

Western Tale Spinner

Fall 2009 Volume Four Number Two



Illustration by Darryl Funk

A newsletter published by the Western Canadian Chapter of the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Information published in this newsletter does not constitute an endorsement by SCBWI and/or SCBWI-Western Canada.

Note from the Editor:

Welcome to our Fall Edition of the Western Tale Spinner. There are many interesting articles to read, submitted by our regional advisor, Ken Kilback, and also by Stephen Mooser, the President of SCBWI, along with four other members.

There's also a lot of good news from both authors and illustrators! Congratulations to all of you mentioned on page 2. And thanks to all who contributed to this issue, as without you there wouldn't be a newsletter. If you're interested in submitting an article or an illustration for our Spring 2010 edition, please email me at: dragonfly3@telus.net
Happy writing! *Loretta Houben*

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GOOD NEWS

Compiled by Ken Kilback

There is lots of good news to report this time!

Linda Bailey's new book about Stanley the dog, called "Stanley's Beauty Contest", has been nominated for the Blue Spruce Award.

Illustrated by **Kristi Bridgeman** and written by P. K. Page, "The Sky Tree: A Trilogy of Fables" is a series of stories about the landlocked kingdom of Ure, in whose land no one outside the royal family has ever seen or believes in the sea. And yet, three men are about to seek out the sea in order to win the hand of the princess. The book is due out from Oolichan Books in December 2009.

Jan Markley's debut novel, "Dead Frog on the Porch", is just out from Gumboot Books. In this first of the Megabyte Mystery series, twin sisters Cyd and Jane race to save the frog kingdom. Available on Amazon and in local independent book stores.

Lois Petersons' first children's book, "Meeting Miss 405", has been nominated for OLA's 2010 Forest of

Reading Silver Birch Express Award. Lois has an opportunity to participate in the OLA award festivities at Toronto's Harbourside in Mid-May 2010. Lois is pleased to announce the April 2010 release of her next children's novel, "The Ballad of Knuckles McGraw" from Orca Books.

Michelle Read recently signed with agent Erin Murphy of the Erin Murphy Literary Agency. Erin Murphy is representing Michelle's middle-grade historical fantasy manuscript.

Mary McKenna Siddals is pleased to announce the March 2010 release of her next picture book, "Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth", from Ten Speed Press.

Crystal J. Stranaghan's new picture book, "The Pirate Who Lost His AARRR!", is now out from Gumboot Books. Illustrated by Marcus Wild, this book is a rousing tale of pirates, betrayal, gold, a curse, and second chances.

"aRYTHMétique", the French version of **Kari-Lynn Winters'** popular picture book with Tiffany Stone and Lori Sherritt-Fleming, and illustrated by SCBWI member Scot Ritchie, is now out from Gumboot Books. Through poetry, various math concepts are explored.

Kari's picture book, "On My Walk" (illustrated by Christina Leist)—about an interactive rollicking rainy day walk—is now out from Tradewind Books.

Another picture book, "Runaway Alphabet", will be out in Fall 2009 from Simply Read Books. Illustrated by Ben Frey, this alphabet book is told through the sounds of the letters as Nan and Pa explore a winter carnival.

Kari is also pleased to announce that her picture book, "When Chickens Fly", is now out from Gumboot Books. Illustrated by Izabella Bzymek, the book focuses on Esper Getz, who wants to be part of the Snow Sports Competition, but is not allowed to compete because she's a...chicken!

Kari has been appointed as Assistant Professor of Drama and Children's Literature in the Faculty of Education at Brock University. She begins her post in January 2010.

SCBWI Western Canada Illustrator's Conference

By Darryl W. Funk

Being relatively new to the children's book industry, I was very excited to attend the Western Canada Chapter's Illustrators conference in Burnaby BC this past October.

I've been fortunate enough to be a part of the fledgling children's magazine "Zamoof!" since its inception in 2006. This was a perfect start for me I thought, as my dream was always to be a children's book illustrator. *Finding* work as a children's book illustrator however, had been somewhat of a mystery to me.

Granted, I knew how to put together a reasonable portfolio which would show what I was capable of, but I came to the realization, during this conference, that it had to be much more than that. After the conference was over I knew that I literally had to go 'back to the drawing board'.

