

This is the Newsletter

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SCBWI Dakotas is a regional chapter of the Society for Children's Book Writers & Illustrators.
www.scbwi.org

These Are the Words

Name that newsletter! As our communication continues to evolve, we'd like to hear your ideas for what we can call our newsletter on a permanent basis. Check out the SCBWI website for the names and formats of other chapter newsletters and send your ideas to Lori at byerswalsh@aol.com. Don't forget to think visually. Someday we'd like to add a logo.

That Grow Into Stories

Publisher's Weekly announces a free email newsletter called Children's Bookshelf, covering what's going on in the world of children's books each week. Each issue features book reviews, a "Cover of the Week" section, PW Bestsellers, important publishing and literary events, and articles. Up-to-date industry news at a mouse-click!
Sign up at www.publishersweekly.com/bookshelf

Crafted by Writers

Five Minutes with Emily Rhoads Johnson

Emily Rhoads Johnson lives and teaches in Ithaca, NY. Her young adult novels are *Spring and the Shadow Man*, *A House Full of Strangers*, and *Write Me If You Dare*. This interview with Emily was recorded prior to the September conference.

1. A little background, please. What motivated you to start a children's literature conference at UND? Did you imagine it would become as successful as it has?

I had attended a writer's conference in Bloomington, Indiana, where workshops

were offered in every genre. The Writing for Children workshops taught by Madeleine L'Engle and Lloyd Alexander were so informative and inspiring that I wanted beginning and would-be writers in North Dakota to have a similar opportunity to meet professionals and to share with each other their aspirations and concerns. Skeptics assured me that such a conference would never fly—that there simply weren't enough people in the region who wanted to write for children. Well, they were wrong. The first conference drew about 40 eager participants who came from all over the state and beyond, and 25 years later, writers, both published and unpublished, continue to find it a valuable resource.

2. What advice would you give aspiring writers en route to their first conference?

Although you may have written a story that is dear to your heart and that you desperately want to see published, be willing to open yourself to new possibilities. Our world is constantly changing and so is the world of children's books. The stories we loved as children aren't necessarily the kinds of stories that appeal to children and teens today. Talk to as many people as possible at the conference—faculty members as well as each other, and don't be afraid to ask questions. It's reassuring to know that we all face the same problems and share similar experiences.

3. Name a quality all children's writers should nurture.

Just one? That's tough; there are so many. But if pressed to choose one, I'd say perseverance. Too many good writers give up too soon.

4. What trend in children's lit inspires or excites you?

The continuing trend toward excellence in both the writing and illustrating of children's books. Never has the quality of children's literature been higher than it is today.

Who Gather Together

The Northwest Iowa SCBWI group is hosting a fun get-together on November 12, 2005, 10 a.m. to noon. Join them at the Storm Lake, Iowa, Public Library for few hours of talking, learning, and noshing with like-minded writers. For more information, please contact Mary at mjscarb@iw.net

From historical fiction to magazine articles, the Highlights Foundation has workshops for every writer. A complete listing of 2006 workshops is available online at:

http://www.highlightsfoundation.org/pages/current/FWsched_preview.html

Querying the Editors

A few words with Heather Delabre, Carus Publishing editor extraordinaire and human companion for Chaos the cat. (Interview recorded prior to the September conference.)

1. Stories in Spider can pack quite an emotional punch. How do your readers experience the magazine?

It's extremely difficult to generalize, which is why I usually avoid doing it. Our readers come from diverse backgrounds and have varying levels of life experience, so they experience all literature in vastly different ways.

For instance, we ran a funny Caribbean ghost story called "Tukama and the Duppy" in our June 2005 issue and received exactly two letters from parents about it. The first letter explained that the mother's 7-year-old daughter was fascinated by the story and that she then began asking for more Caribbean ghost stories and Caribbean stories in general. This led, the mother said, to a learning experience about the Caribbean folk tradition as a whole. The mother was quite pleased with the story in Spider. In the second letter, on the other hand, a mother explained that her 8-year-old daughter was scared after reading that same story and was having nightmares.

