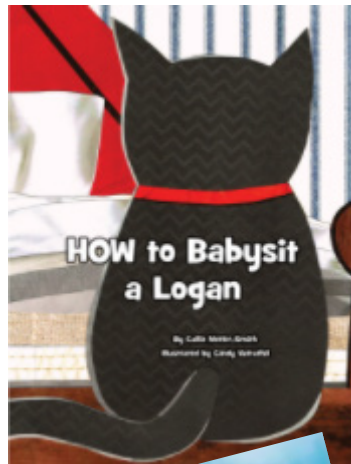
We're even creating a logo store with options for our authors and illustrators to buy t-shirts and mugs and other swag so that they can feel part of the Spork family. And of course, we will be giving these items away to reward authors for being a viable part of the team and helping us achieve success. Our first logo is *In A World of Forks and Spoons, Be a Spork Author*, which also has a cute little Spork. We love to celebrate people and what makes us unique as well as what brings us together—our love for quality children's stories.

CBI: What are some of the things that a Spork children's book author should be willing to do?

LM: Off the top of my head, we will recommend being active participants in debut and/or book promotion groups; participating in blog hops/tours; setting up interviews and writing guest blog posts; submitting to local, state and national book awards (if applicable); being active in the kidlit community; having a website and creating a platform; and, when COVID clears, setting up author signings, readings and school visits. Even now, online appearances can be facilitated. Many of the ideas and resources necessary will be covered in Callie's marketing course.

CBI: What is one of the biggest challenges/obstacles you have encountered since taking over at Spork?

LM: I enjoy rising to meet challenges. As far as obstacles, I did not re-



alize how hard it is to find an artist who you like for a project, and then one who is actually available. Obviously, an artist can make or break a picture book, so they have to be well-suited for the project and you just can't settle.

CBI: How involved is the author in the selection of the artist? Who has the final say over the art?

LM: At the present time, I am very open to suggestions and assistance from the author in finding a mutually-acceptable artist. Of course, a bad experience could change all that, but for now, it's working out well. Of course, I run all choices through the Advisory Board and we discuss, and we want the author to be happy, but ultimately, the final decision lies with the Board.

CBI: How does Blue Whale Press (the independent press which has become an imprint of Clear Fork Publishing, run by Alayne K. Christian, who was last month's CBI Spotlight interviewee) fit into all this?

LM: Currently Blue Whale Press is run autonomously by Alayne (and her husband Steve) and she is doing a great job with some stellar books on the list. I truly loved Bill Borders' *A Horn is Born*. So until it's time for Alayne to retire and me to take over or appoint someone, she'll just operate under our umbrella, and hopefully, her success will also inform my goal of paying advances.

CBI: Tell us a little bit about your new imprint and how it came about.

LM: There are several books pending in the Spork pipeline which I didn't acquire or have any input in, so I believe Callie wanted to allow me to have an avenue in which to express my literary tastes and style. I came up with a few possibilities for the name and she liked *Dancing Flamingo Press* (which nods to Florida, where I now live). Because I had

Lynne Marie...continued

wanted my imprint to be a celebration of things I love and things worth celebrating, I thought a Flamingo was perfect. They're so fun and festive! Plus a little-known fact is that while growing up I doodled countless flamingoes (and cattails for some reason) all over my homework and books.

CBI: What is your mission statement for Dancing Flamingo Press? Is it true that you will be focused on art and culture?

LM: Yes, my imprint will be a celebration of art and culture with a focus on kindness and curiosity. Alayne's Blue Whale Press will be leaning toward more STEM topics in the future.

