

Little Miracles

NJ-SCBWT

May 2003



NJ-SCBWI Members! “Spring” Conference 2003 is in June!!

Seton Hall University

Saturday, June 14th

9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Limited to 60 attendees

Cost is \$72 for members

(includes a full day of programming, plus Continental breakfast and lunch—what a deal!)

see details on Page 2

THOUGHTS ON CRITIQUING FICTION

By

Gale Sypher Jacob

“A novel is a mirror walking along the main road.” Stendhal

Always begin a critique with at least a couple of positive comments and quote examples of what you liked—such as particular figures of speech, lines from scenes or dialogue, and phrases from character description.

One way to structure a critique is to break it into sections. For each of these sections, the critique should address the overall question of whether the style and content is appropriate for the age of the intended reader.

Give page references or mark the manuscript to show specific examples of what you feel might need improving. Give the author things to think about by asking questions. For example: instead of saying “this character doesn’t seem too well defined,” ask, “have you considered defining this character better by using more dialogue?”

CHARACTERS/POV — Do the characters seem real? Is the POV the best one to tell this story? Are there places where the characters need to react more (or less) to what’s happening to them? Is the interaction between characters realistic and believable? Is the reader made to care about the characters?

DIALOGUE — Does it fit the story? Too formal? Too slangy? Is it natural? Does each character sound different? Does the dialogue successfully take the place of “telling”?

PLOT/ PACING - Is the reader propelled through the story? Are there spots that move either too



fast, or too slowly? Is the overall plot believable? Does it have any inconsistencies? Are there large chunks of narrative that might be broken up? Where is more narrative needed for clarity?

SETTINGS/ DESCRIPTION — Do the setting descriptions put the reader IN the story? Are they too long, or too short? Do details appeal to as many of the five senses as possible?

WRITING STYLE — Does the sentence structure change to fit the emotions of the scenes—short sentences for dramatic crisis, longer sentences for slower narrative? Is the tone and vocabulary appropriate to the theme, settings, and characters? Are there instances of “telling,” rather than “showing”? Are the verbs active or passive? Are there too many adjectives and adverbs? Note typos, spelling and punctuation errors, or word usage questions.

THEME(S)— Will the reader come away from the piece with an understanding of the themes? Are they stated in too obvious a fashion, or are they slowly revealed through characters and actions?

A successful critique gives the author new ideas to explore. Be sure your critique gives the author encouragement as well as thoughtful, precise criticism. Always keep in mind how hard it is for authors to hand over their words to others, especially when the words are still a work in progress. Remember the phrase from the field of medicine, “Do no harm.”

Gale Sypher Jacob is the author of Pajama Light, to be published by Dutton in 2005

Art by Jeff Lindberg

NJ-SCBWI Seton Hall Conference

Saturday, June 14, 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

It's time again to gear up for another great chapter conference at Seton Hall. The format is the same as last year's. To maximize networking potential, registration is limited to only 60 attendees. Participants will have the opportunity to meet with three of our five guest editors (see profiles below) in small group sessions. Tell us which three editors you prefer for these group presentations, and we'll do our best to match you up.

This year we've also invited a sixth editor, Nicole Kasprzak, to be available throughout the day for individual critique consultations. Her profile is included with the others, below.

As always, everyone is encouraged to bring the best "First Page" you ever wrote and submit it anonymously to the popular "editors panel" session. Yours may be one that is chosen to be read aloud and given an informal critique from all of our guest editors. Please note we will do our best to return the first page critiques; however, we do not guarantee this. A continental breakfast, NY style deli buffet luncheon, a "freebie" table, and end-of-conference door prizes are also part of the conference package.

Meet the Editors by Robin Friedman

Alyssa Eisner

is an associate editor at Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers. Titles she recently edited include THIS VAST LAND by the late Stephen E. Ambrose, THANK YOU, SARAH by Laurie Anderson, THE VOYAGE OF PATIENCE GOODSPEED by Heather Frederick, LITTLE QUACK AND THE MOUSE books by Lauren Thompson, and the HENRY AND MUDGE series by Cynthia Rylant. Her areas of interest include historical fiction, middle-grade fiction, and precocious picture books.