There were five speakers, all of whom were valuable sources of information. Crystal Stranaghan, Publisher and Art Director of Gumboot Books, spoke about what illustrators need to know about contracts. There is a lot of information to consider when signing a contract with a publisher. Copyrights, licensing, merchandising and digital rights for example; if they print T-Shirts with your

image, how much of a cut do you get? If you decide on a certain amount of payment, how many pages are required and how much direction will you receive? What kind of timeline?

Teresa Bubela, Director of Art and Production at Orca Books, gave a presentation on submitting portfolios and working with an art director. When selling yourself to a publisher, submit a diverse body of work. Show them that you are capable of presenting more than one particular style or format. Keep yourself updated. If your work has grown, or changed, replace older work with the new. Don't misrepresent yourself by showing work that you can't commit to under a deadline. When submitting work, "Tear-Sheets" or "Pull-Sheets" are preferred. Make it as easy as possible for the art director to view your work. If possible, find an agent. A lot of work is given to illustrators who are represented in the books sent out by these agencies.

There were two professional illustrators, both with several books to their credit, who talked about their work and experiences. Cynthia Nugent talked about her process, showing preliminary drawings, final work and even gave a quick demonstration on some of her digital

methods. She talked about inspiration for her work, which included traveling abroad to Denmark in which the story, "Honey Cake", written by Joan Betty Stuchner, was presented! She also showed how she used pictures of two real dogs for the illustrations of her newest book, "Fred and Pete at the Beach".

Kathryn E. Shoemaker gave a great presentation about putting together a dummy book for submission. A lot of artists write their own stories as well as illustrating for others, and she presented some great examples of her dummy books. I found this to be very useful information as I've been working on one myself, but wasn't sure how to go about it. Putting only one or two complete pieces in is recommended as the art director might ask you to change them at some point. This way they know how the completed work will look. Using sketches or even thumbnails and a breakdown of text layout on pages being the general idea; enough to give the publisher an example of how the story will look and feel.

The last presenter was Kallie George, Art Editor from Simply Read Books. She discussed selling and delivering a

picture book as well as describing what they look for in submissions. This kind of picked up on Kathryn E. Shoemaker's discussion on creating dummy books. Using different methods to submit your story; such as a storyboard with sketches of your characters, or a completed story with sample illustrations. The thing I found most interesting is that if you have a webpage or blog, a very interesting way of showing your work is by sending a simple folding postcard with two or three strong images on one side and your web addresses and contact information on the other. Printing a stack of these would be a simple, cost-effective way of introducing yourself to publishers.

Overall I felt this was a fantastic and well informed way to spend the day. The speakers were excellent and shared such wonderful information. I had always envisioned sending my work to some stuffy, overworked art director with giant piles of portfolios on his or her desk, briefly glancing at my work before shuffling it off to another pile. This is clearly not the case, or at least it isn't with smaller publishers. These were very friendly people who took the scariness out of an industry in which I am eagerly breaking into.

SiWC 2009 By Michelle Read

I heard over and over last weekend at the Surrey International Writers' Conference (SiWC) that it's the best conference there is. Terry Brooks, who has written 33 novels in 33 years, told the audience that he sends all beginning writers to the SiWC. It says a lot, I think, that top notch authors Anne Perry, Jack Whyte and Diana Gabaldon show up year after year to help writers progress in their careers.

I have to say, the first time I attended the conference in 2003, it seemed

like total chaos; a frenetic pace of workshop-eat-pitch-workshop-blue pencil-eat-key note address-drink! But this time, I was able to relax, meet people, enjoy the meals, pick and choose the workshops that would help me the most and I was also able to pitch with a little more confidence. This year, there was a room where you could practice pitching with Cricket Freeman. A great idea!

Now, the SiWC may be considered "the best" conference, but I had to remind myself those were writers-for-adults speaking. They've never been to a SCBWI conference. I've been to one and it was as well-organized with the same quality of

speakers as the SiWC. We're very lucky! I was pleased to meet many SCBWI members at the SiWC. We were calling ourselves the Secret Society, because *ess-sea-bee-double u-eye* is a mouthful, and Skibwi, Skwibwee, or Skwibee seemed to elicit a "Pardon me??"