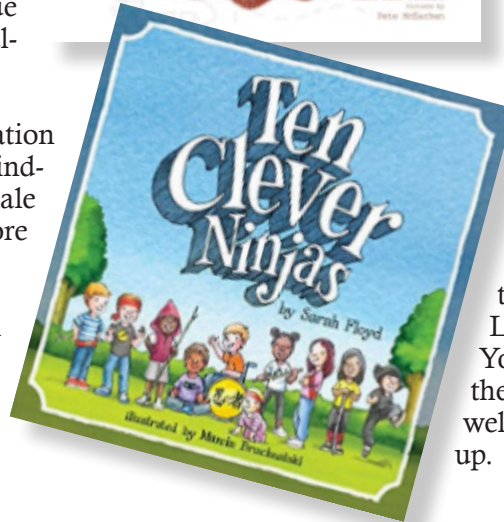
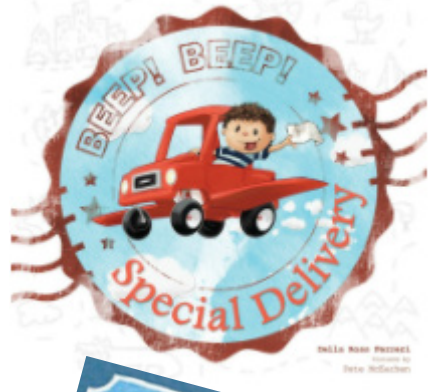
CBI: How many times a year will you be releasing new books? How many spots do you have available for books each season? How important is it for the book to have a seasonal tie-in?

LM: At present, the goal is to publish 3-4 picture books per season (twice a year), starting with April 2022. The first book to come out will be *American Pie*, written by me, and illustrated by Deborah Cuneo. We chose this book because it is a celebration of America and the diverse cultures that make it up and as such features immigrants via anthropomorphized animals. It also integrates curiosity in the main character's desire to learn the new ways and celebrate Fourth of July as best she can, and kindness in that it turns out she cannot do so without the help of her community. It even weaves in art -- the art of baking! The book we are considering for our second book also has culture, curiosity, art and fosters kindness in its subtext that even those of us who are less fortunate have value and potential to be realized and should not be overlooked.

CBI: How important is it that the author touch upon all these things?

LM: It's a guideline and some aspect of the book should touch upon at least three of these, if possible. I understand that not all books will promote an art, but it doesn't hurt to try. There are so many arts to celebrate. Culture should be integral to the story, or perhaps that's one best overlooked if the project touches on the other three. Like with all things, it's a judgment call.

CBI: How would you characterize your wish list? What might you add to that?



LM: I'm pretty much a stickler for effort and hard work. I believe that writers need to read picture books and books on craft. I can tell from a manuscript whether the writer actually reads them or not. I think that this foundation will present itself in a strong character, strong plot, and a strong voice. So basically, if you take this approach to being an author, work hard and have a story that falls under my guidelines and touch upon my wish list at (QueryManager.com/clearforkmedia/Dancingflamingo), I would want to see it. Unfortunately, as I stated, we are only taking books submitted by a gatekeeper (agent), however, there are opportunities to have me see/request your work through the First Pages with Callie and Lynne session and through the Rate Your Story/Spork March contest and the Rate Your Story August Contest, as well as other opportunities that may pop up.

Lynne Marie is offering CBI subscribers a special **Above the Slushpile** submission opportunity to submit to Dancing Flamingo Press during the month of January 2021. Open to picture book manuscripts that fit the specifications listed in her guidelines at QueryManager.com/clearforkmedia/Dancingflamingo. This same link also includes the online submission form. Paste a query letter and attach the manuscript to the appropriate fields on the form. There is no special submission code required, but **this form will be closed at 5:00 PM EST on January 31, 2021**. Lynne Marie will contact the authors of any manuscripts she is interested in directly within two months. If you don't hear from her by that time, it will be considered a pass.

---Please Read Before You Proceed---

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

- 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 manuscript falls within standard word counts of the particular age group for which you're writing. (If you don't know standard word counts, get our free Ultimate Children's Writing Cheat Sheet at: writeforkids.org/ultimate-cheatsheet)
- Your work has been critiqued by a beta reader, critique partner/group, or a freelance editor.
- You have thoroughly revised and polished your manuscript.

