


# Children's Book Insider

The Children's Writing Monthly  January 2023

## HOW TO END YOUR PICTURE BOOK



**ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE  
SUBMISSION OPPORTUNITY**



**YEEHOO  
PRESS**



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Published 12 times/year by Children's Book Insider, LLC,  
mail@CBIclubhouse.com  
<http://www.writeforkids.org>

ISSN 1073-7596

Publisher: Laura Backes  
Layout: Shellie Dougherty  
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Chief Operations Officer: Jon Bard

*Children's Book Insider, The Children's Writing Monthly* is an electronic monthly newsletter that is included in the paid membership to the Children's Writing Knowledge Base (<http://www.CBIclubhouse.com>). The cost of membership is \$49.95 per year, or \$5.49 per month if billed monthly. For more information, go to <http://writeforkids.org/come-join-the-insiders/>

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*Children's Book Insider* makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses and literary agents before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers or agents with whom they are unfamiliar, and read contracts carefully. All "At Presstime" listings are current at the time of initial publication. Members are urged to verify listings past the month of publication.

# At Presstime:

## Contest for Unpublished Authors with Disabilities

Sleeping Bear Press, the picture book imprint of the Cherry Lake Publishing Group, sponsors the annual Own Voices, Own Stories Award for children's picture book manuscripts written by new authors from historically marginalized groups with the intention of recognizing and amplifying new and diverse voices with underrepresented perspectives. For the 2023 award season and in partnership with Easterseals, the Own Voices, Own Stories Award will focus on picture books written by new authors with disabilities.

**Eligibility:** The Own Voices, Own Stories Award contest is open to new authors who identify as having a disability. Applicants must be United States residents and at least 18 years of age. Only projects and authors who have not had a previously traditionally published children's book will be considered. Projects must be unagented at time of submission. Manuscripts that have been previously submitted to Sleeping Bear Press and/or the Own Voices, Own Stories Award will not be considered. Authors who have self-published books will be considered, but the submitted story must be original (i.e. not the self-published title).

**Submissions are open January 1 through March 31.** Applicants must submit via the award submission form at [sleepingbearpress.com/ovos](https://sleepingbearpress.com/ovos). Manuscripts must be for ages 4-10, up to 1300 words (not including back matter), and can be fiction, nonfiction or poetry. All submissions should speak to the authentic experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities with the purpose of engaging readers in narratives that reflect underrepresented voices and communities. Only stories with human protagonists will be considered.

Authors may submit up to two manuscripts per award period. Each manuscript must come via separate submission. Manuscripts cannot be submitted to additional publications, publishers, agents, or contests while under consideration for the Award.

**Prizes:** Grand Prize winners will receive a \$2,000 cash prize, in addition to a publishing contract with advance and royalties standard for new Sleeping Bear Press authors. Honor Award winners will receive a \$500 cash prize as well as one consulting session with a Sleeping Bear Press editor. Submissions selected for the Sleeping Bear Press Own Voices, Own Stories collection will be offered a publishing contract. For more information, go to [sleepingbearpress.com/ovos](https://sleepingbearpress.com/ovos)

## New YA Imprint Seeks Historical Fiction and Narrative Nonfiction Proposals

Santa Monica Press, an independent publisher of adult nonfiction, launched the imprint Santa Monica Press/Teen in 2022. Currently looking for Young Adult Historical Fiction proposals, with an emphasis on 20th-century historical fiction, and Young Adult Narrative Nonfiction proposals with either contemporary or historical narratives. Specifically seeking captivating and unusual stories, featuring a unique and compelling author's voice.

Proposals should include A cover letter with a brief summary of the book and the approximate length (word count, not pages) of your manuscript and the book's target audience. Also include a brief chapter-by-chapter synopsis; two sample chapters; any photographs or illustrations you believe might assist in evaluating your proposal; a brief list of similar or competitive books, including title, author, publisher, ISBN number, and date of publication, with info on what makes your book unique; marketing and publicity plans or ideas; a brief autobiographical summary or résumé; your mailing address, daytime phone number, and e-mail address.

Paste the cover letter into the body of the email and attach the rest as ONE Word doc file. Email to [acquisitions@santamonica.com](mailto:acquisitions@santamonica.com) Replies within three months of receipt of proposal.

**Magazine for Ages 6-14 Accepting Science, Nature and History Article Queries**

*National Geographic Kids* is a general-interest nonfiction magazine for 6- to 14-year-olds published ten times a year. The magazine's mission is to find fresh ways to entertain children while educating and exciting them about their world. Material in Nat Geo Kids covers a broad range of topics, including natural history, science, geography, history, and human interest. Before submitting, study back issues for style and content (issues are available at most libraries) and see the table of contents of recent issues at [kids.nationalgeographic.com/magazine](https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/magazine)

All geography, archaeology, paleontology, and history article ideas must answer the question, "What's fun about that?" Science and technology ideas must answer the questions, "How does this directly affect a kid's life?" and "What's in it for a 10-year-old?" Natural history ideas must be tightly focused and exciting. For example: Don't pitch a general feature about cheetahs. Do pitch a piece on how a cheetah's physical attributes make it the ultimate hunting machine. For the Amazing Animals department, looking for animal pieces that tell about unusual abilities, animal heroes, friendships, or silly situations. Other departments include Weird But True, Guinness World Records, and Bet You Didn't Know.

Send a query letter (about 250 words) that outlines your idea in the following way: It should include a headline that suggests what the article is about, a deck that amplifies the headline (a short sentence that follows the main headline and summarizes the article), a strong lead or hook statement, and a paragraph that clearly sets out the premise and approach of the piece. The query should represent the style in which the piece will be written. Also mention which area of the magazine your story fits into. Include any clips that show a fun sense of style and tone, as well as a listing of previous publishing credits, if any. Study recent issues of Nat Geo Kids (available at most libraries) to be sure that your idea has not already been covered within the last three years. Paste everything into the body of an email, and submit to Kay Boatner, Senior Editor, [Kay.Boatner@natgeo.com](mailto:Kay.Boatner@natgeo.com), OR Allyson Shaw, Editor, [Allyson.Shaw@natgeo.com](mailto:Allyson.Shaw@natgeo.com)

**Publisher Seeking Teen Fiction with Romance Elements**

*Entangled Teen* is an imprint of Entangled Publishing and features single-title young adult romance novels published in both digital and print. Seeking fresh voices with interesting twists on popular genres. All stories should have a romance element, but can be in any of the following subgenres of romantic fiction: Contemporary, Science Fiction, Paranormal, Fantasy, Historical, Romantic Suspense and Thrillers.

Looking for high-concept plots with romantic elements. Protagonists should be 16-19 years old. Manuscripts should be 70k to 120k words in length for all genres, except contemporary romance, which should remain under 90k. M/F, M/M, F/F relationships and multicultural characters are welcome!. Accepts both agented and unagented submissions. Submit through Submittable at [entangledpublishing.submittable.com/submit/19015/entangled-teen](https://entangledpublishing.submittable.com/submit/19015/entangled-teen) Study recent titles at [entangledpublishing.com/books?filters=Teen&facets=true](https://entangledpublishing.com/books?filters=Teen&facets=true)

**Agent Accepting MG, YA Genre Submissions**

**Bailey Tamayo** is an Associate Agent with Stanford J. Greenburger Associates ([www.greenburger.com](http://www.greenburger.com)). She is seeking middle grade, YA, and adult speculative fiction, fantasy, sci fi, horror, and anything in between—especially when the genre is a unique setting for the deeply human stories underneath. She is drawn to poignant coming of age narratives like *The Graveyard Book*, *I Am Not Okay With This*, and any given Ghibli film. Her favorite stories are those that are gently heartbreaking, hopeful, or (ideally) both. She enjoys sharp humor, lyrical prose, lovable and complex characters, and rich worldbuilding. Query Bailey at [btamayo@sjga.com](mailto:btamayo@sjga.com) with the subject line "Query: [PROJECT TITLE]." Include a brief pitch and bio in your cover letter and your full manuscript as a Word attachment. If Bailey believes your work might be a good fit for her list, she will be in touch within 4-6 weeks. If you haven't heard back in 6 weeks, consider it a pass.

# Picture Book Endings That Stay With You

by Natascha Biebow

**W**ouldn't it be great if there were a magic 'ending machine'? You'd write your picture book and then feed it in and POOF! – out pops a spectacular ending!

Endings can be one of the most frustrating and nig-glesome aspects of writing picture books. But when you've cracked it, a great ending can make the difference between that book that children ask for again and again, and the one they aren't really fussed about ever reading again.

So, what makes a great ending?

- the main plot problem set up in the opening of the story **must be resolved in a satisfactory way** – the character's hopes, wants and needs are met and realized.
- your **characters must grow and change** by the end of the book – they should have learned something and will be bigger, better "people" as a result of their journey. So, by implication, will the reader.
- **readers must feel satisfied** and not be left hanging, wondering about unresolved plot points or sub-plots. All loose ends should be tied-up or dealt with.