Nicole Kasprzak

(Individual Critiques Only)

is an editorial assistant at G.P. Putnam's Sons, an imprint of the Penguin Young Readers Group. Titles she recently worked on include the novels ALIEN by Catherine Atkins, FAT KID RULES THE WORLD by K.L. Going, and a forthcoming second novel by Gennifer Choldenko (author of NOTES FROM A LIAR AND HER DOG). Picture books include ARMADILLO'S ORANGE by Jim Arnosky and MY LUCKY DAY coming out this fall from Keiko Kasza. Her first slush-pile discovery, a picture book acquired last spring, is scheduled for release in the summer of 2005. Nicole likes picture book manuscripts with great language that beg to be read aloud. Quirky humor is always a plus. Overt sweetness doesn't generally do it, but she enjoys stories with cute baby animals. When it comes to novels, she is drawn more to YA and older middle-grade than younger middle-grade and chapter books. She looks for strong, unconventional characters, rich dialogue, a good plot, and polished prose.

Alvina Ling

is an assistant editor at Little, Brown and Company. Titles she recently edited include SING-ALONG SONGS boxed set; THE PERFECT PURPLE FEATHER by Hanoch Piven; ONE MORE RIVER by Joan Paley; DE COLORES/OH, THE COLORS by Ashley Wolff, MY NEW YORK: NEW ANNIVERSARY EDITION by Kathy Jakobsen (Fall 2003); ANNE ELIZABETH'S DIARY by Kathleen Krull (Spring 2004), BLOW OUT THE MOON by Libby Koponen (Spring 2004), BUBBLE GUM, BUBBLE GUM by Lisa Wheeler (Spring 2004). Alvina seeks multicultural books, quality picture books, and middle-grade and young adult novels (contemporary, fantasy, and science fiction).

Amanda Maciel

is an associate editor at HarperCollins Children's Books. Books she recently edited include the first eleven titles in the PHANTOM STALLION series. She also co-edited FROZEN RODEO by Catherine Clark. Amanda seeks fun, funny chick lit for teen girls, such as Meg Cabot's THE PRINCESS DIARIES, books that have broad appeal, an innovative spirit, and an authentic teen voice.

Steve Meltzer

is managing editor at Dutton's Children's Books, an imprint of the Penguin Group. Titles of books he's recently edited include THE PERFECT WIZARD by Jane Yolen, HELLO MUDDAH, HELLO FADDAH: A LETTER FROM CAMP by Alan Sherman and Lou Busch, DANGEROUS CROSSING: THE REVOLUTIONARY VOYAGE OF JOHN AND JOHN QUINCY ADAMS by Stephen Krensky, A CONFUSED HANNUKAH by Jon Koons, THERE ONCE WAS A VERY ODD SCHOOL by Stephen Krensky, 2030 by Amy Zuckerman and James Daly, MOTHER OF EXILES: THE STORY OF EMMA LAZARUS by Erica Silverman, A CUDDLE FOR CLAUDE by David Wojtowycz, CLAUDE'S BIG SURPRISE by David Wojtowycz, and HAUNTED HOUSE by Jan Pienkowski. Steve seeks biographical nonfiction in picture books that focus on a specific event that has historical significance and excitement. In middle-grade fiction Steve looks for adventure stories and fantasy. In YA, cutting-edge fiction or fantasy.

Karen Riskin

is an editor at Dial Books for Young Readers. Recently she edited SWEET BRIAR GOES TO SCHOOL by Karma Wilson, illustrated by LeUyen Pham, THE SPIFFIEST GIANT IN TOWN by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler, PETITE ROUGE: A CAJUN RED RIDING HOOD by Mike Artell, illustrated by Jim Harris, SNOWED IN WITH GRANDMOTHER SILK by Carol Fenner, and MY LOVE FOR YOU ALL YEAR ROUND written and illustrated by Susan L. Roth. Karen specializes in picture books for 4- to 8-year-olds and is drawn to story-driven manuscripts with a universal theme and a protagonist that kids can immediately identify with and relate to. Some authors and illustrators she currently works with include Donna Jo Napoli, Karma Wilson, Robert San Souci, Kate McMullan, R.W. Alley, and John Manders.

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

IMPORTANT! Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your completed registration form and check. No SASE=No Registration to Conference. You will receive DIRECTIONS to Seton Hall University and CONFIRMATION of your acceptance around June 1. DO NOT mail your First Page. Bring First Pages with you on the day of the conference.