The Old Schoolhouse[®]

The Family Education Magazine

SERVES HOMESCHOOLING FAMILIES

interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

This month, we're chatting with Deborah Wuehler, Senior Editor of *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine*.

SHARON BLUMBERG: Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be Senior Editor of The Old Schoolhouse Magazine?

DEBORAH WUEHLER: I began at *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine* 18 years ago as a proofreader. A few years later, the senior editor position became available. I have enjoyed every minute on this wonderful publication. It allowed me to work from home as well as homeschool my own children.

SB: How do readers find your magazine? Subscription, newsstand, etc.?

DW: To subscribe to the quarterly print issue, go to www.TOSPrint.com, for the free digital version, go to www.TOSMagazine.com, and for the free apps, go to <https://tosapps.com/>. To just order one issue, go to www.GrabIssue.com.

SB: What kind of audience reads your magazine?

DW: Our audience mainly consists of families who are educating their children at home, whether that is parents, grandparents, single parents, even working parents! Today, homeschooling is exploding in numbers, and we are here to support all home educators, new and old. We cover all topics that a home educator deals with from preschool through high school, college prep, and career ideas. We cover all of the academics, resources, teacher helps, as well as the planning and execution of a school year. Every issue covers special needs, encouragement, and practical help. We cover popular teaching styles, student learning styles, and various teaching methods for every grade and every subject.

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

DW: We have homeschool parents, grandparents, moms and dads, and even teens write for us about their personal experiences. We also have experts in their field of education write for *The Old Schoolhouse*.

SB: What is the best way for writers to submit to your magazine?

DW: You may submit queries through our website: [www.](http://www.TheOldSchoolhouse.com)

TheOldSchoolhouse.com under the Writer's Guidelines tab, or you can go to www.WriteforTOS.com. We only accept queries through these sites.

SB: How do you respond to writers' submissions?

DW: When a query is submitted through the submit query link, we send an email detailing the next steps in the process. We respond immediately, and at the same time, our review team decides on placements, if any, whether for our blog (www.HomeschoolingWithHeart.com) the magazine, any number of ebooks, or elsewhere.

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

DW: We receive first rights for 180 days from date of publication.

SB: How are authors who write for you paid?

DW: Authors are paid \$75 for a submission, paid within 90 days of date of publication of article.

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

DW: We do not accept any articles relating to public education or articles that cover classroom experiences. We do not accept articles that are infomercials of products or services. We do not accept any reprints of articles whether from blog posts, print, or any other type of publication. We prefer articles on fields of expertise in education in academic subjects, how-to-teach those subjects, unit studies on different time periods in history, how to plan, how to juggle work and home, etc. We occasionally accept children's stories (800 words or less) that have an excellent moral or character quality portrayed.

NOTE TO WRITERS: Be sure to go to www.WriteforTOS.com for *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine* guidelines and upcoming themes, along with query deadlines, before submitting.



HOW TO BUILD A STRONG PLOT

by Jane McBride

After nearly forty years of writing, I still struggle with plotting a book. Give me dialogue to write or characters to create, and I'm on my way. Ask me to outline a plot and then write a story that makes sense, and I flounder.

In an effort to do better with my plotting, I recently did some studying on techniques for coming up with a believable and interesting storyline.

Let's start with a definition: Plot is a narrative of events in sequential order that shows cause and effect. A little boy loses his dog to death is a story. A little boy loses his dog to death and thereby learns about grief is a plot.

What are the elements of a strong plot?

STEP 1: *A strong plot raises questions.* Readers love questions in a story. Why did the 17-year-old boy, the protagonist of our story set in 1980, turn down the much-coveted scholarship to the university he has dreamed of attending all his life?

