

# Western Tale Spinner

Spring 2006 Volume One Number One

Here it is; the first edition of our newsletter!

Many thanks to all who submitted a name for the newsletter. **Joan Winter** was the winner in choosing our new name; congratulations!

I wanted a name that would reflect the fact we are in the western part of Canada, and also something that would show that the majority of us are children's book writers. I think this name fits the bill!

We have 8 pages of articles in this issue. Thanks to all who contributed! I hope to hear from more of you in the next edition, which will be published August 2006.

There will be three editions of the *Western Tale Spinner* each year; Spring, Summer, and Winter.

If you have any ideas to submit, please send them to my attention at [dragonfly3@telus.net](mailto:dragonfly3@telus.net).

The deadline for submission of articles for the August edition is **June 15<sup>th</sup>**.

All the best,  
*Loretta Houben*



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**Western Tale Spinner Editors:**  
Diane Jones, [angelslodge@yahoo.com](mailto:angelslodge@yahoo.com)  
Loretta Houben, [dragonfly3@telus.net](mailto:dragonfly3@telus.net)

## ***Welcome from the Regional Advisor***

Hello everyone! Welcome to our first edition of the *Western Tale Spinner*! I hope you'll enjoy the articles and feel free to contribute your own thoughts.

SCBWI-Western Canada covers enormous territory. Our region extends from British Columbia and the Yukon all across Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and even extends all the way to the Northwest Territories. The rest of the country is served by SCBWI-Canada.

This confuses new members because it looks as though we are part of the Canada group. We used to be, but western writers complained that all the action was in Ontario. So, be careful what you ask for! I was handed the job of regional advisor for this half of the country when I spoke up. It was more trouble than it was worth to change their name, so we agreed they wouldn't have to. I hope it won't bother anyone.

As it is, our eastern colleagues work along with us on our shared website. It's still going through some growing pains, but that's how it is when everyone is working as volunteers and life interferes. We have to be as patient and as helpful as we can. I'm sure it will be worth it, if we keep working together.

Covering such a large territory, even after our split, means that many of our members are still left out of SCBWI activities. If you are able to be a leader in your area, please email me. I started out as SCBWI-Canada's Assistant Regional Advisor and learned as I went along. There are perks to the job, and the work is not overwhelming. If you feel your area could use your help, please let's talk. SCBWI has many benefits, and we want to share them with children's writers and illustrators in Western Canada.

Our goal is to be supportive and helpful. Let us know how we can serve you in your community.

Cheers! ~~Diane Jones, Regional Advisor for SCBWI-Western Canada

## Grammatically Speaking by Diane Jones

In the old Broadway musical "My Fair Lady", Professor Henry Higgins complains that the English don't know how to speak their language. He adds, "Well, in America they haven't used it for years." I suppose by extension he would say the same for Canada. Another character later says, "Her English is too good. That clearly indicates that she is foreign."

So, as one who has spent nearly thirty years teaching foreigners to speak better than the rest of us, I'm presuming to take on the task of writing a column devoted to clearing up some sticky wickets in English grammar.

Top of my list of pet peeves is the misuse of the subjective pronoun in the first person singular: the word "I". Primarily, this word is reserved for use as the subject of a sentence, such as "I am reading" or "I like your book". The objective pronoun for the first person singular is "me". None of us would say "Me am reading," or "Me like your book". We would, however, say, "Please read to me," ("me" as object of

the preposition "to") or "Please help me," ("me" as object of the verb "help"). So it astonishes and dismays me to hear many well-educated people say ridiculous things like "Please read to John and I" or "Please help my friends and I" as if adding another person or persons makes an iota of difference to the grammatical structure of the sentence. If this is one of your buggaboos, it's easy to catch and correct it. Just eliminate everyone else but yourself and see what you would naturally say.

If you have any pet grammar peeves, or questions about grammar rules, please send them to me in care of this newsletter. By the way, I don't make the rules up to suit myself. I have shelves full of grammar books and will be happy to recommend some to you. You don't mind if they're mostly for ESL (English-as-a-Second-Language) students, do you? After all, that's what made them the experts!

## Rejection is Real by Mark Baker

Sending out a manuscript does not require courage. All it requires is an envelope and a stamp. (Actually two envelopes and two stamps, but you know what I mean.)

Seriously, there is nothing to be afraid of. What frightens you? Rejection? Rejection is not a possibility. It is a certainty. You will get rejected. You will get rejected a lot. We all do. Rejection just means you've joined the club. You will be one of us, a venerable international society of rejection slip collectors.