Here are some examples where the main character has gone on a journey and grows or something significant changes as a result of the action in the story:

*In No Roses for Harry* by Gene Zion and Margaret Bloy Graham, Harry is given a handmade sweater with roses that he dislikes. He tries all sorts of antics to get rid of it, and just when it seems he will never lose it, a bird swoops down and helps him solve the problem by unraveling it. The satisfying ending reveals that the bird has made a sweater nest with the yarn, and Harry gets a new sweater – with black and white spots – like him.

*Knuffle Bunny, A Cautionary Tale* by Mo Willems has

an equally satisfying ending: in the journey of losing and finding her special toy, lost on a trip to the laundromat, Trixie is moved to speak her first word: "Knuffle Bunny!" (of course).

In Lauren Child's *I Am Too Absolutely Small for School*, Lola is convinced she is too busy and too small for school – plus a whole host of other excuses. But her big brother helps her to see that school might actually be quite handy to write to Santa or read bedtime stories to an ogre or count cookies. Now that Lola's changed her mind, all that remains is to reassure her equally nervous invisible friend, Soren Lorenson!

Here are some other kinds of endings:

**Dark endings:** The ending of Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross' *Tadpole's Promise* is controversial, but true to nature. The caterpillar turns into a butterfly and gets eaten by her true love, the Tadpole-turned frog. Some adults may wonder: what will children make of this realistic and not at all happy ending?! It is memorable, though – and it works!

**Circular endings:** In *A Bit Lost* by Chris Haughton, we see the classic ending that is the story starting all over again, with a slight twist. The story begins with Little Owl falling out of the nest and his quest for his mommy. Finally, reunited with her at last, Mommy invites his rescuers up to the nest, only for Little Owl to fall asleep again . . .

**Unexpected endings:** In *Flora's Flowers* by Debi Gliori, there is a delightful surprise in store for young readers who believed in little Flora as she plants a small brick and declares, "I'm growing a small house." Her brothers and sisters all made fun of Flora while the seasons changed from Spring to Fall and Winter to Spring again, but look what grew!

The Baddie gets eaten up and **everyone lives happily ever after:** In traditional tales, the baddie often gets his comeuppance at the end of the story and meets a das-



## Picture Book Endings...continued

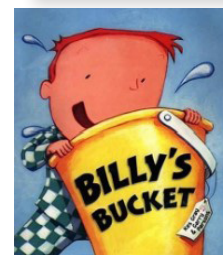
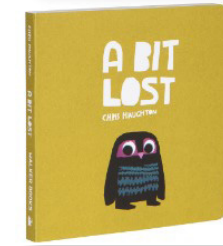
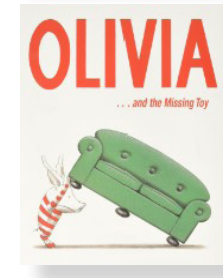
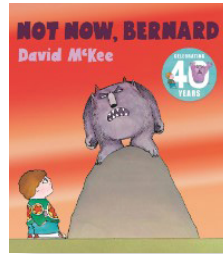
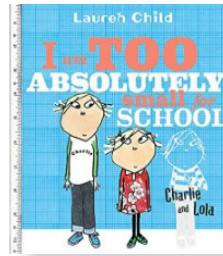
tardly end. For example, at the end of Irene Yates' retelling of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, the Troll falls SPLASH! into the river, never to be seen again, and the three goats happily munch the delicious grass on the other side of the bridge he was so fiercely guarding.

**Twists:** sometimes, the ending is a twist that is a delicious visual joke or surprise reveal. For example: In the classic, *Not Now, Bernard* by David McKee, Mom and Dad have been ignoring Bernard throughout the story (they are busy!), and they are completely oblivious to the fact that Bernard really has been eaten by the monster! But you'd only know this if you saw it in the pictures.

Or in *Susan Laughs* by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross, Susan enjoys many everyday pastimes, but it isn't until the final page that the pictures reveal that Susan is differently-abled.

Or the **twist is an unexpected plot turn**. For example, in *Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin, the cows are holding the farmer hostage with a typewriter and demanding electric blankets. The duck is the neutral party who brokers the agreement, but in an unexpected twist at the end of the book, it's the ducks who have appropriated the typewriter! Their demand? A diving board!

**P.S. endings:** Sometimes, the ending is not



quite the end. When author Kes Gray's son read *Billy's Bucket*, illustrated by Garry Parsons, he was concerned for the whale that comes out of Billy's bucket onto the street when his dad borrows the bucket to clean the car without asking. How would the whale survive? So we added a postscript on the back endsheet, in which the whale was safely shoe-horned back into the bucket with the aid of several fire engines.

The endings I like best are those that make me laugh or leave me with a warm feeling inside. They bring closure and a kernel of truth about life that resonates. For instance, in *Olivia and the Missing Toy* by Ian Falconer, the reveal is that it was Olivia's dog that stole and chewed up her toy. But, even though she's upset, Perry is allowed to sleep next to her at bedtime – because even she can't be angry forever!

Or in Mo Willems' *Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs*, the book ends with a pun on the moral of the story. If only the dinosaurs had arrived home a little sooner and actually locked the back door . . . they might have been able to eat up that delicious, chewy chocolatey Goldilocks intruder before she left!

**What kinds of endings do you like?**

### TOP TIPS for creating a strong ending:

**CHECK:** Does your ending come full-circle to the opening?

#### ASK:

- Have the characters grown and changed as a result of the plot?
- Has the problem set up in the opening been resolved?
- Is it a *satisfying* resolution?

**CHECK:** Did you set up the action and characterization to deliver the punchline at the end of the book in a satisfying way? Everything in a picture book

must be there for a reason! If not, be brave and CUT.

#### **CHECK:** Does your ending *tell* readers the message at the end of the book?

Don't be tempted! This can be didactic and off-putting for the reader. Instead, strengthen the character's motivation and plot so that the action will *show* the message and the reader can intuit it as a result of the story.

**Play the 'what if?' game.** Can you make your ending *even more* surprising or add an unexpected outcome the reader didn't see coming?

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interview by Lynne Marie

**Note:** This interview expands upon and updates a prior interview, which *Children's Book Insider* members with an annual subscription can access by searching our archives for the June, 2020 issue. This is just one of the benefits of being an annual member!

**H**elen H. Wu is the Publisher at Yeehoo Press. Helen is also a children's book author, illustrator, translator, and graphic designer. She is a proud first-generation immigrant who loves sharing inspiring stories from her immigrant experience. Her most recent picture books include *Tofu Takes Time* (Beaming Books 2021), and *Long Goes to Dragon School* (Yeehoo Press 2023).

Yeehoo Press is an independent children's book publisher based in San Diego, California. Yeehoo books are published in English in the US and in simplified Chinese in mainland China, featuring picture books on cultural inclusivity, social-emotional learning, hands-on experience, and STEAM-related topics. Yeehoo Press is dedicated to creating fun, enchanting, and socially responsible children's books and products for readers and customers around the world.

**LYNNE MARIE:** It has been two and a half years since we last interviewed you as an editor with Yeehoo Press! How has Yeehoo Press changed and grown during that time? How have your job responsibilities changed during that time?

**HELEN H. WU:** I started as an associate publisher two and a half years ago. Back then, I made acquisitions, got involved in every step of bookmaking, and

worked with authors directly.

Earlier this year, I was promoted to publisher and am in charge of the company's business strategies. Our other editors largely make the acquisitions. As a publisher, I majorly draft publishing plans, such as how many titles to publish each year and what topics and themes to cover. I lead the marketing department. I work with our marketing specialists to develop a thorough plan, including ads, publicity, and other promotional opportunities for our books.



Yeehoo has published 21 titles in 2021 and 2022, and will publish 11 titles in 2023. Yeehoo books received many positive editorial reviews and awards. Our books, *The Vanishing Lake* by Paddy Donnelly won an IPPY award, *My Monsterpiece* by Amalia Hoffman is gold medal winner in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards 2021. *The Whole World Inside Nan's Soup* by

Hunter Liguore and Vikky Zhang is winner of Paterson Prize for Books for Young Readers and a Every Child a Reader Honor Book. *The School of Failure: A Story About Success* by Rosie J. Pova and Monika Filipina won Hiii Illustration 2021 Merit Award. Several of our books have been licensed to foreign publishers, including South Korea, France, Germany, Netherlands, etc.



*Helen H. Wu...continued*

Besides books, I'm forming a new product department in Yeehoo Press to develop book-related licensed items and merchandise. We're developing plushies, craft kits, coloring bookmarks, and giant coloring posters for classes. Merchandise brings the book and its characters to a broader audience and market, and the book gives the merchandise a meaningful message and makes it unique. We aim to create a dynamic and multi-dimensional learning experience for our readers and customers and make our books, stories, and characters more memorable for a broader audience, and ultimately bring success to our fabulous authors and illustrators.

**LM:** You recently received an honor-  
 ee nomination in *Publishers Weekly Star Watch* as the associate publisher of Yeehoo Press. Congratulations! Please tell us a little bit about this nomination and the criteria for nominations. What does this mean for you? For Yeehoo Press?

**HHW:** It was my great honor to be a *Publishers Weekly Star Watch* honoree. This award by *Publishers Weekly* honors the rising stars of book publishing. Accordingly to *Publishers Weekly*, while some of the class of 2021 come from traditional publishing backgrounds and others are on third or fourth careers, there are many similarities among this year's honorees: their desire to foster new, diverse voices; to mentor those from traditionally marginalized backgrounds and help them find careers in publishing, and to improve the industry through collaboration and teamwork.