ACTION: Create an overarching question that will sustain an entire book. Of course, the question you ask will be appropriate for the targeted reader age group. Along the way, pose other questions that will eventually lead to the answer of the main one. Let's take the above example and come up with some more questions and then answer it. Markham is a star athlete, a 4.0 student, and was voted the most popular boy in his senior class, the class of 1980. He applied for and won a coveted scholarship to a prestigious university. Without telling his parents or his guidance counselor, he turns down the scholarship. Why? Why is Markham suddenly secretive? Why does he break up with his girlfriend? Why is he short-tempered with his family and friends? Why does he not want to attend prom? Markham is being blackmailed by another boy at his school who threatens to tell everyone that Markham is gay and his "all American boy" image a sham. Unless Markham refuses the scholarship and does whatever this boy

orders, the other boy will out him. Do you see how the other questions we posed relate to the main one? Leave out questions that don't enhance the primary one, even if they're really interesting questions, such as "Why does Markham always wear blue on game day?"

STEP 2: *A strong plot is cohesive.* What do I mean by cohesive? Every scene, every chapter, should relate to the original premise. Have you had the experience of writing a terrific scene in your novel only to find out that it has nothing to do with the real storyline? I have. It took self-discipline and a few tears to cut those scenes.

ACTION: In writing a scene, ask yourself what is its purpose? How will it enhance and strengthen the main story? If the scene is only to showcase your writing talents and has nothing to do with the plot, cut it. If you must, save it to another file and go back and re-read it to remind yourself what a great writer you are. What if you're writing a story about a 12-year-old girl who doesn't want to visit her grandfather because he's always teasing her about being chubby? Would a scene between the two of her showing him her latest report card and him nodding approvingly move the story along? Probably not. Now, if the scene contained some dialogue where he tells her "It's a good thing you're smart because you're too fat to be pretty," then it becomes relevant.

STEP 3: A strong plot introduces only relevant details. Don't introduce something in the story that doesn't have relevance later on. Chekov's Gun is a principle that states that everything a writer introduces in a story must be necessary and that unneeded elements should be removed.

ACTION: Periodically check your story for elements that have no significance. For example, if you have written a scene where a teenage girl who

How to Build a Strong Plot...continued

is struggling to deal with her parents' divorce reminisces over a corsage from last year's dance from a boyfriend who has since moved away, that corsage should relate to the plot. If it doesn't, get rid of it. In fact, get rid of the entire scene.

STEP 4: *A strong plot sticks to the original story premise.*

ACTION: If you get stuck in a story, which often happens in the middle of the book, go back to the original story premise and let it guide you to what would naturally happen next. In the above example, the girl who is trying to come to terms with her parents' separation and subsequent divorce blames her mother for kicking her father out of the house. The girl maintains an angry distance from her mother, which she gradually admits to herself is because she believes her mother has stopped loving her as well as her father. How does this part of the original premise fit in with the overall arc of this character's growth and change during the story? She might come across the letters her mother wrote her on each birthday, letters our young protagonist had stored away in a special box. Now she re-reads them and remembers that yes, her mother loved her then and still loves her now. The girl grows in maturity and understanding.

STEP 5: *A strong plot may introduce an interesting subplot which will enhance the main one.* I write romance. Sometimes, I show an unfolding romance between two secondary characters that mirrors that of the main characters.

ACTION: First, make certain that the length of your book can sustain a subplot. A very short picture book probably won't hold a subplot. A longer chapter book may be able to have one. Middle grade and young adult novels can support two or three subplots. Second, make sure that your subplot can be reasonably interwoven with your main plot. Ask yourself how the two storylines can work together. Will the subplot lend greater depth or understanding to the main storyline? Will it develop a relationship or other aspect of your protagonist that she needs in order to solve the main story problem? A subplot that has no bearing on the main storyline won't work.

STEP 6: *A strong plot has a believable ending.* Notice I didn't say happy ending, though I love happy endings. A great ending needs to fit the story and the characters so that the reader, upon finishing the book, will think, "Yeah, it couldn't have happened any other way."