Are editors saying nasty things about your manuscript? It won't happen. Not a chance. If they don't like it, they will say nothing. The only way you will ever get any criticism from an editor is if they like your story a lot, but think that it needs to be improved to meet their needs, or if they think it shows enough promise that they want to encourage

you to send them more of your work. In this case, any criticism that the editors comments contain will not sting in the least because you will be too busy doing your Sally Field imitation; "They like me! They really like me!"

Are going bankrupt paying for printing and postage costs? That's the scariest one of the lot. I spent \$1500 one year on printing and postage. Net result: two hundred rejection slips, two short stories published, and one contract with an agent. You have to play the numbers.

This is the writing life:

- Write manuscript.
- Insert manuscript into envelope.
- Insert envelope into mail box.
- Repeat until dead.
- Once in a while, an acceptance letter will show up.

Welcome to the club.

## Good News! Submitted by Joan Winter

From Sally Rogow: She's had some excellent reviews for, "**They Must Not Be Forgotten**". She's currently beginning another project.

From Joan Winter: My article "**Writing Tight**" is published in this month's issue of Children's Book Insider.

From Loretta Houben: Her article "**The Magical Key**" was published online at the ICL website this month.

From Lois Harris: Fun for Kidz magazine accepted her non-fiction article, "**Nose Twisters**", plus photos, for a future issue. Her piece is about nasturtiums: naming, growing, and using the colourful, peppery-smelling flowers.

Lois also became a grandmother for the first time a few weeks ago to a healthy, alert, beautiful baby boy -- what a terrific spring!

## Historical Research by Sally Rogow

Writing about history is challenging and insightful. First there is the research to be done and then the telling of the story the story that is true to the realities of the events. History writing requires a well organized and persuasive thesis. Document sources need to be acknowledged and facts serve as evidence.

Hate and prejudice continues to erode our culture and our humanity. It is important to remember events borne of hatred and those who had the courage to resist. Historical events that took place around World War II like the Holocaust must not be forgotten.

The actions of people who rescued others are deeply inspiring. Planned escapes that involved children as well as adults also took place. Presently, I

am writing about the children of Teheran. Thousands of children escaped from Poland into Russia, and then escaped to Teheran and were taken to Palestine. The story is fascinating and demonstrates how well organized escapes needed to be.

The research required is as challenging as the writing. The details are important facts and are the building blocks of the story. The facts are to be found in personal memoirs, history books, and documents. History writing is challenging and needs to capture and hold readers' attention.

In a world inundated by stories of violence and terrorism, our children need models of behaviour that sustains faith in the world and in them. Stories of heroes serve that purpose.

## Writing Tips by Gladys Swedak

I have found that writing when I have something else on my mind is not worth it. I find that I need to have my mind on what I am doing. If it is writing I have to be in the story at the time I am writing it.

I first think about what it is I want to write. I usually have an idea but not necessarily an outline. Sometimes I let the characters take themselves where they want to go, as in fiction.

Two non fiction articles of mine have been published online. Both are real to

life and happened to me. The first was an assignment for the Institute of Children's Literature where I was a student. It was through a fellow student it was published. The other article was written to help me deal with a personal problem in my life. I find that if something is bothering me it helps to write about it. This was sent to a woman's online magazine and accepted for their women's issue section. Both brought me the recognition of being published online. There was no payment but I learned a lot from both of these experiences.

## Event Horizon by Ken Kilback

I must be one of the few people around who has not read Louis Sachar's multiple-award winning book (including the Newbery Medal and the National Book Award), *Holes*. However, I did go see him when he came to the Lower Mainland on the last stop of his tour, mostly because his book—even though unread by me—has intrigued me for some time. He appeared in the gymnasium of Our Lady of Perpetual Help on Thursday March 30 of this year (and then the next night at a location in North Vancouver). The event was well-attended, especially by Sachar's younger fans. One of the pieces of information he shared with us is that he doesn't plan his stories out before starting to write; instead, he starts with a simple idea that he wants to explore and starts writing without any idea where he is headed with the story. He discovers the story as he writes it, and then shapes it into what he knows he wants in later revisions and rewrites.

Robert Munsch was in Vancouver just about a year ago, but it was very hard to get to see him that time if you didn't have a child. And if you did have a child, then your chances of getting to see him depended on whether your child won a lottery for the ticket as

organized by the Vancouver Public Library. For those who missed Munsch last year or would like another opportunity to go see him, he is coming back to town for the 2006 Vancouver Children's Festival. The author of *Mortimer*, *The Paper Bag Princess*, and *Love You Forever*, among many other books, has six appearances scheduled at the festival from Thursday May 18 through Monday May 22. Tickets are \$14 until April 17 and then \$16 after that, and they are available through Ticketmaster at 604-280-444 or [ticketmaster.ca](http://ticketmaster.ca). For those of you who really love Robert Munsch's books, you'll be happy to know that his publisher, Scholastic Canada, has a backlog of over 100 of his manuscripts waiting for publication. Since only two of his titles are published each year, this means...