With Yeehoo, I strive to make sure other marginalized writers' voices are heard. My goal is to find common ground between different countries and cultures and provide books with universal interest and appeal for readers worldwide. I appreciate the compliment and the acknowledgment of the work I've put into my job. Starting a children's book publishing house, es-

pecially during the pandemic, was a big challenge, and everyone on the Yeehoo team and the partners we have worked with has been incredibly helpful.



**LM:** Since our last interview, you've written and published *Tofu Takes Time*, illustrated by Julie Jarema, with a starred review from *School Library Journal*. What key elements of your book did *SLJ* emphasize when giving it a starred review? Please explain the benefits of one's book achieving a starred review from a review journal.

**HHW:** I think *SLJ*'s criteria are based on the book's literary merits and its social impact. *School Library Journal*'s review:

"In this child-friendly, intergenerational story, Lin and NaiNai carefully execute each step necessary for making tofu ...Wu incorporates sound words throughout, such as 'Click, Click, Whirrrr,' 'Bubble, Bobble, Poppo,' and 'Fizzle, Sizzle, Hiss.' These are a delight to the ear and make this book one that promises successful read-alouds ... The playful tone works in beautiful partnership with Jarema's joyful illustrations as granddaughter and grandmother work together. Back matter provides information on the history of tofu and explains its recent popularity."



*Tofu Takes Time* also received a glowing review from *Booklist*: "The story of making a delicious homemade meal with a grandparent makes this a strong pick for food-themed displays or story times, but the emphasis on waiting for good things and cultivating patience gives this picture book a strong theme of emotional intelligence as well."

In promotion, I also quoted a review from *Kirkus*: "A culinary lesson in patience." However, the other parts of the review are not that positive. And it's okay if sometimes your book gets criticized. It's totally normal, and it's part of the publishing business.



*Helen H. Wu...continued*

I think a starred review from *SLJ* helps a lot for the sales in the school market and library market.

**LM:** Regarding submissions to review journals, please outline the role that Yeahoo Press plays in submitting copies of their books to these forums? Which journals do they submit to? How would an author use these reviews in promotion?

**HHW:** Yeahoo will submit books to *Kirkus*, *Publishers Weekly*, *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Foreword Reviews*, *BookPage*, *Midwest Book Review*, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, *The Children's Book Review*, *Shelf Awareness*, and a few more. The reviews will appear on the sales system, Amazon, our own website, and social media. They can also be used when we or authors reach out to libraries and bookstores. Review can be used in full or excerpted form for any marketing purposes.

**LM:** What did you learn about book marketing through your experience with *Tofu Takes Time*, and how has it changed your promotion focus moving forward?

**HHW:** I gained a lot of marketing experience with *Tofu Takes Time*. My marketing strategy included contacting libraries, contacting bookstores, sending bookmarks and signed bookplates to whoever was interested in receiving these, joining launch groups, and doing storytimes with local stores and libraries. I think all these approaches helped me build connections with booksellers and readers. I will continually do these for *Long Goes to Dragon School*.

**LM:** Regarding *Long Goes to Dragon School*, illustrated by Mae Besom (coming 2023), please tell us a little about this book.

**HHW:** My upcoming book, *Long Goes to Dragon School*, was inspired by my own experience as a minority immigrant student. It follows a Chinese drag-

on who struggles to breathe fire in his new Western dragon school, only to discover he must carve his own path to finding a sense of belonging. In this story, Long's name is based on the Chinese word for dragon, "龙 (lóng)." Like in Western culture, dragons are intricately intertwined with Chinese culture. However, Chinese dragons do not typically breathe fire. Instead, they are known as "water spirits" and have the power to summon rainstorms. I have always been fascinated by the differences and similarities between cultures. And living in America, I've realized that everyone is different and that learning from others helps you discover your own talents while still allowing you to find your own path.



**LM:** Recently I have been hearing that editors and agents like to see as many hooks as possible in a picture book, even as many as ten, if possible. What would you consider to be the hooks in *Long*? Without having been able to read the book yet, I count seven. Are there others?

**HHW:** The one-sentence pitch of *Long Goes to Dragon School* is: Wrapped in Eastern and Western dragon lore, this fantasy tale celebrates perseverance, cultural inclusion, and self-discovery. So indeed, there are seven. Another major hook is included in the title, back to school/first day of school. There are Social Emotional Learning components around perseverance, self-love, growth mindset, and goal setting, and this book provides opportunities to learn more about the differences between Western and Eastern representations of dragons.



**LM:** How important are these hooks to the editors of Yeahoo Press? Should they be named in any query letter sent?

**HHW:** It will be very helpful to list the hooks in a query letter. The more hooks or layers in a book, the stronger its marketing and sales potential. We pitch

*Helen H. Wu...continued*

books to multiple booklists, and the more hooks a book has, the more booklists they have the potential to be included, which will ultimately increase the chance that the book is recommended to librarians, parents, teachers, and children,

**LM:** You have been working hard on the pre-promotion of *Long*, and are accepting pre-orders. How important are pre-orders to the publisher? What does the preorder # mean with regard to production numbers and promotional money spent on the book by the publisher?

**HHW:** The pre-order campaign by authors is part of the marketing strategy. But it doesn't really affect the overall pre-order sales. Usually, the sales from large accounts, such as Ingram, Bake & Taylor, and Amazon, are a few hundred copies. Sometimes, Barnes & Noble will place orders of hundreds or even thousands of copies. The preorder campaign might generate dozens of sales, and it's always great for marketing and increasing exposure for the book, but sales from the pre-order campaign might only count for a small portion of the overall sales.

I'm not saying it isn't worth the effort to do a pre-order campaign. If authors are interested in doing this, I would see it as part of the marketing plan to increase exposure and make the book seen, not just focus on the actual sales number.

If the pre-order number from a large account is significantly high, it will make the publisher put more marketing efforts into the book.

For Yeehoo, the first print run will be decided a few months before the sales start, so it won't affect the production number. We have a standard first print run. If the pre-order from a large account is significantly high, we'll immediately do another print run and use the fast freight to make sure there is enough inventory for large accounts.

**LM:** When should an author start working on the promotion of an upcoming book? What are some things they should be doing?

**HHW:** I would like to break this question into three small questions to make my points clear.

The first question is: Is it helpful if the author has a media presence? Yes, it definitely helps. Every time the author tweets, posts, or shares the work, it helps spread the word and lets more people know about the book, even among family, friends, and local communities.

The second question is: Does the author have to have a media presence to get published? No. We evaluate the book by its content, theme, quality of writing, and how it fits our list. The author's marketing is something nice to add to the package. But even without the author's marketing efforts, the publisher's professional marketing team can still provide marketing support and resources and be able to sell the book.

The third question is: Does the author have to have a media presence to become a best-selling or well-known author? Probably yes. In today's competitive market, anything that can increase their profile will help the book and the author climb up the ladder.

One thing to keep in mind: The market potential of books is different—some books have stronger commercial hooks, some books fill in a gap in the market, and some books serve a very niche market but are socially meaningful. For some authors, marketing is enjoyable! It's a chance to promote their work and interact with readers firsthand. But for others, it can be a real burden—after all, book marketing requires specialist skills that many authors haven't had the chance to develop. Authors have different goals as well. Some authors aim to become best-selling authors, which requires years of hard work and commitment to their careers. Some authors already have a career, and book publishing is a side business for them. All of these are totally fine.

And there are many different media platforms, such as email lists, blogs, podcasts, and social media like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. All these platforms have different features. If the author is willing to try, I would suggest choosing the one the author feels the most comfortable with, then building the author's career around that channel. Actually, there are many things that authors can do, no matter if they have a media presence or not, such as author visits, author read-alouds, interviews, and so on. As long as the author is willing to do some marketing, it's never too late to start.



*Helen H. Wu...continued*

For media presence, instead of using it for promoting and selling books, I would see it as an opportunity to learn about the publishing industry, get connected with fellow writers and illustrators, and support each other in the community. Publishing is already a long journey. I hope authors will enjoy the process of being published and building connections with the community, being proud of all their wonderful accomplishments.

**LM:** With *Long*, you have also worked hard to create licensed items for the book. What can you share with us about this experience and your expectations and results?

**HHW:** For *Long Goes to Dragon School*, I'm making plushies, pins, stickers, and animated gif emojis and stickers to use on social media. I hope this adorable Chinese dragon character can fly beyond the book to be a companion of more children, teens, and adults in everyday life. I think the most challenging part is the graphic design of the character. The original character from the book is in detailed watercolor. But to develop licensed items and merchandise, we'll need to redesign the character in vector style with a limited color palette. We'll also need to simplify the character, only keeping the most important features. We're working on it and stay tuned for our progress!

**LM:** Please share some titles and blurbs from a few Yeehoo Press books that you're excited about and let us know when we can expect to see them.

