

SCBWI Florida

The Sand Scoop

September 2007

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Welcome back to the *Sand Scoop*! I apologize for the long delay, but I have some scoops for you: the **2008 winter conference** is scheduled for **January 18–20** at the Wyndham Miami Airport Hotel. Confirmed speakers include authors Nancy Werlin, Lee Bennett Hopkins, Sid Fleischman, Cheryl Zach; artist David Diaz; art director Daniel Moreton; and editor Alexandra Cooper.

Also, you'll soon receive brochures for the **Writer's Boot Camp** led by author Jen McVeity taking place on **October 20–21** at the Mayfair Hotel in Coconut Grove. The fee for the event is \$150 and the first 25 people to sign up will spend a weekend releasing their creative spirits.

The **2008 Illustrator Intensive will be on June 6**, and the **Mid-Year Workshop will be on June 7**; both at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort. Besides the usual picture book, middle grade, and young adult track, we plan to have a mystery and a humor track as well.

So mark your calendars because it's going to be a busy year!

Vivian Fernandez

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Commit to Submit: Turn that “someday” dream into action

by Laura Murray

The idea of writing for children simmered as a “someday” dream in the back of my brain for many years, but being a stay-at-home mom of a 7, 5, and 2 year old continually convinced me that I did not have the time to pursue it. Then two years ago, in August 2005, I read a quote in a magazine that jumped off the page at me: *Nothing happens until you decide*. Such a simple sentence really, but so powerful if one really thinks about it. It struck me that I had to quit letting the minutia of daily life be an excuse for not making time for what I really wanted to pursue. I had to decide; choose to make it a priority with the time that was available, and start the process...take the first step. So I decided.

After some research, I joined SCBWI. I bought several books on children’s writing and learned that there was much more to it than just coming up with a “cute” story. I arranged for a babysitter to come for a 5 hour time block every Monday so I could go to Barnes and Noble or Panera Bread (free wi-fi) and write. My first Monday out with my pen in hand, I wondered where to begin, but as I sat, I realized I had already begun.

I finally came up with an idea based on a Gingerbread Man unit I used to teach in Kindergarten. When the idea wouldn’t leave me alone, I knew it was the story I should be writing. Every Monday for months, I returned to my writing spot and my story. I began writing it in verse, which I had an ear for, but no training in. When I thought the manuscript was ready for other opinions and I was ready to hear them, I joined an SCBWI critique group. I turned in my manuscript and they were very supportive of the story idea, but I learned my first big lesson on the difficulties of writing in verse—meter, true rhyme, and the economy of words. Back to the drawing board...or rather my writing spot.

I researched writing in verse, and for the next year, I wrote and rewrote my picture book, passing it through the invaluable consideration of my critique groups time and again. They helped me whittle away at the verses to make them tighter and move the story forward with action and humor. It went through 4 major plot revisions, and at least 40 trouble spot revisions—hard to believe, considering it is only a 900-word manuscript.

In January 2006, I attended my first regional SCBWI conference in Miami. It was awesome! I met our regional advisors, and many other fellow writers who loved writing as much as I did. They were such a supportive group, sharing hopes, frustrations, and encouragement. The conference fueled my dream, so I decided to try a national one as well. In summer of 2006, I attended the LA SCBWI conference—listening, learning, networking, and turning in my manuscript for critique. I made a wonderful contact with Hope Vestergaard who was speaking on writing in rhyme. I also met Esther Hershenhorn, an excellent writing coach and regional advisor from Illinois (www.estherhershenhorn.com). After the conference, I sent my manuscript for her writing coach services and she returned it with an eight page critique full of encouragement and suggestions that ended up being crucial to the final story. I also heard a critical “nugget” from Connie Epstein’s market speech—the Penguin group was seeking picture book manuscripts.

Now on to the second step: the “follow through”—the research, the cover letter, the submissions and rejections. Writing a succinct, yet enticing cover letter turned out to be surprisingly difficult to do, but I did have one unusual idea. I knew my story idea came from a school Gingerbread Man curriculum unit that seemed to be very widely used in

the early grades, so I decided to do some informal research to help support that claim. I sent out over 600 e-mails to primary teachers representing every state, asking them to send a short response if they had heard of or used the unit. I received 70% of the e-mails back with a positive response. I was amazed and excited to include these informal research percentages in my cover letter as a possible "built in" teacher market for my story.