ACTION: Analyze your characters and storyline periodically throughout writing the book. Ask yourself if they are heading to a satisfying ending. Or are they just heading toward an abrupt stop that makes no sense and leaves readers feeling dissatisfied? *Moby Dick* is an example of a great plot with a memorable, if not happy, ending. Your ending should represent what you want your readers to take away from your story.

STEP 7: *A strong plot makes the reader sit back after finishing the book and think, "Wow, this was a great read. I'm glad I spent my time and money on this book."*

ACTION: Read your manuscript with an eye and ear to what you are feeling. Reading a novel can be (and I say should be) an emotional experience. Determine what emotions your words are evoking and what your readers are likely to be feeling. If one of those emotions is boredom, rethink your plot!

Plotting is a skill that can be learned. Take classes or workshops about it. Join a critique group and ask the members how they are feeling as you read sections of your manuscript. Most of all, write and keep writing.

 writing blueprints

Frequently 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, check out free trial editions here: <https://writingblueprints.com/p/free-trial-editions-of-our-top-blueprints>

SMALL SEEDS & BIG IDEAS

BRIAN WEISFELD

MG AUTHOR/GIRLPRENEUR ADVOCATE

interview by PJ McIlvaine

Inspiration comes when you least expect it (or big ideas come from small seeds). For Brian Weisfeld, business executive and brand creator, it came from his daughter's lemonade stand. After seeing one of his daughter's struggles with selling lemonade, Weisfeld followed his heart and his intuition to launch a girl empowering book series, *The Startup Squad* with co-author Nicole C. Kear (Macmillan Publishing, thestartupsquad.com/). Critically acclaimed as *The Baby-Sitters Club* for a generation with new hopes and passions, *Kirkus Reviews* praised the books: "drama-filled, fast-paced, entertaining...places friendship and hard work at its heart." A born salesman and gummy bear fanatic, Weisfeld lives in Silicon Valley with his family.

PJ McILVAINE: On the face of it based on your background as a business executive, turning your acumen and attention into creating a book series promoting entrepreneurship in young girls seems a bit of a stretch. How did you make this crossover? What was the igniting incident?

BRIAN WEISFELD: A bit of a stretch is a HUGE understatement. *The Startup Squad* was inspired by my two daughters. Yes, I'm a former business guy (I helped build IMAX Corporation and Coupons.com) but when my daughters were just eight and six years old, I watched my older daughter attempt to sell Girl Scout cookies and run a charity bake sale with incredible amounts of enthusiasm, but no practical knowledge about how to market and sell a product. Later, while reading to my younger daughter what felt like yet another unicorn-rainbow-princess-fairy book, I was struck by a desire for more empowering books for my daughters. Those two thoughts combined in

my head and launched my five-year journey into the children's publishing industry and the creation of *The Startup Squad*.

PM: You had many twists and turns and bumps along the way. What was your highest moment and your lowest? How did you know this was an idea worth pursuing? What kept you going in the face of rejection?

BW: So many twists and turns! The story of the making of *The Startup Squad* book series would make a great book. (I did a TedX in which I recounted some of the more amusing tales of my journey in case anyone is interested: https://www.ted.com/talks/brian_weisfeld_kindling_inspiration_from_my_daughters_girl_scout_cookies_and_fairy_books)



I thought it was an idea worth pursuing but every couple of months I set myself an external validation milestone to ensure I was on the right path. At first, I

asked my wife what she thought. Then I checked with some friends. Then I shared early versions of the first few chapters with some friends and their kids. Then I queried a few agents. Then I spoke to a couple of publishers. At each step I received enough validation to give me the confidence to continue my journey.

One of my mentors once told me that things are never as good as they look or as bad as they seem



Brian Weisfeld...continued

and that thinking helped me manage the highs and lows of the publishing process. My highest moments were probably seeing the ARC of my book for first time (which someone surprised me with), launching our 100inspiring100 fundraising effort with Girls Inc of NYC which has led to the donation of 7,000 copies of the book to girls in need, hearing that a girl saw the cover of the book and said to her mom: “that girl looks just like me!”, and learning about girls who were inspired to start their own businesses after reading the book.