**HHW:** I'm very thrilled about our spring 2023 titles, here I'd like to share a few: *My Grandpa, My Tree and Me* by Roxanne Troup, illustrated by Kendra Binney, is a moving tale about the depths of love and care a grandfather and granddaughter have for one another. *Opal's Springtime Birdhouse* by Emily Matheis, illustrated by Albert Arrayás, is a charming picture book tale that showcases how the rewards of our efforts can come from the most unexpected of places. *My Dog is NOT a Scientist* by Betsy Ellor, illustrated by Luisa Vera, is a humorous, endearing story about a passionate, young scientist who is determined to achieve her goal—no matter what! *Humphrey the Egg-Splorer* by Nadia Ali, illustrated by Valentí Gubianas, is a rollicking story that expands the famous tale of a fragile egg to a new story about bravery, creativity, and forging your own path.

Helen has agreed to share our **CBI Above the Slushpile** pitches with the editors at Yeehoo Press. **Until January 31, 2023**, you can submit a 350-character pitch/synopsis of a **fiction or nonfiction picture book** manuscript, along with other information, via the online form at [bit.ly/YeehooJan23ATS](http://bit.ly/YeehooJan23ATS). The Yeehoo editors will read all pitches and respond to those they're interested in by April 30, 2023. If you haven't heard back by the end of April, consider it a pass.

Yeehoo Press ([yeehoopress.com](http://yeehoopress.com)) is currently looking for fiction and nonfiction picture books, both text-only and author-illustrator projects, aimed at ages 3-8. Texts can be up to 1000 words, not including back matter. The editors are particularly interested in:

A clever combination of fiction and nonfiction; museum related stories; natural science titles focusing on sea creatures, microorganisms, ecosystems, etc.; underrepresented voices with universal messages, especially those with Asian heritage; hands-on experiences, such as problem-solving, cooperation, etc.; stories modeling critical thinking, such as analytical thinking, open-mindedness, etc.; stories exploring self-identification and identity; intergenerational family stories; stories highlighting international and multicultural foods and cooking; neurodiverse characters who are the heroes of their own stories; books about environmental conservation and stewardship.

(Note: Using the CBI Above the Slushpile pitch form ensures that your pitch will be read first, and you'll hear within three months if an editor is interested in your work. However, if you miss the deadline Yeehoo does currently have an open submission policy, so you can submit your pitch in a query letter according to the submission guidelines on the publisher's web site at a later date. For regular submissions, if you don't hear back from the editors within six months you can consider it a pass.)

### ---Please Read Before You Proceed---

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/](http://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/](http://writeforkids.org/blog/kidlitdistancingsocial70/)

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

- 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.
- 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.

# The Anatomy of SCENES

by Jane McBride

**W**hat is the purpose of a scene? Do scenes have a structure? If so, what is it? Are there different types of scenes? Should we think in terms of scenes or should we think of the book as a whole?

The questions about writing scenes can continue on and on. The fact is, when I started writing, I didn't know what a scene was. I didn't understand the concept of a scene. I just started writing and kept writing. And that writing, to be frank, was pretty dreadful.

A little more experienced now, I understand the necessity of understanding scenes and that good scenes make good chapters which, in turn, make good books.

Let's start with a definition: a scene is a unit of action.

What should a scene contain?

## *A purpose.*

A scene just to take up space isn't good writing, no matter how wonderful those actual words may be. Literary agent Donald Maas tells his students, "Don't write scenes of people having tea." Don't write scenes of characters drinking tea or drinking coffee. The metaphor, of course, is to leave out the boring stuff. A good scene, like good dialogue, should move the story forward. If it does not contain a lot of action, it should point to future action. It should leave the reader wanting to know what happens next.

## *A point-of-view character.*

A scene should have a POV character. How many characters it contains is up to you and to your pub-

lisher guidelines. The line I currently write for has a strict one POV per scene. Sometimes my fingers itch to include another character in a particular scene, but I keep them still and abide by the guideline. Well-known authors who can do anything may have two or more POV characters in a scene. That's fine for them. For you and me, it's better to play it a little safe. If you are writing for young children, you may want to keep a scene to one POV character. Or you may have only one POV character in the first place.

## *A change in the POV character.*

In a book that readers want to come back to, to re-read again and again, the main character will experience change and/or grow over the course of a book. Each scene also contains a mini-change for the POV character. For example, in a picture book about a child starting kindergarten, the span of the plot may cover how that child changes from feeling scared when his mom leaves him at the classroom door, to eventually sharing a joke with a new friend and not wanting to leave at the end of the day when Mom picks him up. The mini-changes for each scene might include feeling excited while walking to school with Mom, then afraid when she leaves; worrying he can't find his cubby and then feeling proud that he identified the one with his name on it; sitting at the edge of the circle for storytime and then laughing at the book along with his classmates. The changes can be small, but if your character ends the scene exactly as he started it, the scene isn't advancing the story.

## *A structure.*

How can a scene have a structure? Scenes should mimic chapters and the book itself. A good scene will have a beginning, a middle, and an end. How



*The Anatomy of Scenes...continued*

do you begin a scene? The same rules apply as in beginning a book. Begin a scene with action or dialogue or a question. Don't do as I did in my second book (thankfully it was never published) by having the main character (MC) take a trip and mulling over why she must take the trip. It was a cheap way to work in a bunch of excruciatingly boring backstory. What about the middle of a scene? It, too, should contain action. Even if that action is the MC coming to a conclusion about what to do about a problem, it is still action. What of the ending? My editor likes a question or suspense or something else that causes the reader to sit up and take notice at the end. The ending need not be action-packed as in physical action. It may be a question of what to do next. Or it may be a resolution that yes, the MC will keep fighting to achieve her goal. Whatever it is, it should give readers an impetus to keep reading. As in the book as a whole, a scene should have a dynamite opening and an intriguing ending.

*A conflict.*

A scene needs conflict. Consider a seven-year-old boy trying to come to terms with the death of his beloved dog. He has been told by his parents that if he prays for something, that God will answer his prayer and that everything will be all right. But when his dog becomes sick and our young hero prays for the dog to get better and it dies, the boy is devastated. The story becomes not that of a boy losing his pet (a heart-wrenching story in and of itself), but of a boy wondering if his parents lied to him, if the whole "God thing" is a myth. This is real conflict with both external and internal forces at work.

*A sense of texture.*

Scenes where sensory details are sprinkled lightly throughout come to life in ways that scenes lacking those details cannot. This is not to say that you should load a scene with every detail you can find. That becomes cumbersome and boring. (Boring is the last thing you want to make your writing.) What if you're writing about a 16-year-old girl who is adopted and wants to find her biological parents. Suppose she finds them living "the good life" in a well-heeled neighborhood surrounded by luxuries. She zeroes in on the smell of the house. It doesn't have a smell,

neither good nor bad. There are no smells from the kitchen, such as the rich yeasty scent of homemade bread rising or spaghetti sauce simmering. as they are in her home with the mother and father who raised her. There are no smells of bleach her mother used in doing the laundry. It is a lavishly appointed home that is as sterile in its smells as the people are in their emotions. When she returns home, she finds a house scented with her mother's favorite cologne, a drug-store variety, the smell of goulash cooking on the stove, the strong odor of the cleanser her mother uses to clean the bathrooms. It smells of home.

*A cause and effect.*

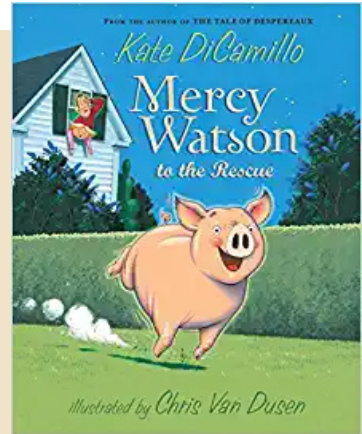
Effective scenes will show not just a unit of action but how those units are related to each other. A rejection some years ago contained the words, "Your story is episodic." It took me a while to understand that I had written a series of scenes but that they were not related. They were strung together with little thought as to how one affected the next. If you make sure your POV character changes in some way with each scene, then that will affect how she moves through the next scene. Each scene should be the logical result of what's happened previously. If Scene B is not influenced by Scene A, then Scene A needs revision.

Scenes are building blocks of chapters and, in turn, of books. Master scene writing and find that your writing has been elevated to a new level that had been missing before.

One of the best ways to learn how to write effective scenes is to study scene structure in published books. To identify individual scenes, start by looking for the basic building blocks:

- A point-of-view character
- Something that changes the character from the beginning of the scene to the end (a conflict, a goal, attempted action that either succeeds or fails, etc.)
- A structure with a beginning, middle and end

On the next page, let's look at two simple scenes from Kate DiCamillo's early chapter book *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*.

**Scene 1**

Mr. Watson and Mrs. Watson have a pig named Mercy.  
Each night, they sing Mercy to sleep.

*“Bright, bright is the morning sun,”*  
sing Mr. and Mrs. Watson,  
*“but brighter still is our darling one.  
Dark, dark is the coming night,  
but oh, our Mercy shines so bright.”*

This song makes Mercy feel warm inside, as if she has just eaten hot toast with a great deal of butter on it.

Mercy likes hot toast with a great deal of butter on it.

But when Mr. and Mrs. Watson kiss her good night and turn off the light, Mercy’s room becomes dark.

Very dark.

And Mercy does not feel warm and buttery-toasty inside anymore.

She feels afraid.

Mercy is clearly this scene’s POV character, and she has a conflict which changes her state of mind from buttery-toasty to afraid once the Watsons turn off her light.