So what was offered to children's writers at the SiWC? There were many children's and teens' author/presenters such as Eileen Cook (*great* humour workshop), kc dyer, Meg Tilly, Chris Humphreys, Kathryn E. Shoemaker and Richelle Mead. Many of the workshops were appropriate, from a stream of picture book workshops, specific kidlit topics like "Writing in the Kidzone" and "Writing for Teens" to general writing topics like: "The Hero's Journey" and "Dialogue with Jack Whyte". I took in a screenwriting workshop and found it very applicable to novel writing.

A panel on the future of the fiction market told us: no need to fear e-books,

they are a very small part of the overall market. Children's book sales are steadily growing, and the next craze now that teen paranormal is on the way out is the post-apocalyptic novel.

The hotel was lovely, the food was great. If I have any suggestions for anyone thinking of attending for the first time next year: stay at the conference hotel so you can pop up to your room whenever you need a break, and so that you don't have to lug your overcoat, umbrella and gumboots to every workshop (according to Anne Perry it's *always* raining during the SiWC). And, if it's your first time pitching, go with the attitude that you're going to give it a try just to see what it's like. If you go with the attitude I had in 2003—that you've written a bestseller and now's the time to knock the socks off an editor—you'll end up puking!

The dates for next year are Oct. 22-24, 2010. I hope to see you there!

Word on the Street and the Surrey International Writers' Conference By Ken Kilback

This year, SCBWI—Canada West had display tables at both Vancouver's Word on the Street (WOTS) and the Surrey School District's Surrey International Writers' Conference (SiWC). Our region will also soon be having a display table at the Calgary Children's Book Fair & Conference.

WOTS was held on a sunny, but cold and slightly windy day at the end of September. We had only reserved a half-table for the festival, which perhaps was just a bit too small for us given the generosity of our members who had donated books as part of the display. However, we did meet a lot of people that day who came by to ask questions

and find out more about our organization in general and our region in particular. In fact, one of the people we met that day came to our manuscript workshop in October.

SiWC was held for an entire weekend—three days—and this time we had an entire table to ourselves at the trade show. Originally we had only reserved a half-table, but after WOTS we managed to upgrade to a full table for ourselves at the Surrey conference. We met even more people here than at WOTS, some of whom practically became new members on the spot. In addition, some of the people we met there have already signed up for one of our website-building workshops coming up within the next few months.

While we had lots of books at our SiWC display table as at WOTS, we

divided the books into packages that were then donated to the conference to be handed out as door prizes. There were so many door prizes—on top of the five packages that were created just with our books alone—that some of them were handed out during workshops on the final day instead of in the big meeting hall where the keynote speeches were given. Several conference volunteers and organizers expressed their thankfulness at the generosity given by SCBWI—Canada West and its members.

Several members volunteered their time during the course of the conference to watch over our display table. A very big thank-you, then, to the following people: Alison Acheson, Gloria Blanchard, Diane Jones, Jeremy Mathieson, Brenda Moore, and Gladys Swedak.

In addition, a very big thank-you to all the people who donated their books to be displayed at WOTS and SiWC, and also to be offered as door prizes at the Surrey International Writers' Conference. The following is a list of the books donated for display, as well as of the members who donated them:

- Alison Acheson—
“Grandpa’s Music: A Story of Alzheimer’s”
- Eileen Cook—“What Would Emma Do?”
- Lee Edward Fodi—
“Kendra Kandlestar and the Box of Whispers”;
“Kendra Kandlestar and the Door to Unger”; and

“Kendra Kandlestar and the Shard from Greeve”

- Deborah Hodge: “The Kids Book of Canadian Immigration”; “Lily and the Mixed-Up Letters”; “Bears”; “Ants”; “Whales”; “Bees”; “Rain Forest Animals”; and “Forest Animals”
- Laura Langston: “The Trouble With Cupid”; “Perfect Blue”; “Finding Cassidy”; “Hannah’s Touch”; and “Exit Point”
- Simon Rose: “The Heretic’s Tomb”; “The Clone Conspiracy”; and “The Alchemist’s Portrait”
- Mary McKenna Siddals: “Millions of Snowflakes” and “Morning Song”
- David J. Smith: “If the World Were a Village” and “If America Were a Village”
- Kari-Lynn Winters: “aRHYTHMetic” and “Jeffrey and Sloth”
- Ola Zuri: “Why Can’t You Look at Me?”