2. Can you tell us about something you've learned from your involvement with multiple conferences?

The one thing I've always noticed about weekend conferences is that there is, unfortunately, never enough time to meet and get to know everyone. I've also noticed something about the manuscript critique sessions. The authors who are serious about their craft and are serious about improving their writing are the ones who always approach the critique session with an open mind, little ego to speak of, and a great desire to learn. The authors who come in to the session in tears or who are angry about a negative critique are too emotionally wrapped up in their manuscripts to see things objectively. There isn't much room for ego in this business.

3. What trends are you seeing in submissions? What trends would you like to see?

Topic wise, I haven't seen many trends as of late. Authors are still sending in the first assignment from the Institute of Children's Literature, though, which is getting rather tedious. (I can only read a story about bears in the bathtub so many times before my brain turns to mush.)

A trend I would love, love, love to see is that of extremely well researched manuscripts. Most slush pile manuscripts have hideously bad bibliographies. A poorly researched manuscript makes an editor take that particular author much less seriously and less likely to accept work from her in the future.

4. Heroes often play a prominent role in Spider stories. Is that a sign of the times or simply a foundation of good storytelling? What's your personal idea of courage?

Kids don't like to read about weepy, terrified, or whiny protagonists. Those kinds of characters simply don't make for very interesting reading. We like to print stories with spunky, take-life-by-the-horns kinds of characters. We especially like stories in which the child protagonist solves the "problem" with little to no adult assistance.

Kids are intelligent, intuitive people—they're just shorter than adults are—so problem-solving, hero-like characters are almost always a plus.

5. Please finish the following sentence. A good children's editor ...
... respects her audience, retains the author's voice when editing a manuscript, knows how to think like a kid, and works a billion and a half hours a week while still managing to keep a smile on her face.

6. Are there plans to expand the Cricket Books list to include more titles?

For the time being, there are no plans to lift the moratorium on submissions to Cricket Books, but we still plan to publish six to eight titles a year.

Who Work at the Houses

- * Wordsong poetry editor Wendy Murray is leaving Boyds Mills Press for Scholastic.
- * Shoe String Press has ceased operations
- * Mary Gruetzke is now Senior Editor of Walker Books for Young Readers
- * Justin Chanda is now Executive Editor of Atheneum Books for Young Readers. He is primarily interested in picture books, and will look at queries only.

Who Publish the Books

A few resources recommended by Heather Delabre.

- * It's a Bunny Eat Bunny World by Olga Litowinsky
- * Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation by Lynne Truss
- * You Can Write Children's Books by Tracey Dils
- * In the Palm of Your Hand by Steve Kowit

* How to Write a Children's Book and Get It Published by Barbara Seuling

Discovered by Readers

Good news for November.

* Janice Tingum

Janice was one of three winners in the 26th Annual Fiction Contest sponsored by Highlights for Children. Congratulations, Janice!! (There were more than 1,400 entries.)

* Rose Ross Zediker

Rose was interviewed by Kevin Scott Collier for Kids Magazine Writers online for the November issue. Here's the link: <http://www.kidmagwriters.com/> and it will be under Spiritual Matters.

A craft idea, Easter Egg Mint Cups, accepted for publication with The Friend

*Lesson in persistence. Rose submitted this craft idea 14 times before successfully placing it. Fifteen times seems to be the charm!

* Linda Lee Sand

Linda Lee Sand was honored with the Emily Award at the 2005 UND Conference in Children's Literature. We'll spend some time with her next month learning more about her and her winning manuscript.

* Marilyn Kratz

A poem in the October issue of Wild Animal Baby magazine

* Roxane Salonen

A story ("Counting Hippos") in the on-line version of Guideposts for Kids.

To view, cut & paste the following line in your browser:

www.gp4k.com/stories/Article.asp?ID=1064&Type=6

Send your good news announcements to Lori at byerswalsh@aol.com

Let's celebrate together!

Who Find Their Own Voices

"Children are like wet cement. Whatever falls on them makes an impression."

~Haim Ginott

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