**Scene 2**

One night, after Mr. and Mrs. Watson sang their song about the sun, kissed Mercy good night, and turned off the light, Mercy decided something.

She decided that she would be much happier if she wasn’t sleeping alone.

And so Mercy got out of her bed and went and got in bed with Mr. and Mrs. Watson.

She snuggled up between them.

Mercy felt warm inside, as if she had just eaten hot toast with a great deal of butter on it.

The “one night” clues us in to the start of a new scene. This scene also has a clear POV character, a problem, and a change in Mercy’s situation from the beginning of the scene to the end.

What are some other ways authors move from one scene to another?

Some insert a symbol, or several lines of white space (called a “drop down”), as a way of saying to the reader, “A scene has ended. Be prepared for a switch in time or place or POV character.”

As Kate DiCamillo demonstrated above, an effective marker of a new scene is a transition, such as “An hour later ...” or “The following day ...” or “Back at the house ...”

A third way is by a change in the POV character. In my books, the change of point-of-view between the hero and the heroine signals the ending of a scene and the beginning of another. The physical place where the scene is taking place may not change, but it is obvious that a different scene or unit of action is taking place.

Many recent books, which often feature very short chapters, switch scenes by the simple expedient of starting a new chapter. I enjoy reading suspense and thrillers and find that the authors frequently begin a new chapter when a fresh scene starts.

Once you’ve learned how to identify scene boundaries (where each scene begins and ends), you can start pinpointing the purpose of each scene. Is it to reveal an obstacle that raises conflict? Show a failed attempt at reaching a goal? Provide the protagonist with new information? Introduce an important character? Notice how your favorite authors balance the purpose of scenes so each chapter contains one or two essential plot points. All this information helps you see how scenes are important links that build the chain of plot spanning your entire book.



# A Monstrous Collaboration: Lisi Harrison and Daniel Kraus

interview by PJ McIlvaine

What do you get when you mix two high-profile, hugely talented, accomplished authors of scary stories together? A ghoulish. Well, my horrible pun aside, what you really get is the first book in a new contemporary middle-grade series bursting at the seams like Frankenstein in a new suit: *Graveyard Girls: 1-2-3-4, I Declare a Thumb War* (Union Square, September 2022) about the genuinely frightening adventures of five teen girls navigating the horrors of middle school in a town called Misery Falls.

**Lisi Harrison** ([lisiharrison.com](http://lisiharrison.com)) was a former senior director of development at MTV Networks in another life. Now she's an incredibly prolific, New York Times best-selling author (over thirty-seven novels) writing about complicated dynamics in middle-grade and young adult. Based in California, Harrison is also a co-founder of Thrive ([thriveswell.com](http://thriveswell.com)) a wellness and therapy center that teaches kids and their parents how to have healthy, drama-free relationships.



**Daniel Kraus** ([danielkraus.com](http://danielkraus.com)) is another hugely prolific horror writer who never seems to run out of ideas or inspiration. He collaborated with the iconic filmmaker George A. Romero and later, co-authored *Trollhunters* with Guillermo del Toro which became the basis of the popular Emmy-winning Netflix animated series. A Bram Stoker finalist and winner of many prestigious awards, Kraus lives in Chicago.

**PJ McILVAINE:** How did this collaboration into a new middle-grade series come about? Who came up with the initial idea? How did you decide on the

characters and who wrote them? Did you outline? What was your writing routine like? And how difficult was it to come up with the final title of *Graveyard Girls*?

**LISI HARRISON/DANIEL KRAUS:** It all began when Lisi was hired to create a teen horror podcast for Spotify. She knew teen but not horror. So, our agent introduced us, knowing that Daniel had the horror thing down. We had such a great time working together we decided to join forces and write a novel. *Graveyard Girls* is a perfect blend of what we both do best: teen drama and horror. At this point, it's impossible to know who came up with what

as it has been a true collaboration since day one. The title?

You don't want to know.

It took months. Sometimes the simplest things are the hardest.



**PM:** Lisi, on the face of it, aside from your ghoulishly successful *Monster High* series, this seems like an unusual collaboration based on several of your previous best-selling titles/subjects. You seem to be lighter in terms of horror and more girl-centered. What appealed to you about teaming up with Daniel? Was it challenging to mesh style and tone into a seamless, blended story? How did you know when it was working—and when it wasn't?

**LH:** I've written over 35 novels in the same genre and welcomed the opportunity to stretch myself and learn from an expert in the field. Turns out, I really enjoy it. Horror is dramatic, absurd, and oftentimes funny. Sound familiar? It did to me. It's another way of expressing similar themes.

*A Monstrous Collaboration...continued*

**PM:** Daniel, you've done critically acclaimed collaborations with legendary filmmakers George A. Romero and Guillermo del Toro. Your style/tone is much darker than Lisi's, so was it a challenge for you to adapt? What was the most rewarding aspect of working with Lisi?

**DK:** It was a bit of a challenge! My tendency, as you say, is to go very dark, and too often to go rather dense—I typically have a bit of a baroque style. This project challenged me to lighten up (a bit) and to move with more fleetness than I'm used to. That was the fun of working with Lisi: she has writing for this age range down pat. It was educational. That's what I'm always looking for in writing: new spaces for me to become a first-time writer again. It keeps things fresh.

**PM:** Lisi, in addition to writing, you do interactive workshops for children to give them the tools to develop drama-free friendships. How did that come about? Has that infused your writing?

**LH:** Actually, my writing infused the workshops. I have spent decades documenting and satirizing dysfunctional friend dynamics. I have studied the topic and psychology behind it for years and am ready to take a more hands-on approach. That's why, Amy Neufeld, MS, LMFT, and I co-founded **Thrive**—a wellness center that takes a creative approach to therapy. We offer workshops, after-school programs, and presentations aimed at teaching kids and parents how to have healthy relationships with themselves and others.

**PM:** Daniel, since my grandchildren are huge fans of the *Trollhunters* Netflix series, I'd be remiss if I didn't ask if there are going to be more seasons/movies/and or books.

**DK:** My only involvement with the show is that it's based on the novel Guillermo and I wrote, so I can't speak to that. As far as the book goes, my guess is that we're not going to revisit it; we both have so much else going on. But never say never.

**PM:** As this is the first installment of a five-book series, do you have the subsequent books already plot-

ted out? How much input did you have on the cover? Do you envision other projects together besides this one?

**LH/DK:** Our publisher has an incredibly talented group of illustrators, creative directors, and graphic artists. They get full credit for the drop-dead (pun intended) gorgeous cover. We get to provide feedback, but all praise should be given to them. As far as other projects go—we'd love to! But let's get through the *Graveyard Girls* first and make sure we're not clawing each other's eyeballs out by then.

**PM:** What projects (aside from *GG*) are you currently working on? Is it easier or less stressful to work on an individual project than a co-authored one or is it the opposite?



**LH/DK:** Lisi is creating workshops for Thrive and writing the third novel in *The Pack* series called, *Two Truths and a Lion*. In 2023, Daniel will release the third in the *Teddies Saga* series, as well as an adult survival thriller called *Whalefall*, about a scuba diver who is literally swallowed by a whale.

**PM:** Since you're both highly successful and seasoned best-selling authors, what excites you most about writing now? Do you have any tips or advice for writers in today's competitive market? What do you wish you had known when you were starting out and is there anything you would have done differently?

**DK:** For me, it's the challenge. What mountain can I climb up next? What voice can I use that will force me to think in an entirely new way? What boundary can I push that will reveal something crucial about the world we live in? That's also my advice to writers: do what you do, as hard as you can do it, no matter what readers might fall by the wayside. If you make your writing unmistakably yours, there will be nothing out there like it.



# Writing For The CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE MARKET

by Jane McBride

**N**early forty years ago, I sent off my first short story. It was more on a whim than from any real thought that I might sell it. To my surprise and delight, the story sold. I was being paid for writing! The magazine that bought that story was a Christian one. Since then I've gone on to write more than 500 stories for that particular magazine, plus dozens of stories for other Christian periodicals and publications.

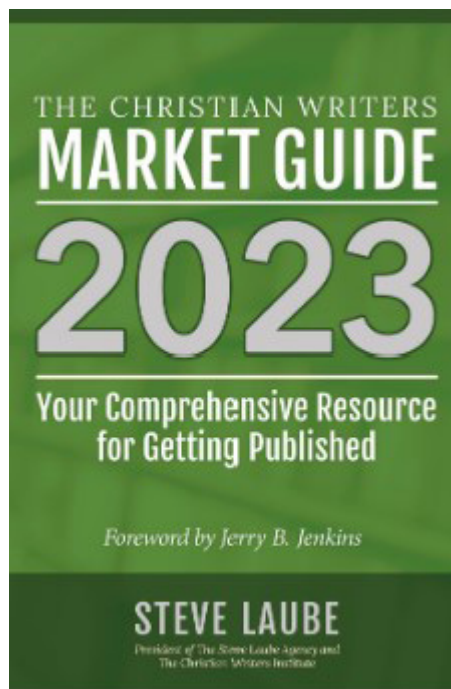
stantially increase your income.