Even my lowest moments provided some inspiration to push forward. When I meet with kids, I tell them that entrepreneurs don't say “win some, lose some” they say “win some, learn some” because they know that even if they fail, they'll have learned something to help them succeed the next time. So when an editor at a publishing house told me that my kids' dialogue was so bad she was surprised to find out I actually had kids (yes, someone really told me that!!), I was obviously hurt. But then I thought about her comments and tried to hear what she was really saying. She was telling me (in a VERY direct way) that my dialogue needed work. So I took a dialogue writing class and continued my journey, thankful for her feedback.

PM: How do you juggle family and business/writing? Has the current pandemic affected that?

BW: The one nice thing about being stuck at home has been that my girls are around more. I worked from home already so the only real difference is that my home office is a bit more crowded. I'm fortunate, though, in that my girls are teens and so are self-sufficient for the most part. My heart goes out to those with young kids who are looking after their kids while also trying to be productive and creative.

My kids have always been a priority for me. Even when I was helping to build companies, I tried to leave the office in time for dinner with my family and then get back online after they went to sleep. The only other significant difference with the pandemic is that I am

not traveling which gives me extra time at home (it's nice but I miss traveling so much!!!).

PM: Since you helped scale businesses like IMAX and create brands, what business principles did you apply in your path to publication?

BW: Interesting question. My role in business was as a Chief Operating Officer. I was in charge of turning the Chief Executive Officer's vision into reality and ensuring that the company delivered on its goals. The Startup Squad is the first time in my career that the vision I'm executing on is my own, so that's a big change. I approached my path to publication as I did

in business: I set goals for myself and measured myself against those goals, I used my network to try to open doors and get advice from those who knew this industry better than I did (aka everyone), and I tried to learn the customs, norms, and processes of the industry to better understand how The Startup Squad could fit in. My business approach was unique for an author, and certainly raised some eyebrows amongst the people I dealt with, but I didn't know of any other way to go about the process.

PM: What do you have planned for *The Startup Squad*? Do you envision it as a series a la *The Babysitter's Club* or even television?



BW: *The Startup Squad* is a series that will include at least three books—the third book is scheduled for release in May 2021. Our goal is to inspire girls to start their first businesses and to empower them with an entrepreneurial mindset so we're thinking broader than just the books. We're looking into a number of different ways to reach and impact girls, television certainly being one of those options, including some in-person programs for when the current COVID-19 situation is behind us (hopefully soon!). For example, we worked with a number of Girl Scout troops on a program in which the girls read *The Startup Squad* before they started selling Girl Scout Cookies. We found that girl scouts who read the book had more success and fun selling cookies so plan to work with even more troops in 2021.

Brian Weisfeld...continued

PM: Do you have an agent? If so, how long did that take?

BW: I do have an agent, he's actually my third agent! Almost every agent I queried about my idea asked to see my manuscript because they were intrigued by the idea of *The Startup Squad*. But I got a ton of rejections after the agents reviewed the manuscripts. I received two offers of representation from agents approximately three years after I started working on the project. I signed with one of those agents but my needs and her expertise weren't a fit so I switched to my current agency. Within weeks I had two different three-book offers from major publishers. The agent who landed me my book deal left my agency shortly before the release of my first book but another agent took over from him and we've worked together ever since.

PM: What surprised you most about publishing?

BW: My publishing surprise was how much I had to do to market the books. I had read that publishers will help you launch your book and get it on the shelves but that most of the ongoing marketing of the book is the responsibility of the author—and that has proven to be true. I need to be promoting the book series or it will sit on the shelves. The marketing team I work with has been extremely supportive of any of my crazy ideas pre, during, and post each of my book launches—but a lot of the ongoing promotion has definitely fallen onto my shoulders.