For those people who live in or near Victoria, the Victoria Children's Literature Roundtable is holding a special event on Sunday June 4 2006. It is marking its 25th anniversary with a guest list of 25 writers and illustrators. Unfortunately, I have been unable to gather any more details about this event at this time.

## Summary of our WCCW meeting February 25, 2006

4 members attended: Diane, Loretta, Joan, and Gladys

**General Discussion:** We talked about quick and easy recipes for kids, along with the idea of putting them in a book. We discussed our upcoming Spring Event, to take place at Granville Island Publishers. (Maybe a tour of the publishing house?)

This would be a FREE event, details to be announced later.

We strayed off the subject and detoured into a chat about travel to England, Italy, Mexico and Greece. Diane talked about her three day novel she wrote a few years ago at the famous 2004 Motel on Kingsway. We chatted about modern murder mysteries and Inspector Morse etc.

It was mentioned that our Newsletter needs a name.

**Good News:** Joan Winter reported that "Children's Book Insider" asked her to write another article. She received \$200.00 from Cricket for a piece previously published by Cricket and used elsewhere. She had first rights to the piece which means she can re-sell to another publisher. Her story originally published in Cricket was "The Magic of the Petrifying Well". Fantastic news, Joan! And she kept it quietly to herself until we had nearly finished our meeting!

Gladys Swedak currently has five articles/stories making the rounds of various publishers, and we hope to hear good news from her at our next meeting.

Our next monthly meeting will take place on **Saturday, April 22, 2006**, at our usual location at St. Thomas Church Hall, 2444 E 41st Avenue in Vancouver BC; 12.30 – 3:00 pm. We hope to see some new faces there!

Also for your info:

Here is the link to our Yahoo group web site:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/westerncanadianchildrenswriters/>

From there please visit the Photo section and feel free to upload your favourite shots of yourself. (if you're so inclined) Some group members weren't aware we had a website, but we do. We are also working on a SCBWI website where information about each member will be posted, along with other relevant information, in conjunction with Eastern Canada SCBWI.

Till next time;  
Loretta Houben

## News from our Bellingham SCBWI Chapter by Lois Harris

The Bellingham Network of the Western Washington Regional Chapter of the International Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators (SCBWI) invites you to our monthly meetings. Events are held the 3rd Mon. of the month (no meeting July or Aug.) at the Geneva Fire Station, 4518 Cable St., Bellingham. Doors open at 6:45 PM. (Take Lakeway exit 253 from I-5 in Bellingham and go East. Lakeway turns into Cable St. just before the blinking light. The station is on your right.) Non-subscribers pay \$5 (\$4.50 if Int'l SCBWI member.)

April 17: Patty Wittmann, writer/illustrator. Patty examines incorporating humor in writing and

illustrating. Books include: Don't Wake Up the Bear (illustrator), and Buffalo Thunder (book), Clever Gretchen (writer & illustrator).

May 15: Bonny Becker, writer. Bonny offers us techniques for plotting from picture books to chapter books. Books include: My Brother the Robot, and The Christmas Crocodile

June 19: Network Workshop. We'll end our season with an inspiring workshop for summer creativity.

As always,

Lois Harris  
Anacortes, WA

## Writing Picture Books for Children By Ken Kilback

Writing picture books for children is not easy. With a word count as low as 10 and as high as 1500, it is more difficult than you might think. Not only does the market fluctuate wildly for writers wanting to submit their stories, but when publishers are accepting manuscripts they are flooded with thousands of unsolicited submissions. What should you know about writing picture books and trying to market them? Here are some tips.

You need to find that perfect balance between what you actually need to say in your story and what you can allow the illustrator to interpret. In short:

don't write too much of the story! What's important is that the flow of the story is not interrupted by too much detail. Focus on the personality of the characters, the action of the story, and the dialogue. And don't forget about the character arc; even picture books have someone who has changed in some significant way—however small or large—by the end of the story.