On November 12, 2006 (oh yes, I remember the date), I dropped the first batch of manuscripts in the mailbox to seven researched publishing houses, with a HUGE smile on my face. I went to celebrate with a cafe latte at my haunt, Panera. I couldn't quit smiling as I sat outside in the November cool. I had done it—I had not only decided, but I had committed, acted, followed through, and enjoyed every minute of the time spent on what I had found was my passion.

Now the waiting...but not idly. I spent the "waiting time" researching the next house and beginning new writing projects. I expected rejections, and they came, but I was determined that the manuscript was going right back out to the next house on my researched list within 24 hours of a rejection arriving. I marked the response time dates of each house on my calendar so I would know when to send a status request. I also created a log to track my submissions, their status, receiving editor, etc.

Four months after I sent the initial set of manuscripts, I had received rejections from every house but two. I was writing at Panera Bread on March 12, 2007 (yes, I remember this date too) when I opened my laptop and stared in amazement at an e-mail from an editor with the title of my book, *The Gingerbread Man is Missing!*, in the subject line. I clicked on the e-mail with a racing heart and a shaking hand. It was from an editor at GP Putnam's Sons, writing to inquire if my picture book was still available. The people in Panera

must have thought I was a nut—jumping up and down, crazy smiling from ear to ear, yelling the good news to my husband on the cell phone, and then racing out of the door.

Two days later the editor e-mailed me again after bringing my manuscript to the editorial board and offered me a contract. Needless to say I was, and still am, giddy with happiness. The editor's acceptance e-mail is now printed and framed with the big bold words I typed above, "REMEMBER HOW THIS FEELS!" It hangs above my desk. *The Gingerbread Man is Missing!* is currently slated to come out in 2009/ 2010.

Two years ago, I started with a dream and a decision. With a little luck, a lot of work, help from my critique groups, and the constant support of SCBWI, its informational website and its members—the unbelievable has happened. Please know: it can be done!

My favorite writing quote is, "A professional writer is just an amateur who didn't give up." Now that I have begun, I have discovered a passion for writing that I know will fill me with an enthusiastic sense of adventure and wonder for many, many years to come. So, decide...begin! And see where it takes you, but don't forget the second step. Commit to submit: research those houses, send it out, expect rejections and when they come, send it right back out to the next house on your researched list. My manuscript was pulled from the slush. So remember—it does happen, but only if you send your stories out into the world.

Illustrator Intensive a Success!

by Kimberly Lynn

How do I lay out a picture book spread?

What type of royalties can I expect as a first time illustrator?

How do I license my designs?

All of these questions and more were answered at the first SCBWI Florida Illustrator Intensive held on June 15, 2007 in Orlando. We gathered at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort, each determined to take advantage of talented workshop leaders author/illustrator Janeen Mason and Caldecott Medalist David Diaz. The event, held in conjunction with the Mid-Year Writing Workshop, was jam-packed with an impressive schedule.

Janeen Mason opened the day with casual introductions to break the ice. We then roamed freely about the room, perusing and playing with a large selection of Mason's personal art supplies. Everyone exchanged tips and shared laughs while painting with crayons on a hot griddle, a technique Mason developed for a book about planets she is currently illustrating. Additionally, Mason explained how she used Model Magic to make models of her bird characters in Max and Regina. This allowed her to incorporate a 3-D feel and perspective into her illustrations. This free-play with art was also

a great opportunity to check out Mason's time line posted on the back wall. The time line mapped the step-by-step process of getting a manuscript to publication. Workshop attendee Barbara Dondero called it a "masterpiece."

The free-play with art was followed by Mason's dynamic lecture and Power Point presentation. Topics included supplementary funding in the arts, how to make a picture book dummy and a thumbnail, as well as more technical issues such as the different types of scanners and computer programs available for artists. In addition, we were given numerous pages of helpful handouts listing royalty rates for artwork, programs available for artists, and much more. Keith Jones, who has a background in design, commercials and movies, found the nuts-and-bolts of this segment very helpful. "At the end of the day, I felt like I had invested my money wisely."