ONE ON ONE CRITIQUES: We are offering a small number of one-on-one 15 minute critiques with an editor after the conference. If interested, check the box below. You will be notified via email or by phone if a slot is available. They are first-come, first-serve at an additional fee (\$40). Do not submit a manuscript until you receive a confirmation of a slot.

Fill in the blanks and Mail with SASE and check payable to NJ-SCBWI to: David Caruba - 31 High St., New Providence, NJ 07974

Name _____

Address _____

Phone (____) _____

E-Mail _____

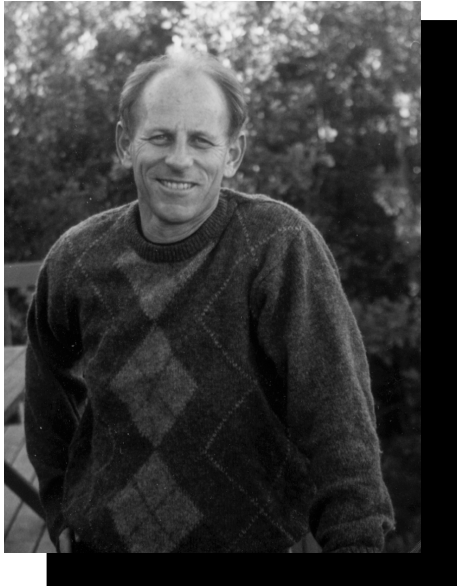
- Yes, enroll me in the June 14 Conference – \$72 members 1. _____
- My signed check is enclosed 2. _____
- My SASE is enclosed (No SASE = No Registration) 3. _____
- These are 3 editors I'd like to be assigned to in the 3 small group sessions:

I would like a one-on-one critique with an editor (please make sure your email address and/or phone number is above, you will be contacted if a slot is available)

Please note: Our guest editors cannot accept manuscripts, dummies, proposals, or art samples during the conference. Please remember to bring the best "First Page" you've ever written (minus your name and address at the top of the page) for a chance to have it read aloud and informally critiqued by our editors panel! We are not responsible for returning first pages—bring a photo copy.

Interview with Stephen Mooser

by Linda Bozzo



Stephen Mooser, co-founder of SCBWI, has written more than 60 books for children including everything from series, to non-fiction, picture books and novels. He began his career when he was hired to write a series of reading books for children. He was born in Fresno, California and has lived in New York City and Bar Harbor, Maine. He currently resides in Santa Monica, California. He has two children—a son, who is in the Peace Corps, and a daughter, who works for SCBWI.

Q: How did the SCBWI organization get started?

A: In the 1970s, Lin Oliver and I were hired to write a reading program. At the time, Lin's background was in writing and education and mine was in journalism. We were brand new to the field of children's writing and were looking for help. We searched for an organization to join and found that one didn't exist for the children's book writer. Seeing the need, we printed up a flyer and placed an ad in *Writer's Digest*.

Q: What happened next?

A: The Society of Children's Book Writers was born. Membership totaled 50 people that first year. We immediately had regional chapters in California and New York. The Rocky Mountain Region in Denver quickly became our largest chapter early on due to their large number of volunteers who set the framework for a very effective chapter.

Q: Why didn't the organization include illustrators initially?

A: It didn't include illustrators basically because Lin and I were writers. That changed, however, in the early '90s when illustrators were included and we proudly became the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

Q: How many members does SCBWI have today?

A: Today, our membership has grown to 20,000 worldwide. We now have 70 regions in the United States and 15 or 20 overseas.

Q: For SCBWI's 30-year anniversary both you and Lin were presented with a special gift. What did that mean to you?

A: We were given a beautiful piece of artwork that I'm looking at right now hanging in my office. It meant a lot to me to be recognized. You think people have noticed what you've done but sometimes you don't just take the time to reflect. It was a very special moment.

Q: Is New Jersey one of your favorite chapters?

A: New Jersey is great chapter. It has a long history with SCBWI, has seen lots of positive changes and has had wonderful Regional Advisors over the years. New Jersey is fortunate because of its unique geography and it benefits from its close proximity to New York City.

Q: How are chapters run?

A: Each chapter is run autonomously while following general guidelines and receiving support from National because each chapter is unique with individual needs. All regions are linked to a Regional Chairperson.