PM: Tell me about your writing routine. How did you find your co-author? Do you edit and exchange drafts as you go along? Do you write every day? Do you outline? Do you juggle multiple projects?

BW: My co-author for *The Startup Squad* series is the fabulous Nicole C. Kear. We're currently working on the third book in the series (due out May 4, 2021) and have it down to a science. Nicole had published a prior book series with my same editorial team at Macmillan and they introduced us. The creation of each book in the series begins with Macmillan's editorial team and

me creating a 5-6-page outline of the book. We determine the business lessons we want to weave into the storyline, who will be the lead and sub-lead characters (the sub-lead is usually the character that will be the main protagonist in the following book), and the outline of the plot. The finished outline is sent to Nicole who, approximately three months later, miraculously sends us back 24,000 amazing words. Macmillan and I then work together to edit the draft going back and forth with Nicole until we all sign off on the manuscript. While Nicole writes, I work on all of the other aspects of the book and our programs.



PM: Many authors are shy introverts who loathe speaking in front of large audiences, never mind doing virtual presentations. What tips or tricks do you have to push out of one's comfort zone?

BW: I'm an introvert but I'm not shy so I can play the part of an extrovert when I need to. I've also spoken in front of groups throughout my business career and have taken a few public speaking classes to help me manage the process. I even took a refresher class right before the release of my first book to help me prepare for the most fearsome of audiences—elementary school kids! My professor was Matt Abrahams who wrote *Speaking Up Without Freaking Out*

and here are a couple of his tips:

- Anxiety and excitement have similar physiological manifestations so try to think of how passionate you are about your book and get excited to impart that to your audience. Try to think of it as a conversation about something that you are passionate about instead of a presentation.
- If you tend to sweat or flush when you are nervous, hold something cold like a bottle of water in your hand to lower your core body temperature. If you tend to shake, give your nervous energy a place to go by squeezing your toes or your fingers in a non-gesturing hand. Breathe slowly and deeply to lessen your nervous symptoms.
- Finally, think rationally and make a list about the

Brian Weisfeld...continued

worst things that could happen. Seriously! The worst thing probably isn't that bad in the grand scheme of things—you will survive!—and the act of writing down your fears will help.

My other suggestion is as I tell audiences all the time: failure isn't what happens when you don't succeed, it's what happens when you don't try in the first place. The only real failure is not taking a risk so don't hesitate to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Remember that you win some, and you learn some!

PM: What do you want young readers to take away from your book series?

BW: *The Startup Squad* books are divided into three sections which I describe as Inspiration, Information, and Aspiration. The Inspiration section is the bulk of the book; it's a novel about four sixth-grade girls that has been referred to as *The Baby-Sitters Club* meets *Lean In*. The narrative covers their adventures, relationships, successes, and failures—while in the background they're creating and running different businesses. My hope is that after reading the narrative, readers will be inspired to start their own lemonade stands or other businesses. The Information section is a nonfiction section with business tips drawn from the narrative. My hope is that readers who were inspired by the story to start a business will use these tips to be more successful. The Aspiration section is an interview with an actual girlpreneur who has built her own business. My hope is that readers will realize that their businesses can become big businesses as well. So my overall hope is that young readers will be inspired by *The Startup Squad* to start their own business and to begin to develop an entrepreneurial mindset. It's not that I think every reader should grow up to be an entrepreneur, but I believe strongly that girls with an entrepreneurial mindset (who see opportunities instead of problems, who say yes when everyone else says no, who are comfortable with risk and failure) will be more likely to reach their potential in life, regardless of the path they choose.

PM: How is your daughter doing at her lemonade stand? Is she following your advice?

BW: My girls have (mostly) graduated from their lemonade stands although they were still peddling lemonade from our driveway every now and then before the pandemic. My older daughter is passionate about the

environment and preventing climate change. She uses entrepreneurship to further that passion. Last year she ran a lemonade stand to raise money for her school's climate awareness club and to enter her club's booth in our town's summer festival.