Illustrations are your adjectives! While you may love to describe Hornson Humphrey standing on his tippy-tippy-tippy toes as he reaches for something or Su-Ling wearing a pink skirt imprinted with flowers and butterflies, these images can easily be edited out unless they are fundamentally necessary to the story (think of Rosemary Wells' Max's Dragon Shirt or Kevin

Henkes' Lily's Purple Plastic Purse). The way characters, places, and things appear will be interpreted by your illustrator, using your text as a guide as well as his or her own inspiration. Have a look at published children's books and note two things: how pared down the text is if you imagine the book without illustrations; and how well the text and illustrations blend together to create something uniquely whole. Let the wonder of your story be its ability to evoke images with the barest of word counts.

No matter how great your story may be, a publisher will not consider it unless it matches what they are looking for, so you need to find the proper market for it. A good starting point is the annually-published Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market, a reference that includes listings for markets in Canada and the United States (as well as some markets in countries outside North America). However, visit the websites of any publishers that interest you to make certain that the information in the reference is still up-to-date. While this book is an excellent resource, the editors and markets can change quickly and so you will need to check that the editor's name you're addressing is correct and that the publisher is accepting submissions at the current time.

Only submit the text of your story. Don't submit any illustrations, even if you're both a writer and an illustrator. If you submit both text and illustrations, your story will not be considered for publication; this is the case even if the publisher would love either the text or the illustrations by themselves (there are a few publishers that do welcome submissions with text and illustrations even from unknown author-illustrators, but this is not the case in most instances so do your research before making any such attempt). Publishers often want to pair up unknown writers with known illustrators (and unknown illustrators with known writers). If you are an

illustrator and writer, submit samples of your illustrative work separately to publishers; they will keep your samples on file until they find a story that they believe matches your style. Once you become known as either a writer or an illustrator, then you will find opportunities to blend your own illustrations with your own text.

Submit your story to only one publisher at a time, unless you know for certain that a particular publisher accepts manuscripts that have been submitted to multiple markets at the same time. Many companies will not look at stories that are multiple submissions and many others are wary of wasting their time on multiple submissions; only a few say that they will read these stories, but it is better to send your story to one publisher at a time. Also bear in mind that waiting to hear from a publisher can be as short as three months or as long as one year, so you need to be patient as well as persistent when marketing your stories.

If your story is accepted, no contract will be offered until the publisher finds an illustrator. If none is found within a reasonable time (another six to twelve months), then you will be free to market your story elsewhere. However, if an illustrator is found, then you will both sign a contract, and the royalties will be evenly split between author and illustrator (typically, 5% each). Advances are payments that are made by the publisher to you and the illustrator as credit against anticipated future sales; you won't receive any royalty monies until the equivalent of the advance has been paid off. As soon as that point is reached, you will start earning the 5% royalties. Advances are usually small (maybe \$1000 - \$2000) for beginning writers and not all publishing houses can afford them, but they may increase on subsequent book deals if you become more well-known and the publisher is confident as to how well your book can be expected to sell. Bear in mind that how your book will appear, both in

how the text will be broken up into different pages and in which moments of the story are chosen for illustrations, is determined by the editor and the illustrator, and not by the author.

What can you do to become a better writer? Well, write. And keep on writing. Belonging to a writing group is also very valuable. You will gain a lot of important feedback on your stories and also a lot of inspiration for future ones. Although the act of writing often involves isolating yourself from others, its development as a craft should not be done in isolation. Surround yourself with other writers—whether they are part of the same genre of writing as you or not. Writers share stories, experiences, and information with each other; and they also encourage one another to become even better writers.

Joining professional writing organizations can also be helpful. While some organizations require writers to be published authors, others do not. Check out the Canadian Society of Children's Authors, Illustrators, and Performers (CANSCAIP) and the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), both of which have a Friend Member status if you are not yet published. Attending writing conferences is also very important. Not only do you network with other writers and learn more about the craft and business of writing, but some of

the bigger conferences have opportunities for you to have your work reviewed by professional writers and agents or pitched to editors. Local organizations and societies also have opportunities for writing workshops and seminars (and usually at much cheaper prices than conferences) that should not be overlooked for their value to the developing writer.

Write with passion, write from your heart, and write with perseverance. Good things come to those who write, and write, and write, and write, and write.

### The Importance of Being Loud

Good children's stories demand to be read out loud. Pick up some picture books from the store or from the library, read them out loud, and you will see what I mean. Check for the flow of the action and the rhythm of the story as you read each book out loud. Similarly, read each draft of your own story out loud, checking for its rhythm and action flow. Listen carefully so that you pick up awkward phrases or wordy sentences and paragraphs. And the more you read your stories out loud, the better you will become at analyzing and critiquing them so that in the end they will be better and more marketable stories. If you don't have anyone to whom you can read your manuscript, then instead you can read it out loud to yourself—and in the same way as you would to a child!



**"Try to look at everything through the eyes of a child." Ruth Draper**