Q: What are the responsibilities of a Regional Advisor?

A: A RA is the liaison between members. Responsibilities include arranging conferences, organizing critique groups and doing what needs to be done to keep the region going. They are also responsible for extending support and create a community for writers and illustrators who are working individually. Being a Regional Advisor is a very rewarding experience.

Q: What would you say is the biggest misunderstanding about the SCBWI organization?

A: The biggest misunderstanding, I believe, is that members think that Regional Advisors are paid employees, which they are not. A Regional Advisor is a volunteer position. Members should be mindful of this when asking them for favors.

Q: What is the one thing you would say most people don't know about SCBWI?

A: Most people don't know how much more you can get out of the organization by volunteering. The success of a chapter is usually dependent on its volunteers. Regional Advisors need and appreciate help with anything at all.

Q: What do you want NJ Chapter members to know about you, that they might not know already?

A: I'd like them to know that SCBWI is my full time job. I would also like them to know that I'm always interested in hearing from them. It is important to know what our members' wants and needs are. We always try to provide advice or a program that members request.

Q: What is the biggest change you've seen in the SCBWI organization over the past 30 years?

A: I have to say that the first 15 years, SCBWI was an amateur organization. There wasn't the knowledge, money, people or resources to turn it into something more. Over the last five years it has become a professional organization. We've upgraded our bulletin, added more services and developed a website. It is now a professional organization. We've had many members publish first books and we've also built a community of writers and illustrators. Many have gone on to publish first books and many children have benefited from those books.

Q: What can SCBWI members expect in 2003 as well as in the near future?

A: They can expect many exciting things. We plan on expanding the size of our bulletin by four pages, every other issue. Right now we are working on the logistics of having online conferences and writing workshops led by members of the industry. We also hope to repeat the Bologna Children's Book Fair Contest.

Q: Can you describe the special project you are assisting with in West Africa?

A: My son is stationed over in Gambia with the Peace Corps, and a \$2,500 grant was obtained to build a solar powered media center. SCBWI is assisting with book donations to stock the center.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say to the members of the New Jersey Chapter?

A: Yes. I'd like to say "hello" to everyone and I hope to get back to New Jersey soon.

*Linda Bozzo is the author of *The Apple Tree (Rigby)* and *Playground Fun (Babybug July/August 2003)*. She can be reached at lindabozzo@cs.com.*

Children's Writer Newsletter

A Valuable Resource for Writers Looking
to Break Into the Field

reviewed by Lisa Trumbauer

The Children's Writer, a monthly newsletter published by the Institute of Children's Literature, provides a lot of valuable info for writers looking to first break into the field: editor names, publishing houses and their current needs, features on specific markets, and more.

Each 12-page newsletter is divided into two sections. The first contains the main feature—usually explorations of specific markets within children's publishing (including editor interviews and publishers' contact information). The April newsletter, for example, detailed historical fiction, crossover Christian publishing, and writing for parenting magazines. The May issue examined publishing for the multicultural market, and writing for anthologies. It also included a review of the SCBWI conference in New York this past February, as well as a feature article on a children's editor looking for manuscripts.

The newsletter's second section, entitled "Marketplace," proves to be especially valuable. It contains magazine and book publisher contact information, details what they publish and are looking to acquire, and lists how to go about querying and submitting.

The final two pages of the newsletter speak to the art of writing. A "Craft" section addresses common challenges: finding one's "voice," and writing from a child's—not an adult's—perspective. The April newsletter explored writing in verse rather than in prose, the May newsletter suggested ways to get creative juices flowing.

You can subscribe to the Children's Writer newsletter by visiting its website: [<http://www.childrenswriter.com>]. or by calling 1-800-443-6078. Cost is \$15 per year for thirteen issues.

Is the Children's Writer right for you? It is an invaluable resource for its "Marketplace" section. Any writer will welcome knowing what publishers are looking to purchase at any given moment. Its articles, however, are best appreciated by writers looking to first get their foot in the door. They, in particular, will find the Children's Writer to be a worthwhile and excellent investment.