My younger daughter had a calligraphy business with some friends and recently started a new job creating content for *The Startup Squad's* TikTok channel! She is also the one more likely to run a lemonade stand at our house. Most often, she raises money for a charity rather than for herself. Interestingly, I've been asked by several girls' advocates to tell girls that it's okay for them to start a business simply because they want to make money for themselves. I've been working with my daughter on that same message and it will be a theme of our third book which will be released next year.

PM: Where do you see yourself, writing wise, five years from now?

BW: Five years from now I certainly hope to be back in front of kids at schools and libraries across the country without fear of Covid-19. As each day of 2020 passes, it is getting harder and harder to imagine that one day we'll return to "normal," but hopefully in 2025, as I prepare for the release of the seventh(!) book in *The Startup Squad* series, 2020 will be a distant spot in our proverbial rear-view mirrors.

PM: You know I have to ask: what is your favorite gummy bear?

BW: All of them!



Vintage CBI: February 2002

Dear Reader:

This morning I accompanied my son's kindergarten class on a field trip to watch the Olympic torch as it passed through Fort Collins. The excursion was the brainchild of the school's principal, who felt the kids shouldn't miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The kindergartners felt differently.

I'm sure attitudes would have been better if there wasn't eight inches of fresh snow on the ground and temperatures in the teens. And the fact that the snow delayed the torch's appearance by half an hour didn't help. The fifth and sixth graders probably liked getting an hour away from class, but the significance of this historic event was lost on the younger kids. Most of Matthew's class doesn't even know what the Olympics is, and "torch" isn't in their everyday vocabulary.

Nevertheless, the teachers and parents led over 400 students through five snow-packed blocks and across busy College Avenue to wait, praying that no one hurled themselves into oncoming traffic. Finally, after many complaints of frozen toes and empty stomachs, flashing lights appeared down the street. The procession of police cars and Coca-Cola floats perked the kids up, but the runner bearing the torch was sandwiched between two tall gray vans carrying Olympic committee officials. Though Matthew gamely waved his official Coca-Cola "I Saw the Flame" flag, I have a feeling he missed seeing the actual flame. Then came the ultimate disappointment: We weren't riding back on school buses as planned, but walking. Since Matthew walks to school every day, the chance to ride on a bus was really the only reason he agreed to come out in the cold in the first place.

As we scurried back to school, I overheard two girls talking about the morning. One turned to her friend and, with typical six-year-old drama, said, "This was the worst morning of both of our lives." As I choked back a laugh, I wondered who the field trip had really been for after all.

Adults often expose children to experiences or ideas because they want to expand children's horizons. Sometimes, this is a good thing. But in life, as in writing children's books, the adult must take the age of the child into consideration. Young children are very "me" centered; history and tradition are only relevant if they impact the child's daily life in a positive way. If the child is inconvenienced, the lesson is annoying. I admit to feeling a mixture of patriotism and awe as the runner jogged by with the torch; Matthew only wanted hot chocolate.

Authors often write children's books because they have something to say about life that they feel children need to hear. It's fine to pass on wisdom, values, or common sense lessons, but before you do, think about whether the child is ready to hear them. Not every message will make sense to young children, and others they won't even care to hear. Children need a certain amount of life experience within which to place the information they receive from books. If you try to teach them something they can't put to use right away, it won't have any relevance to their lives.

Another thing to keep in mind is the way you convey the lesson. Instead of approaching a topic from your own adult point of view, put yourself inside the child's head. Don't start with the moral of the story; think about the process with which this moral was learned. After all, kids ask "Why?" and "How?" more often than "What?"

After we returned to Matthew's school, one of the torchbearers visited his class. The kids got to hold the torch, see the holes where the flame came out, ask the legally-blind woman how she jogged down an icy street without falling down. This was something personal they could touch. This was impressive.

And much warmer.

Sincerely,

Laura Backes