Thanks again to everyone!!

Ken Kilback is our Regional Advisor for the Society of Children’s Book Writers & Illustrators in Western Canada.

The SCBWI at Thirty-Eight

By Stephen Mooser

In 1971 two young writers, newly hired to write a series of reading books for children, met at the Southwest Regional Laboratory in Los Alamitos, near Los Angeles. Neither Stephen Mooser nor Lin Oliver had written anything for children before and didn't know where to turn. None of the existing author organizations had groups, publications or workshops geared to the children's book writer. Seeing the need for such a group, they printed up a one page brochure, took out an ad in *Writer's Digest*, and ushered the then SCBW (Society of Children's Book Writers) into the world.

What they did not realize nearly forty years ago was that they were not merely starting an organization, but were creating a community that would, eventually, have a profound effect on the children's book industry as well as on thousands of individuals and countless children around the world. Over the years the organization has grown to be the largest writer's group in the world, and the most active.

The week after that initial ad appeared, the first member, the late Sue Alexander, joined. Among her many contributions to the SCBW was the founding of the Golden Kite Award and the inspiration for the first conference. At that first conference, in 1971, the keynote speakers were Sid Fleischman and Jane Yolen, two extraordinary authors who have continued to provide the organization with valuable support and advice. Fifty-five people attended that first conference, held at a seaside hotel in Santa Monica, where deluxe rooms were going for \$12 a night.

Dorothy Leon also joined that first year and spearheaded efforts to assist and recognize children's magazine authors and illustrators. In September of 1992 Board Member Tomie dePaola successfully lobbied to change the name and mission of the SCBW to include

illustrators and the SCBWI was born. Not long after this, Bruce Balan helped develop the initial web site and other electronic programs, greatly increasing the SCBWI's ability to build a worldwide presence. Canada became the first SCBWI chapter outside the US. Under the first International RA, Rebecca Gold, more chapters were added. Later, under the leadership of International RA Erzsi Deak and currently of International RA Kathleen Ahrens, the organization has expanded to more than thirty countries from Malaysia to Mongolia and Italy to India.

That first year the membership totaled fifty people. This year, 2009, the SCBWI rolls contain over 22,000 members around the world. This growth would not have been possible without the dedication of hundreds of volunteers, including an amazing group of Regional Advisors, who shared the original dream of the SCBWI and helped to make it happen. The original RA Chairperson Stephanie Gordon, later joined by Judy Enderle, guided the SCBWI for many years. When they stepped aside, Cheryl Zach, the current RA Chair, took over and continued to lead with the same energy, kindness and creativity.

Just this year the SCBWI makes another leap forward with the debut of our newly expanded and enhanced web site, which offers our International community the opportunity to network with others in the field, to display their artwork, advertise for speaking engagements, get the latest gossip and news, and soon, to be able to perform a keyword search through nearly 250 past issues of the *Bulletin*. Webmaster and *Bulletin* Art Director Aaron Hartzler and Database Coordinator Sally Crock have both contributed substantially to our ability to reach our members electronically and to also allow the membership to reach each other.

President Stephen Mooser and Executive Director Lin Oliver want to personally thank everyone who made these nearly forty years of the SCBWI possible. As they have said on many occasions, "We hope our members feel as we do, that we are incredibly lucky to be part of the SCBWI—

an organization we consider much more than a successful story, but a community of cherished friends."

Stephen Mooser is President and Co-Founder of the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators

Event Horizon

By Ken Kilback

Conferences and Events

Western Washington University's Bond Children's Literature Conference is scheduled for Saturday **March 6, 2010** in Bellingham, Washington. Featured guests include Caldecott Honor illustrator Marla Frazee; author John Green; author/illustrators/story reteller Gerald McDermott; and Newbery Medal recipient Linda Sue Park. Visit www.wwucl.com for further details.

The Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators—Western Washington is holding its annual conference from **April 10 to 11 2010** at the Marriott Redmond Town Center in Redmond, Washington (just outside of Seattle). Featured guests include editors Elizabeth Law (Egmont USA), Jordan Brown (HarperCollins), Lynne Polvino (Clarion), Lisa Graff (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux), and Tim Gillner (Boyd's Mill Press); agents Sara Crowe (Harvey Klinger), Michael Bourret (Dystel & Goderich Literary Management), Edward Necarsulmmer IV (McIntosh & Otis, Inc.), and Paul Rodeen (Rodeen Literary Management); illustrator Matt Holm; and authors Deborah Hopkinson, Sundee Frazier, Lin Oliver, and Suzanne Selfors. For more details, go to www.scbwi-washington.org .

The Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators—Western Canada is holding

WestCwic 2010 (Western Canada Children's Writers & Illustrators Conference) on Saturday **May 8, 2010**. Guest speakers include authors Meg Tilly and David J. Smith, as well as senior editor Valerie Wyatt (Kids Can Press). Check out www.scbwicanada.org/west as more details become available.

The **Vancouver International Children's Festival** will run from **May 17 through 24 2010**. Check out www.childrensfestival.ca as details become available.

The **Oregon Coast Children's Book Writers Workshops, Summer 2010** are running in two sessions, one from **July 12 through 16 2010** and the other from **July 19 through 23**. Featured authors include David Greenberg, Eric A. Kimmel, Margriet Ruurs, Elizabeth Rusch, April Henry, Pamela Smith Hill, Randi Platt, and Vijaya Khisty Bodach. Featured editors include Molly O'Neill (Katherine Tegen Books), Noa Wheeler (Henry Holt Books for Young Readers), Lauren Hodge (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers), and Connie Hsu (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers). Featured agents include Michelle Andelman (Lynn C. Franklin Associates) and Jennifer Laughran (Andrea Brown Literary Agency). For more details or to register, go to www.occbww.com .

**Three Dead Moths in my Mailbox:
From Finished Manuscript to Book Publishing Contract**

by Jan Markley

It was a cold and lonely Tuesday evening when I dragged my butt home from aquasize. There was a chill in the autumn air that a cup of steaming chai with an extra dollop of organic honey couldn't stave off. Needed to check my e-mail before shoving some curried vegetables down my gullet and bolting out to meet a friend for coffee. There it was. An e-mail from Crystal Stranaghan the publisher of Gumboot Books. It was the e-mail we all wait for. Quickly scanned over the line apologizing for the delay, complete with a winky-face emoticon, to get to the line we dream about: "It's something I'd be interested in publishing...." I did the classic OMG scream then phoned my sister. Forwarded the e-mail to my writer's group with an 'in your face' message. It was the fall of 2008. The journey to that moment started two years earlier in November 2006. After many re-writes, and using all my finely honed stalking skills, I tracked down the editors who gave me positive feedback on an earlier version of the manuscript 10 years earlier. Many still worked at the same publishing house. I sent the new version mentioning that they had seen an earlier version and gave me encouraging feedback that I took to heart in the rewrite. After extensive stalking ... er, I mean research as to which other publishers to send to, I sent my manuscript for young readers *Dead Frog on the Porch* out to Canadian publishers and U.S. agents. I was leaving for India in January of 2007 and wanted to have it out there working for me while I was gone. When I returned from India in February 2007 there were a few rejections and one request for the full manuscript. Everyday, over the next few months, I would lift the ill-fitting mailbox lid (thank you handyman!)

and find the same thing ... three dead moths.

In the fall Publisher 'A' and two American agents requested my full manuscript. Things got even more interesting when I attended the Surrey International Writers' Conference (SiWC). There was a "Manuscript Idol" session. It consisted of a panel of agents and a MC. Writers threw in the first two pages of their manuscript. The MC would stop reading when the agents said they would reject the manuscript. I watched in horror, as most manuscripts didn't make it past the first two paragraphs before they were rejected. Sometimes rejection was based on a cliché, over use of adjectives or adverbs, change in voice, or too much back-story.

My stomach quavered, like I'd eaten a too hot vindaloo, every time the MC started to read a new manuscript. I considered sneaking up and grabbing mine back. Then the MC read my opening line. By the end of the first paragraph, the audience and one agent were killing themselves laughing (which was good because it's a comedy).