After a brief break, we cleared the tables and laid out our homework assignments—three to four spreads of finished art showing a narrative sequence. These scenes were intended to show how we developed a story through a variety of compositions, moods, situations, and settings while maintaining a consistency of style and character. Each artist set the scene for his or her presentation and shared the medium in which he or she worked. We all stood around and listened to comments by Mason and Diaz. This was the most nerve-racking part of the Intensive, but also the most informative. Skill levels varied from the beginning artist to those like attendee Angela Padron, an elementary art teacher with a BA in art. Padron wanted to learn more about technique and the proper placement of text. "I walked away with a lot of great input." Barbara Dondero added, "David Diaz was a master at the critique session. He recognized our strengths, and pointed out very specifically how to make these strengths even better."



Reviewing the homework

After lunch, Diaz lectured on how to market your work. He shared a collection of artwork he had created over the years for mass mailings sent to publishers. His effort, creativity, and persistence paid off—one of these items ultimately landed him the job of illustrating *Smoky Night* written by Eve Bunting. The picture book, based on the Los Angeles street riots, won Diaz a Caldecott Medal in 1995. Diaz spoke candidly of his experiences and emphasized two very important tips for new artists to keep in mind: know the market, know what is getting published.

At the end of the Intensive, Mason and Diaz were generous enough to subject themselves to a lengthy question and answer session. We were sad to see the day end, but everyone was anxious to get home and apply what they had learned from this exciting new event.



Practicing the melted crayon technique

So why did they participate in the Intensive?

Self-taught artist, **Kimberly Turner** was there to meet her peers, gain support and knowledge in this industry, and be inspired by other talented individuals. "I learned there is so much more to being an illustrator than just illustrating. I discovered confidence is a key factor, and that it is not only "okay" but completely necessary. This was a great opportunity."

Michelle Delisle has a limited background in art, but did paste-up to put herself through college. "The Intensive was more a personal stretch for me, and I felt anything I learned would put me ahead of where I was. I've already followed up on some of what I learned."

Isabel Rodriguez, who has an educational background in commercial and advertising art, signed up for the Illustrator Intensive to learn the proper way to present her work to publishers. "The Janeen Mason and David Diaz presentations were the BEST that I have been to since becoming a member of SCBWI. Janeen Mason showed great empathy toward us "newbies" who are trying to break into this new career of writing and illustrating."

Pascale Mackey, a web and graphic designer, hoped to meet other illustrators and learn everything or anything on the subject of illustrating. "First, the homework itself was a great learning experience. The workshop was absolutely fantastic! I'm so glad I went!"



2007 Illustrator Intensive attendees

Notes on the 2007 SCBWI Florida Mid-Year Workshop

by Vivian Fernandez, Assistant Regional Advisor

I wanted to take a moment to thank all of you who attended the Illustrator Intensive and the Mid-Year Workshop. Your positive energy is what makes all the hard work worthwhile. This was my first year being so heavily involved in the organization of the Workshop and I couldn't have done it without the help of certain volunteers. So thank you **Rebecca Rector, Pam Bachorz, Laura Murray, Marcea Ustler, Tina Porteous, Meribeth Shank,** and **Danielle Joseph** for help with everything from putting together the brochure, to organizing the critiques, to picking up speakers from the airport, to staffing the registration desk, to overall moral support. There's no way I could have done it without you (and stayed sane).

I would also like to recognize **Anne Jewett** and **Danette Lane**, our former co-Illustrator Coordinators. If it hadn't been for their insistence, the Illustrator Intensive might still be in the illusive *someday* stage. **Janeen Mason**, our new Illustrator Coordinator, was also instrumental in organizing and delivering this event, as was, of course, **Linda Bernfeld**.

I've reviewed the evaluation forms completed by attendees and wanted to address some of your comments.

Why can't coffee be available all day?

The price of coffee per gallon at a convention center is shockingly high. Any extra expense we incur gets passed on to attendees. In order to keep the event as affordable as possible, we limit the coffee to a couple of hours in the morning. I believe our first year we had coffee available all day and the cost was over \$1000. We feel that money is better spent on bringing you quality speakers.

Can anything be done about the temperature?