Children's Writer

Newsletter of Writing and Publishing Trends

April 2003
Volume 12
Number 9

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Unearth the Past, Thrill with Story

By Lisa A. Wrable

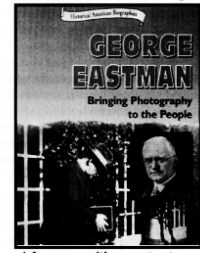
When you hear *history* does your brain groan under the weight of memorized dates and lists of presidents and their terms? Or do you think of exciting events and the people who played active roles in them? If you think of history as yesterday's drama, then unearthing the past may be a way for you to share your enthusiasm for history by bringing it to life for young people.

"History isn't any less popular now than in the past," says Walker and Company Editor Timothy Travaglini. A focus on action and adventure makes recent titles appealing. Many history books today mirror the conflict, pace,

and high drama of fiction. "People taking risks, pushing boundaries, discovering new lands or the retelling of great battles can follow the action-adventure sequence of fiction while focusing on historic details," says Travaglini.

More than ever before, books for young readers about the past place an emphasis on *story*—as much as current events bring drama to daily life in the form of breaking news stories and hot headlines.

"Both adults and children are caught up in the thrill that the story is not only interesting, but it's true," says Beverly Horowitz, Vice President and Publisher of the Knopf/Delacorte/Dell Young



A focus on exciting events, strong photos, and personal accounts gives history the drama of fiction.

Readers Group, a division of Random House.
(To History, page 2)

Crossover Markets: Breaking the Stained Glass Ceiling

By Katherine Swarts

If you've never heard of the Left Behind series, you've left behind your market research. Written by Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, and published by Tyndale House, the series debuted in 1995 with the title volume and has since sold millions of copies. The
(To Crossover, page 6)

Writing for Specialized Parenting Magazines

By Suzanne Lieurance

Back in the days of Wally and the Beaver, parents like Ward and June Cleaver didn't have many magazines to turn to when they had a question about child care. Nowadays, a wide array of parenting publications helps meet the complex needs of families. These magazines, newsletters, and journals can be divided into a few basic categories: national, regional, and special interest parenting publications.

Glossy national magazines like *Parenting*, *American Baby*, and *Child* are found on newsstands everywhere and have a large subscription base.

Regional publications are available in area bookstores, libraries, newsstands, and by searching online.

The biggest news in the parenting market is the dozens of special interest parenting publications that continue to crop up. They target everyone from adoptive, nontraditional, or vegetarian families to families concerned about nutrition, to Christian, Jewish, African-American families—the list goes on and on. These special interest magazines and newsletters offer a wealth of writer opportunities.

Working for these special markets requires a unique
(To Parenting, page 4)

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South Jersey Conference Chair: Kathy Temean
Seton Hall Conference Chair: Dianne Ochiltree

A Good Time Was Had By All - March 22 South Jersey Conference

During the first quarter of this year, our chapter held a very successful conference in South Jersey. Thanks go out to the 85 members who attended and showed their support. The goal was to hold a conference in a different part of the state and to provide useful writing and illustrating information for our members.

Peter Jacobi, professor emeritus of journalism at Indiana University and former news editor for ABC News, gave a motivational keynote address to start the day. He conducted two workshops, where he discussed writing biography and presentation skills. Please note that one of our new members, Chetra Kotzas, provided Peter's appearance. Chetra made the winning bid for "A day with Peter Jacobi," at the Highlights Workshop in Chautauqua, PA last summer and donated him to our chapter. Thank you, Chetra!

Carolyn Yoder, history editor at Highlights for Children, editor for the NJ Historical Society and award-winning author, helped attendees understand how to improve their research skills when investigating historical fiction and non-fiction books. She provided a wealth of information. Even members who had never considered writing historical fiction or non-fiction left her session with new book ideas. Carolyn also discussed the needs at Boyds Mills Press, *Highlights*, *Cobblestone* and other non-traditional places to submit writing.

Sarah Nielsen, assistant editor at Margaret K. McElderry, talked about the market needs at Simon and Schuster and McElderry, and devoted the rest of her day to doing critiques.

Well-known Artist Rep, Evelyne Johnson and award-winning illustrator, George Ford discussed portfolios, storybook dummies and illustrations. They both supplied valuable portfolio critiques and did an excellent job.

Plans are being put together to make this a yearly event. Anyone who wants to share ideas for next year, please contact Kathy Temean at [editor@artandstorybooks.com].



The New Jersey Region of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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