By the end of the second paragraph, I had a round of applause. One of the agents, Janet Reid of Fine Print Literary Management, got up from her seat and went to the podium.

"Give me that. I love dead frogs," she said. "Who's manuscript is it?"

Another agent on the panel, Jenoyne Adams of Bliss Literary Agency International, Inc., said, "I love dead frogs too." Both asked me to submit my full manuscript. By the Monday after the conference, Janet Reid had made a reference to dead frogs on her blog. Pretty wild! A third agent, Michael Bourett of Dystel & Goderich Literary Management, requested my full manuscript after he heard

what happened at the Manuscript Idol. While the project wasn't right for these agents, I am still in contact with two of them regarding future projects.

At the end of December, I got an e-mail from Publisher 'A' saying they "... wished it was an unqualified 'yes'" but that they had some plot problems and suggested a re-write. On New Year's Eve, I received a glowing rejection letter from the vice president of a New York agency. She expected I would be "... snatched up by another agent soon, if I hadn't been already." Spent some time howling at the moon "snatch me up!"

I did a re-write for Publisher 'A' and sent it to them at the end of January 2008. I got a quick-by-publishing-standards response (March) from the Senior Editor who said she would have put me under contract but that it was a small press, they all had to agree and she'd lost the vote. While I was disappointed, it confirmed that I had a publishable manuscript on my hands. My quest for the right publisher continued. In the summer of 2008 I went to a book reading in Calgary by young adult novelists k.c. dyer (organizer of SiWC) and James McCann. I was the only one who showed up so I had them to myself and peppered them with questions about the path of my manuscript. They agreed that I was close and probably in the top ten percent of submissions. I asked how do I get from 90% to 100%? They both agreed that the only difference was persistence. They told me about two newer publishers in Vancouver that I hadn't heard about. One of the publishers was Gumboot Books. Off went two more queries.

Shortly after, I received a lengthy rejection letter from Publisher 'B'. The only thing preventing them from publishing it was that the plot didn't "... unfold organically and intuitively." C'est what did that mean? It only made me think of tomatoes.

This became typical of rejection letters. A couple of paragraphs about how much they loved it, then the word 'but', followed by suggested changes. While an enviable

position to be in as a writer – the Da Vinci Code would have been easier to crack. I did a re-write for Publisher 'B'. Then I thought, why not offer the re-write to Publisher 'A' as well since they were close to buying the first version, this version might push them over the edge. I wrote a non-stalking letter something to the effect that, 'I get that you rejected me, but here are the changes I made. If you're not interested, I will crawl back into my writing den never to darken your mailbox with another manuscript.'

About a month later I received an e-mail from Publisher 'A'. It said they liked the changes and thought the voice of the characters would appeal to 12 year olds, but they felt the plot would appeal to younger children who wouldn't get the 12 year old humour or language. Hello rock. Is that you there by that hard place? Let me squeeze in between! She added that they had reached the end of the road with this manuscript. Sigh.

The week after, I received a letter from Publisher 'B'. It said that they liked the re-write, the manuscript had a great deal of promise, but they didn't have editorial resources to get it there. They left the door open for another re-write. This is when I left a voice mail message on a friend's phone that went something like this: "How much rejection can one human being possibly take before they go completely mad!?" She never phoned me back, and I think she might have even left town.

The following week I got a request for my full manuscript from a longstanding reputable agent in New York with an 'the 4th' after his name. Holy emotional rollercoaster Batman!

In order to handle the rejections I came up with a rule. I would give myself 24 hours to rant and rave, gnash my teeth, and shake my fist at the world. Then I would move on. Thinking a manuscript is finished when you send it out will lead to frustration and disappointment. It's only finished when it is between two covers. Success comes through re-writing, persistence, and following up on every opportunity that

comes your way. Let the frustration burn off like the morning mist on the Ganges. Remember the two queries sent after the "Chocolate and Chat" reading? Both publishers requested my full manuscript. Crystal Stranaghan of Gumboot Books made an offer that I accepted. After the offer from Gumboot, the other Vancouver publisher got back to me suggesting some re-writes and resubmission. I wrote them that I had an offer and thanked them for their interest.

I went back to Surrey that year with a contract in hand. I never thought about

giving up ... and it never once occurred to me to clean out the three dead moths from my mailbox.