## *How do you get started?*

- First, understand why you want to write for the Christian market. Is it to bear testimony? Is it to share your faith with others? Is it to influence young readers with messages about the Lord? These are all worthy reasons.

## *Why should you consider writing for the Christian magazine market?*

- If you are a believer, this is a great way to bear testament to those beliefs. Most secular markets do not want, even forbid, mention of deity. The Christian marketplace welcomes such testimony.
- You may find that you feel a rich satisfaction in writing inspirational stories.
- Many of the inspirational periodicals remain relatively unknown; you face less competition in having your work accepted.
- You can often resell your stories. Since many of the Christian magazines have limited circulation, you can sell previously published pieces as reprints to other magazines with a different market focus. (You'll want to make certain that the magazine you've sold to does not buy all rights. If it buys only first American serial rights, you are free to sell your piece elsewhere after it has been published.) Though these periodicals may not pay top dollar, reselling your work can sub-



- Make the *Christian Writers Market Guide* ([christianwritersmarketguide.com](http://christianwritersmarketguide.com)) your new best friend. It contains everything from the most obscure denominational magazine to the “big name” book publishers like Bethany House, Tyndale, Revell, etc. In it, you will learn of established publications and of new ones as well as where and how to submit, pay scale, names of editors, content requirements, and a host of other things. You can also find lists of Christian magazines for kids at [thinkingkidsblog.org/christian-magazines-for-kids/](http://thinkingkidsblog.org/christian-magazines-for-kids/) and [simplycreativejourney.com/christian-magazines-for-kids/](http://simplycreativejourney.com/christian-magazines-for-kids/)

- Keep up with other industry periodicals. SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators), CBI, *The Writer*, and other magazines will occasionally feature articles, like this one, on writing for the religious market.
- Decide upon what kind of inspirational writing most suits your talents. Are you looking for non-fiction markets? Or are you strictly interested in writing fiction? Or maybe you do both.
- Just as in writing for the secular market, know

your audience. Are you targeting a Sunday School weekly magazine? Some magazines have several “weeklies” designed for different age groups. Or perhaps it’s a more general interest magazine with a Christian focus to its stories and articles. Maybe religion is secondary, and the publication highlights content that shows character traits like honesty, compassion and forgiveness.

- Remember in writing for children’s magazines that today’s savvy kids don’t want to be preached to. They want real life stories with real life solutions. Anything that talks down to them or gives trite resolutions to complex problems will probably and rightfully be rejected.
- Know the language that is used in referring to deity. Some inspirational markets capitalize any reference to deity, such as “He” and “Him” when referring to God or the Lord. Others don’t. Some magazines and book publishers use God and the Savior or Jesus interchangeably; others are specific in the usage. Also, find out which version of the New Testament the magazine prefers when quoting Bible passages. Know these details before you submit.
- Understand the differences between various denominations. For example, if you are writing a short story for children and intend to market it to a Catholic magazine, it helps to know the principles and practices of that faith. Catholics generally baptize children as infants by sprinkling them with holy water. Do you intend to try to sell your piece to a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) periodical? Members of that faith believe that a child should be baptized at eight-years-old, the age of accountability. In some sects, the girls and women do not wear pants. Amish stories vary in strictness of dress, use of electricity, and modern conveniences depending upon the geographical setting and the policies of the bishop. Getting such things right won’t insure a sale, but getting them wrong will likely earn you a rejection.
- If a magazine accepts pieces on the natural world, check if they’re a Creationist-based peri-

odical, or if they discuss evolution.

- Just as you would in writing for any market, do your homework. Look at the magazine’s website to find out how much of it is freelance written. Some Christian magazines, just as some secular ones, have most of their articles and stories penned by in-house staff writers, with very few, if any, slots for freelancers. By finding this out ahead of time, you won’t waste your time in writing and submitting to them. Pay attention to the magazine’s publication frequency. Obviously, a magazine that is put out only quarterly will need far fewer pieces than a magazine that publishes monthly or weekly. Though the weeklies may pay only a fraction of what the bigger magazines do, you can earn excellent money by turning out quality pieces every week. These Sunday School “take home papers” are often published by Cook Communications or by different denominations. *Focus on the Family* also needs consistent content.
- Study submission guidelines on the magazine’s website. Check monthly or weekly themes. Some Christian based magazines put out a theme list for the year. Pay attention to that and tailor your submissions to fit that theme.
- Find out about other markets that may not be listed as “Christian” or “inspirational.” *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, for which I’ve sold eighteen stories, is not strictly a Christian market, but it does buy inspirational stories. These stories rely upon life experiences.

Do you have to be Christian to write for the market? No. But it helps. Just as you don’t have to have been a scholarship winner to write a book about a boy who earns a scholarship to his targeted university, it helps to have some experience with that.

Writing for the inspirational market is not for everyone. If it doesn’t suit you or your work doesn’t fit the marketplace, don’t force yourself into writing for it. On the other hand, you may find it a rich and fertile place for your work and an opportunity for you to grow as a writer and a person.

# Advice from an Author/Writing Coach on Building a Publishing Career

interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

**S**uzanne Lieurance is an author, freelance writer, writing coach, speaker, and workshop presenter. She is a former classroom teacher and was an instructor for the Institute of Children's Literature for over 8 years. She lives and writes by the sea on Florida's beautiful Treasure Coast with her husband, Adrian.

Lieurance has written over 40 published books and her articles and stories have appeared in various magazines, newsletters, and newspapers, including *Family Fun*, *Instructor*, *New Moon for Girls*, *KC Weddings*, *The Journal of Reading*, and more.

**SHARON BLUMBERG:** You have to date, written over 40 published books. Many of them are children's books, published by traditional publishers. Among your children's books are easy readers, middle grade novels, a travel guide for kids, and various nonfiction books about a variety of topics of interest to children. How did you get started as a children's book author?

**SUZANNE LIEURANCE:** Well, for years I was a classroom teacher in Kansas City, but I also loved to write, and I started submitting short stories and poems to children's magazines. I also joined the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Our regional advisor wanted to step down from the position, but no one offered to take over for him, so he asked me if I would. I was already publishing the newsletter for our region, so I felt confident I could handle being the regional advisor. Yet, since I was teaching full time, I wanted another writer to share the position with me. I asked a friend, Lisa Harkrader, and she and I became co-regional advisors for the

Kansas chapter of SCBWI.

As a regional advisor for SCBWI, one day I received a call from a publisher who needed a writer for a children's travel guide to Kansas City. They sent me their guidelines and a sample copy of one of the other books in this series. I reviewed everything and talked to Lisa about it. I knew the book would require a lot of research (visiting the places that would be featured in the book), and I wasn't sure I could do all that myself since I was teaching full time and going to grad school at night. Lisa and I made up a proposed outline and a sample chapter for the book and we got the contract to co-author what became *Kidding Around Kansas City*.



Soon after *Kidding Around Kansas City* was released, the school where I was teaching closed at the end of the school year. My principal told me I would be reassigned to another school, but I knew from experience with the school district that this probably wouldn't happen until well into

the fall, so I decided not to renew my teaching contract and become a full time freelance writer.

To quickly build my freelance writing income (and replace my teacher salary by the time summer was over), I made a habit of sending out 3 queries or responses to online job ads every weekday morning. This paid off because soon I had lots of work! I also networked with other children's writers, and one day I was chatting online with a writer who told me Enslow Publishers was looking for authors for some of their nonfiction series. I got an editor's name from this writer and sent a query, asking for a list of any

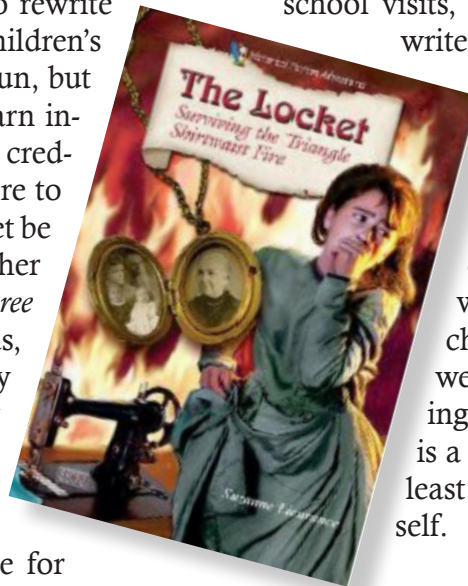
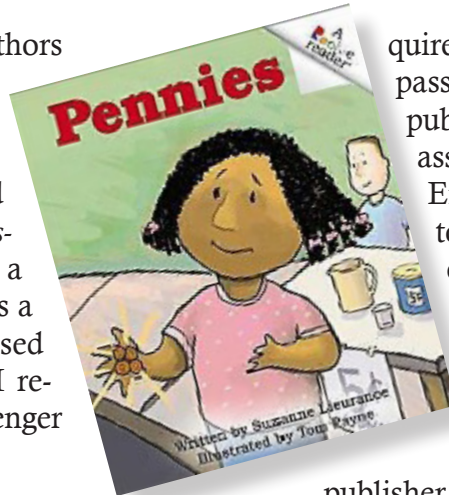


*Suzanne Lieurance...continued*

upcoming titles this editor needed authors for. A few weeks later, I got the list, which included several titles for Enslow's In American History series. I wrote back that I was interested in *The Space Shuttle Challenger Disaster* and was sent the guidelines and a published book in this series to use as a model. Once I had submitted a proposed outline and a sample first chapter, I received a contract to write the Challenger book.