Keep in mind that what is unbearably cold to some is just right to others. The best way to handle this is to pack a sweater (or two, like I did) and have them with you throughout the day.

Can they spend more time/less time on first-page critiques?

About half of you wanted to see more time on first-page critiques, and the other half wanted less time. As you can see, it's a challenge to strike a good balance here to keep everyone happy. What I will suggest to speakers for next year is to break the first-page critiques into two sessions. That way they still read many of the pages, but the shorter sessions makes it less monotonous for those who would like less time spent on it.

Can we hear briefly from all of the speakers at the general session?

I would like to work this in, but honestly I'm not sure how. I would love to hear suggestions from you as to what exactly you'd like to hear from the speakers. Remember, we have a full day, so it needs to be something short in order to get things started on time.

Why can't attending published authors have books for sale at the bookstore?

Unfortunately, it took so long for me to get a yes from a bookstore willing to come to our event that I only had time to gather a list for books by the speakers. However, Barnes and Noble was so impressed that they are excited to work with us again next year. So, published attendees can have their books for sale at the bookstore in 2008. I will send out a notice to all registered attendees about a month beforehand requesting titles. Please note that we will only be selling books through Barnes and Noble (i.e., people will not be able to sell their books themselves at the event), and we will only be selling books that are available through a major distributor.

Also, not knowing how the bookstore would turn out, I ordered far fewer books than I should have. Next year, I plan to remedy that so that everyone can get the book he or she wants.

Will we have an Illustrator Intensive every year?

That is the plan, and Janeen Mason is already working on securing our next fabulous speaker.

Thank you all again for making the 2007 Illustrator Intensive and Mid-Year Workshop such a successful event, and I'll see you next year!

Via

Writerly Musings

My wife and I recently took up yoga. We love how it cleanses both the soul and the body. At the end of every session, the students lie on the floor in "Savasana." It's a wonderful opportunity to rest, relax, and allow every tiny bit of stress to leave your body.

During a recent Savasana, I listened carefully to the instructor and concentrated on my breathing. I imagined the tranquil thoughts of the students around me. Perhaps some were diving gracefully into peaceful pools of serenity. Maybe others were bouncing along rainbow clouds of love and light.

Here's what was going on my head: *What about the kid in the wheelchair in chapter five? He's been sitting in the corner that whole scene doing nothing. Wait a minute. He's not even supposed to be in the classroom at all. What was I thinking?*

I'm not sure writers are genetically predisposed to a whole lot of resting and relaxing.

Paul R. May

Good News for Florida Members

Ed Masessa's book, *The Wandmaker*, hit #1 on the *New York Times* list for the week of July 29.

Paul R. May is under contract with Ocean Publishing for a nonfiction book series titled *Ride Along*.

Janeen Mason was appointed to serve on the Florida Arts Council, was awarded the 2007 United States Maritime Literature Award for Children for her book *Ocean Commotion: Sea Turtles!*, is receiving a Lifetime Achievement in the Arts award in October, and is working on illustrating two books, *Going Around the Sun: Some Planetary Fun* (Dawn Publications, spring 2008) and *Kissimmee Pete vs. the Hurricane* (Pelican Publishing, fall 2008).

Laura Murray sold her first book, *The Gingerbread Man Is Missing!*, to GP Putnam's Sons (set for 2009/2010 release), and she received an honorable mention from the 25th Annual Florida State Writing Competition for her poem, "Bubbles Bubbles."

Gaby Triana's book *Motor Girl* will be out in summer 2009, and *Temptress Four* will be out summer 2008.

In the W.I.N. competition, **Mindy Alyse Weiss** received honorable mention for her middle-grade entry, and **Ena Jones** received honorable mention for her young adult entry.

Write or Illustrate for *The Sand Scoop*

Illustrations should be sent as a JPG, e-mail attachment. Please note that art will be reduced to fit page design. We would also love to receive photographs (again as JPG, e-mail attachments) of related events in which you have participated.

Articles about writing, illustrating, promoting, good news, and other subjects of interest to Florida SCBWI members are welcome and can be sent via e-mail as well.

Send all items to
vfernandez2@cfl.rr.com

IMPORTANT

To receive notice of future newsletters, make sure you are on the listserv. To sign up, e-mail Claire Stephens at
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