Jan Markley is the author of [Dead Frog on the Porch](#) (Gumboot Books 2009). She lives in Calgary, where she continues to stalk agents. Her blog [Three Dead Moths ... from finished manuscript to book publishing contract features a longer version of her 'how I got published' story and tips for writers.](#)

Blue Pencil Project

By Gloria Blanchard

With the prize of a publishing contract so limited these days, why would one writer offer advice to a competitor? Why would a stranger tell another how to participate more successfully in the race they are both running toward the finish line?

Thankfully, they do. Many established writers suggest ways to strengthen another's work while offering an encouraging pat on the back, sending the student on her way into the marathon with renewed confidence.

This summer, Canscaip (Canadian Society of Children's Authors, Illustrators and Performers) offered an opportunity for their members to share their expertise with aspiring writers (protégés) through the Blue Pencil Project. Applicants, either writers or illustrators, could choose a piece of work, a group of illustrations, or one dummy book for feedback by a published author or illustrator. The charges were nominal.

For instance, in my case I chose to have the first 50 pages of my middle grade novel critiqued for a charge of \$50. Ten pages would have cost only \$20, a group of 10 or

fewer illustrations also \$20, and a dummy book critique \$40.

Canscaip's only requirement was that each applicant join the organization as a Friend (\$30). Membership includes a monthly online newsletter which lists market updates with other news.

Canscaip members are authors or illustrators with a minimum of two published children's or YA books.

Toward the end of August I received an email telling me I'd been paired with Hadley Dyer whose book, *Johnny Kellock Died Today*, won the Canadian Library Association award in 2007, along with numerous other awards. Funnily enough, I had picked her book out of the library about a year ago knowing nothing about her. I chose the book strictly on the merits of the intriguing title. It was a wonderful book written by someone who has a special gift. Hadley Dyer has many other impressive credentials including having been a children's editor at James Lorimer & Co. Currently she is an instructor in the publishing program at Ryerson University. How lucky could I get? But I also felt a bit

intimidated and thought, "Uh oh. Let her be forgiving, please."

Her critique came to me at the end of September and she was not so much forgiving as considerate with her analysis, in a couple of instances even flattering (that pat on the back). But better than that, her three page critique gave me concrete points to think about, technical issues in the story structure I wouldn't have thought of on my own. This was more than another pair of eyes to read my work; it was an offering from an experienced, successful professional.

Something she suggested I change surprised me. It was the title of my book. I *loved* the title of my book and thought I'd been really clever dreaming it up (literally--it came to me during a nap, so take that as a warning). The title, (The Secret Life of Bailey Baloney) she thought, was too often used; one example being *The Secret Life of Owen Skye*. And my title might suggest a book for a younger age group than the story suited. It took me a few days of thinking to realize she was right. Now I have to come up with a new title, no dreaming allowed. Titles are important, and hard!

Her feedback made me see that what I thought of as my MG novel was actually more suited as YA. This was another surprise which sent me to the library to research the YA shelves more thoroughly. I've found YA books with main characters as young as 11. This tells me that the determining factor about the age category is not necessarily age in years but subject matter of the story itself. Thinking of the story as a YA rather than a MG is another

reason why the title of the book needs to be changed.

As for her other thoughts, I'll continue to revise my manuscript until I come to The End. At that point, I'll go back and revisit some of her other suggestions. I'll see if the technical issues she highlighted have been resolved to a better degree in my revision. It can't be easy critiquing just a few pages from an entire book. It would be like trying to assess a painting after seeing only one small corner. I accept her feedback as wise opinion, not inflexible judgement. The trouble is I think she may be right which means more work ahead for me.

For anyone interested in taking advantage of the Blue Pencil Project in 2010, make a note now to check out Canscaip's website for information in June or July. If you want to participate, you will need to make an application with a brief description of your project "in the tradition of...", the genre you write in, and of course, some money. If there are more applicants than available mentors, protégés will be selected by lottery.

Canscaip has run the Blue Pencil Project for only two years and so far every applicant has been able to participate. This year, I was tipped off about the Project thanks to Ken Kilback in an email to our Western Canadian Children's Writers group. Knowing how thorough Ken is, he'll likely send us a reminder again next year but a note in your calendar wouldn't hurt. Because publishing is such a competitive business, why not take advantage in 2010 of the generosity of writers willing to share their knowledge.

Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators

Canada West



Kite Logo Contest

SCBWI—Western Canada is looking for a logo—with a kite! SCBWI is all about kites. A kite has been in its logo since the Society's founding in 1971. And now, kites can be seen in the logos of SCBWI regions worldwide.

Guidelines:

1. This contest is open to both SCBWI members and non-members.
2. All submissions must be original.
3. All submissions must include the words "SCBWI" and "Canada West".
4. All submissions must include a kite.
5. Check out the logo for SCBWI—Canada East at www.scbwicanada.org/east to make certain that your submission is not too similar to theirs.
6. All submissions must be in hardcopy, but keep a digital copy available in case it is requested.
7. Deadline: Friday February 5, 2010.
8. Mail a hardcopy of the submission to: Ken Kilback, Regional Advisor, SCBWI—Western Canada, c/o #110—6630 McKay Avenue, Burnaby, BC, V5H 2X2.

IMPORTANT NOTE: SCBWI—Western Canada reserves the right not to pick any of the entries as a winner if none of the submissions seems suitable

The winning entry will:

1. be chosen (by a judge or panel of judges as yet to be determined) by March 30 2010
2. be officially announced at WestCwic 2010 (Western Canada Children's Writers & Illustrators Conference), which is to be held on Saturday May 8th 2010
3. be permanently displayed on SCBWI-Western Canada's website and on the regional page of the main SCBWI website
4. appear on other promotional material in either hardcopy or digital form

The winning illustrator will:

1. be officially announced at WestCwic 2010
2. receive free tuition to WestCwic 2010
3. receive a year's free membership to SCBWI (either a free one-year renewal for members, or a free first-year membership for non-members)
4. receive credit for the logo on SCBWI-Western Canada's website
5. have a permanent link to their own website from SCBWI-Western Canada's website

Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators Canada West



Illustrator Coordinator

SCBWI—Western Canada is looking for an Illustrator Coordinator to help out in its region! This is a volunteer position for an illustrator that will allow the person not only to help out in promoting our region, but to network with other illustrators and with Art Directors.

Responsibilities of an Illustrator Coordinator:

1. helping out the Regional Advisor and Assistant Regional Advisor in organizing and promoting events that are open to illustrators
2. coordinating Portfolio Consultations at any of these events
3. attending these events whenever possible (free-of-charge)
4. being a member of ILLIA, an SCBWI online mail group for those representing illustrators within the Society; ILLIA shares information and advice on running events and other issues common to illustrators

Please note that the volunteer will receive free membership while he or she is in the role of Illustrator Coordinator.

Preference for the role will be given to an SCBWI member.
However, non-members are also encouraged to apply.

If you are interested in being the Illustrator Coordinator or have questions, please contact:

Ken Kilback
Regional Advisor
SCBWI—Western Canada
rawest@scbwicanada.org

Simon Rose
Assistant Regional Advisor
SCBWI—Western Canada
arawest@scbwicanada.org

SCBWI—Western Canada Website www.scbwicanada.org/west



Illustration by Kristi Bridgeman

Image title: "Transformation" from the second book in The Sky Tree Trilogy- titled "The goat that flew" Scene shows the moment a goat is transformed back into his human form. Medium, sepia ink and watercolour. Book slated for release December 2009.

Are you interested in becoming a member of SCBWI, the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators? Please visit the SCBWI website at www.scbwi.org for further information. Join the fun, you won't regret it!

Please visit our own website at: <http://scbwcanada.org/west/> to learn more about our Canadian West group.

The Vancouver critique group includes both SCBWI members and non-members. New people are always welcome! We meet in the Regional Advisor's home in the city of Burnaby (which is right beside Vancouver), near Metropolis at Metrotown mall. We meet on Saturday, once a month, from 1:30 – 4:00. Be sure to bring at least 5 copies of your manuscript--full manuscript for picture books, or one or two chapters for children's novels--or bring your portfolio to share with others. For address information and/or directions, please contact Ken at kenkilback@shaw.ca

For current dates, please visit our website:
http://www.scbwcanada.org/west/critique_times.html