While I was working on the challenger book, I also found assignments online to rewrite or adapt fairy tales and other children's classics for anthologies. This was fun, but challenging, work. It helped me earn income and gain more publication credits. It also helped me learn to adhere to strict word counts and guidelines yet be creative. For example, one publisher sent me the adult version of *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas, which is well over 500 pages. My assignment was to rewrite the story for 8–12-year-olds in just 12 pages of only 250 words per page. Later, they asked me to rewrite the story again. This time it would be for a book meant for parents or grandparents to read “with” a child seated next to them. The book was made up of double-page spreads. One page of each spread would have a higher word count and be written at a higher reading level (for the adult to read). The other page of each spread would have fewer words and a lower reading level (for the child to read). That book was kind of tricky, but fun, to write.

Soon I was working on all sorts of freelance projects. I ghostwrote an economics dictionary for high school students (and, no, I knew nothing about economics when I got this assignment, so that book re-



quired a lot of research). I also wrote test passages and test questions for a variety of publishers. And one of my better paying assignments at the time was for Grolier Encyclopedia. I also became an instructor for the Institute of Children's Literature and had over 800 students at a time. I became very skilled at critiquing manuscripts and writing editorial letters to my students. I also wrote more books in other series for Enslow, easy readers for another publisher, and all sorts of other materials for many different publishers. And I started making paid school visits, and I was often a speaker at various writer's conferences.

Eventually, I started ghostwriting children's books for individual clients (not publishers). Ghostwriting is fun, but often quite challenging because many people come to me with what they think is a great idea for a children's book—but it's more about a well-meaning grandparent or parent trying to “teach” something to kids than it is a great story about a child solving, or at least resolving, some sort of problem himself.

**SB:** You recently compiled and edited (with Wendy Dewar Hughes) an anthology called *Snapshots from Real Life, Book 3: Personal Stories to Warm the Heart and Tickle the Funny Bone*. Please tell us how this book came about.

**SL:** Actually, as the title of the book indicates, this is the third book in the *Snapshots from Real Life* series. Each of these books is an anthology of stories written by clients in my 10-week coaching program *Fearless Freelance Writing*. I designed this program to help writers create a freelance business writing about things that are near and dear to their hearts – their personal experiences. Writers who complete

*Suzanne Lieurance...continued*

the program have the opportunity (at no additional cost) to be contributing authors of a *Snapshots from Real Life* book. For many of them, the book is their first publication credit.

I've used my personal experiences as the basis for many children's materials, and in the *Fearless Freelance Writing* program, I help other writers see how they can use their own experiences in stories, articles, and books for children.

**SB:** Please tell us about your coaching business and website.

**SL:** I started [Write by the Sea®](#) several years ago when I moved to the Florida coast. [Writebythesea.com](#) features tips, resources, and articles about writing mysteries, romances, memoirs, and freelance writing, as well as lots of information about writing for children. When people subscribe to the free daily email *The Morning Nudge*, they get access to a private resource library for writers at [writebythesea.com](#), and I'm constantly adding new materials to this library. I also have a group of bloggers who provide content for this site.

Right now, I'm adding more materials to the [Write by the Sea® Writers Academy](#), too. I want the Academy to be full of affordable courses, e-books, workbooks, tips sheets, and other great resources for writers, plus my one-on-one coaching programs.

**SB:** When you work as a writing coach with children's authors, are there certain revision areas that tend to pop up frequently?

**SL:** Many of the children's writers I coach are working on picture books. Generally, when they are just starting to write for very young children, they have trouble with two things:

1. Telling a story from a single point of view (and maintaining that viewpoint), and,
2. Having the main character solve the story problem without a lot of help from a parent, grandparent, teacher, or other well-meaning adult.

It can be tricky to maintain a single point of view throughout an entire story if you aren't used to doing it. Plus, so many people who decide to write for children are parents, so it is often hard for them to give parents and other adults only minor roles in their stories for children. I've even had clients argue with me when I tell them the child needs to solve the story problem himself. They say things like, "but in real life parents tell their kids what to do or they show them what to do." And, to that I say, "Yes, but that's real life. Stories are meant to empower young readers. When a child reads about another child figuring out the solution to something that child thinks—*Hey, if that kid can figure out stuff, I can, too.*"

**SB:** What are some of your best tips for aspiring children's writers?

**SL:** Don't be afraid to write some really awful stuff. Just write, write, write, and eventually your writing will improve. Most people who say they want to write for kids—but get discouraged after writing and submitting only a few stories or articles—need to just keep writing and forget about publication. Write for the joy of writing, and the joy of becoming a better writer. The nice thing is, once you stop thinking about publication so much and just enjoy the act of writing, you'll usually get published!

Also, take workshops, attend conferences, read newsletters about children's writing, and hang out with other children's writers. And, if you join a critique group, try to join one that includes at least one or two writers who are published in the genre you wish to write. That way, your group will be more than just "the blind leading the blind." Published writers can give you invaluable tips and advice about your work.

If you want to make a living as a children's writer, always be on the lookout for work. There are all kinds of opportunities out there. You just need to find them. And, after a while, at least some of these opportunities will start coming to you—if you have an online presence (so be sure you have a website and/or blog).

Finally, and most importantly, be determined to succeed—and you will!



# CBI Subscriber Builds Success from Opportunity & Hard Work

interview by Lynne Marie

**F**rom Lynne Marie, *Spotlight column editor*: I am excited to be kicking off a new year of editor and agent interviews, as well as corresponding opportunities to share with you all. We have a great line-up scheduled in the coming months.

*I also wanted to share some nostalgic memories of Children's Book Insider as it once was, a mailed subscription newsletter, printed on quality tan paper, often with sample copies available at the many SCBWI conferences across the U.S.*

*Quite some time ago, in 1999 to be exact, an aspiring writer picked up one of these copies and submitted her manuscript to one of the featured publishers. That person is Danna Smith, and that submission launched her career of 19 books with 3 on the way. I am so happy to share my interview with her at this time, with my hope that it will inspire you all to read this resource, take advantage of the opportunities, and achieve success.*

**Danna Smith** is the award-winning author of over twenty books for children, including Junior Library Guild selection, *The Hawk of the Castle* (Candlewick), *Arctic White* (Henry Holt), a 2017 SCBWI Crystal Kite Award finalist, *Swallow the Leader* (Clarion), numerous Little Golden Books, *Wake Up, Freight Train!* (Little Simon, March 2022), *One Blue Gnu* (Amicus Ink, March 2022), *Rooftop Garden* (Barefoot Books sing-along, May 2022), *The Thank You Book* (Little Simon, Oct 2022), and *Peek-a-Boo Haiku* (Little Simon, 2023). *The Complete Book of Aspen* is her debut young adult novel based on her true DNA experience. You can find Danna's website, poetry blog, artwork, and social media accounts at [dannasmithbooks.com](http://dannasmithbooks.com)



**LYNNE MARIE:** Thank you, Danna, for sharing your story and inspiration here. Please tell us about your background as a CBI reader, and about that CBI submission that opened your first door to becoming a published author.

**DANNA SMITH:** Thank you for having me, Lynne! When I started writing for publication in 1996, I didn't have a computer. There was no email to submit my manuscripts, no webinars to learn the craft, and no PB pitch to catch an editor's attention. But I did have a bookstore and a library. I learned quite a bit about the business of writing and submitting from the book, *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market*. The book is also where I learned about The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. I went to my first SCBWI conference in 1999 where I learned about the *Children's Book Insider* newsletter. Eager for information, I subscribed to the newsletter and waited for my copy to arrive in the mail.

To this day, I am grateful to CBI for opening the window to my career in the form of a blurb from an editor at Dial Publishing. The editor was calling for new talent and had opened a two-month window for unagented writers.

**LM:** Please tell us the details of this submission. What was the experience like? Did that opportunity lead to others?

**DS:** I didn't climb through that window that CBI opened. I jumped! I polished my best picture book manuscript, mailed it, and began the long snail mail wait for a reply. A couple of months later, I received a response. The editor liked my manuscript but was



*Danna Smith...continued*

leaving Dial. She had just taken a new position at Disney. She asked me to revise my manuscript and send it to her new address. My newly revised manuscript was still not right for the editor, so she asked what other manuscripts I had on hand as I continued tinkering with it. I mailed another story that I had been working on, which she felt was much stronger. It didn't happen overnight or even that year, but on April 1, 2001, I received "the call." The editor began the conversation with something like, "I'd like to make an offer, and this is not an April fool's joke!" This being my first communication with an editor, I was extremely nervous. I went on to sell three more manuscripts to the editor (two of which were canceled due to the tragedy of 9/11). In 2004 my first book, *A Wild Cowboy*, was released. I cut my teeth on creating these first four books and working with this wonderfully patient editor. The books helped me gain an agent, and I was well on my way to living my dream.

**LM:** What background did you have when you came to the table as a children's writer? How long had you been writing prior to this first success? In addition to being a CBI subscriber, what other factors do you feel helped pave your path to success?

**DS:** I have no formal writing education, but I've always felt I was born to write. I wrote my first poem when I was six, my first short story when I was ten, and my first picture book when I was seventeen. I feel compelled always to be creative and feel at odds when I take a break. Writing books for kids is more than my career. It's my calling.

Networking with other writers and writing professionals, reading my weight in picture books, learning the craft through workshops, books, and articles, studying mentor texts, attending conferences, entering contests, and publishing poems and essays in magazines are all important elements of my success.

**LM:** What was your approach to submissions? What criteria did your manuscript have to have before you

decided whether it was ready for submission?

**DS:** I will be the first to admit I am like a dog with a bone when it comes to a manuscript. I will gnaw on it endlessly until I feel I've given it my best. Is the rhyme perfect? Is the plot strong? Does the end surprise or enlighten the reader? Are the characters likable? Is it age-appropriate? I've learned that sometimes I only have one chance to get it right. Once an editor sees it and rejects it, that's it! Unless they see potential in it and ask for a minor revision. I often write the same story in three ways (rhyme, prose, different POV, etc.). It takes more time, but, in the end, it's helpful to see which is the best vehicle to drive that story home.



**LM:** What would you tell a writer that wants to publish their first book?

**DS:** Don't give up! Writing for publication isn't easy, but it is totally possible. There are rules and many people in the business (editors, agents, publishers) whom you will need to please. They have their finger on the pulse of the industry. They know what works, what is selling, and what their clients want. This is the process, embrace it, work together, and, in the end, you will all be

proud of the book you created.

**LM:** What are some mistakes that you made in the beginning that you would approach differently if you could do it all over again?

**DS:** Going back to the question about my approach to submissions, I'd say in the beginning, I made the mistake of jumping the gun and sending out a manuscript before it was ready. I now know I need to let my stories sit for a while and spend more time with them before I submit them. If I don't, it never fails, when I look at a story days later, I see something I could have changed that would have made my story stronger.

**LM:** Please tell us about your experience with critique groups at the onset of your career.

*Danna Smith...continued*

**DS:** Although I've had other critique groups off and on through the years, I found my main critique group at my first SCBWI conference in 1999, and we are still going strong today (via email now). We are all board book and picture book writers, and I think that's an important point, find a group who knows and writes in your selected genre. In-person or on-line, conferences and networking are great ways to find suitable critique members. In addition, SCBWI has a regional feature to help guide writers to groups.

As one who critiques, it doesn't help your fellow writer if you hold back. If you feel something isn't working, let them know. They can take it (we writers are resilient!). Critique members should never sugar-coat issues to spare feelings because, believe me, when a manuscript enters the outside world, someone will tell you what isn't working! So head it off at the pass.

**LM:** What is the best (and worst) advice you ever received?

**DS:** The best advice I ever received felt like the worst. An editor once said, "You have the most amazing ideas, but you have no idea what to do with them." She made this comment at the beginning of my career before I developed a thick skin. It hurt my feelings. But it did turn out to be the best advice because to this day, when I get an idea, I puzzle over it long and hard to make sure I'm doing right by it.

The worst advice I ever received was, "Don't write in rhyme." See below for more about this...

**LM:** Do you ever suffer writer's block? What is your experience with this? What do you do to by-pass it?

**DS:** I rarely suffer from writer's block, and I think it's because I work on several books at one time. I can bounce to another if something isn't working on one manuscript. However, I write full-time, usually six hours a day plus two hours of promotional work, so sometimes I get burned out. Carving a couple of hours (or the weekend) for a long walk, watercolor

painting, or crafting is a lovely break from words.

**LM:** Do you approach stories from plot or from character or a combination? Why or why not? Please give an example.

**DS:** I usually start with a fun title or unique premise and build my story around that. But before I put a single word down on paper, I have gone over it in my head for days or weeks. I usually know how my story will begin and end before I start the actual writing process. The middle is the hardest part for me.

**LM:** You are a wonder with poetry and are also a poetry blogger at [poetrypop.com](http://poetrypop.com). What recommendations do you have for those who want to try their hand at writing in rhyme?

**DS:** Thank you, Lynne. I do love a good rhyme! To continue the story about the worst advice I ever received... at the beginning of my career, I heard "Don't write in rhyme" at every conference I attended. I was devastated when I heard this because I'm a poet, and I love rhyme. I realized now that they were saying, "Don't write bad rhyme." Many editors are open to rhyming stories if the story needs to be told in verse and you

have an ear for meter and rhythm. With that said, lyrical prose is a good option if you don't want to or can't write in rhyme. It's still beautifully poetic. Something to note, if you do write a book in verse, it most likely will not be translated into other languages. I have written most of my books in rhyme, and just one (*Two at the Zoo/Dos en el Zoologico*) has been translated.

**LM:** Please share a little bit about your next book.

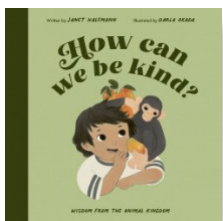
**DS:** *Peek-a-Boo Haiku*, a lift-the-flap board book published by Little Simon, is next in line. Kids will read a haiku and guess which animal is under the flap. Tegan White beautifully illustrates the book, and I'm excited for release day on February 21, 2023!



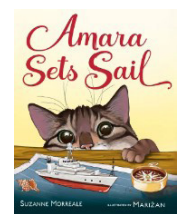


# Let's Celebrate!

## CBI MEMBER PUBLICA



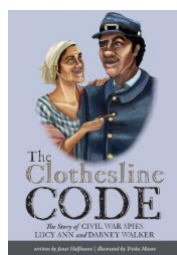
**Janet Halfmann** ([janethalfmannauthor.com](http://janethalfmannauthor.com)) is proud to announce the July 2022 release of *How Can We Be Kind? Wisdom from the Animal Kingdom*, a nonfiction picture book for ages 3-5, with endearing art by Darla Okada and published by Frances Lincoln Children's Books/Quarto Kids. The book shows kids easy, everyday ways they can be kind by imitating the caring behaviors of animals. Winner of a 2022 Eureka! Honor Award. Available wherever books are sold, including at [Bookshop](#).



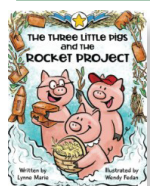
**Suzanne Morreale** is excited to announce the publication of her first picture book, *Amara Sets Sail*, from BiblioKid Publishing, illustrated by Marizan. Book description: Thailand. Egypt. Turkey? Amara wants to make a forever friend on land after being a sea-faring kitty for so long. But when things are noisier, hotter, and lonelier than she imagined...she wishes she could return home. A heart-warming picture book that's great for cat lovers, travelers, & children ages 4-7! Order from [Amazon](#) or the author's website at [suzannemorreale.com](http://suzannemorreale.com)

## OTHER GOOD NEWS

**PJ McIlvaine**, author of *A Good Man* (Bloodhound Books, May 2023), *The Conundrum of Charlemagne Crosse* (Orange Blossom Publishing, September 2023), *Violet Yorke*, *Gilded Girl: Ghosts in the Closet* (Darkstroke Books, 2022), and *Little Lena and the Big Table* (Big Belly Books, 2019), and a CBI contributor, **is now represented by literary agent Jonathan Rosen of The Seymour Agency**.



**Janet Halfmann** ([www.janethalfmannauthor.com](http://www.janethalfmannauthor.com)) is excited to announce three awards. *The Clothesline Code*, illustrated by Trisha Mason and published by BrandyLane Publishers, won a multicultural Skipping Stones Honor Award and a PenCraft Award. This lost-to-history nonfiction picture book for ages 6-11 is about a formerly enslaved couple who created a clever code using clothes on a clothesline to spy for the Union army. *Caterpillar's Surprise*, illustrated by Emily Krueger and published by Black Rose Writing, won 1st Prize for Children's Nature Books in the PenCraft Awards. This fiction picture book for ages 3-8 is about a friendship between a caterpillar and a tadpole, growing up, and BIG CHANGES. Both books are available at bookstores and online, including at [Amazon](#).



Author and CBI contributor **Lynne Marie's** most recent picture book, *The Three Little Pigs and the Rocket Project* (illustrated by Wendy Fedan) has won a 2022 Northern Light Award in the Educational Picture Book Category. In addition, this book has merited three other awards, including a Readers' Favorite Award and 2nd and 3rd place in the Book Fest Awards.

**Send us your good news!** If you'd like to announce a recent publication (book or magazine, traditionally or self-published), please send a short description of the project (title, publisher, age range, pub date, and 1-2 sentence description) along with a JPEG of the book cover or, if available, the magazine cover/spread of article. Also include up to two links (your website, Amazon listing, etc.) Please note that we don't have the staff to hunt down any details that you forget to include. We'll print what you send us, so you may want to wait until you have a book cover and firm pub date to take best advantage of this announcement. **If you'd like to share other good news** (you found an agent, started a blog, finished revising your manuscript, were invited to speak at a local festival, etc.) please send a brief description of your news, up to two links you'd like to share, and, if desired, one related image as a JPEG. (NOTE: If you sign a contract for a book, you can announce the signing under Other Good News, and then send more details and the book cover near the publication date for CBI Member Publications).

Email all material to [mail@writeforkids.org](mailto:mail@writeforkids.org), and put "Celebrate" in the subject line. All material must be received by the 20th of the month to appear in the following month's issue.