

This is the Newsletter . . .

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

These Are the Words

Congratulations to Mary Meinking Chambers, who was the first to recognize the beginning of *Tuesday*, by David Wiesner. Patti Kurtz recognized *Tuesday* and *I'm Sorry, Almira Ann*, by Jane Kurtz.

If you can identify one of these lines, email Lori at byerswalsh@aol.com.

1. "This picture makes me happy," said Little Bear (easy reader)
2. One evening, after thinking it over for some time, Harold decided to go for a walk in the moonlight. (picture book)

That Grow Into Stories

Write It Now: Shorts! A new contest for short story writers. Winners receive a cash prize (\$200 Grand Prize, \$50 for 1st Place in each category) and a copy of the 2006 Children's Writer & Illustrator Market. The Grand Prize winner and the first, second, and third place winners in mid-grad and young adult categories will also be published in an anthology with Blooming Tree Press. The top 15 YA and mid-grade finishers are considered for the anthology as well. (Opportunities for the young readers category to be announced.)

Contest Categories

Young adult	for readers 15 years and older	8,000 word limit
Mid-grade	for readers 11-14 years old	5,000 word limit
Young readers	for readers 7-10 years old	2,500 word limit

Deadline: October 31, 2005. Entry fee: \$10.

Check out the details and download the entry form at www.smartwriters.com.

☞ Crafted by Writers

Five Minutes (and a few decades) with Marilyn Kratz

I've been retired from teaching elementary school for seven years. Now I call myself a full time writer, which is a dream fulfilled. Looking back, I can't imagine how I found the time or energy to write during my 31 years as a teacher. Being younger must have had a whole lot to do with it.

It all started during a ten-year break in my teaching career—to get my two children off to a good start. I took a brief mail-order writing course. I felt guilty about the \$60 it took out of our household budget. Then I sold the first story I ever wrote to Highlights for Children magazine for \$60, and I was off on my very satisfying, if always challenging, career as a freelance writer. In the almost 40 years since, I have had two picture books (now out of print) and about 350 articles, stories, and poems published in over 60 different magazines. By far, most of these were children's magazines with Highlights for Children and the magazines in the Cricket group and National Wildlife Federation Publications buying the most. I've also had many stories in church school related publications.

Lately, I've been doing a lot of writing for adult publications. I write an article for each issue of a new local magazine, contribute regularly to a farm newsletter, and am currently working on a pictorial history of radio station WNAX. I have already signed the contract for that book, which means I have a deadline to meet.

But my first love will always be writing for children —and talking about writing with anyone who will listen!

These days, such conversations seem to concentrate mostly on writing books for children as opposed to writing magazine stories. I can see why publishers are swamped with submissions—everyone wants to write a children's book! While having another children's book would be a thrill for me, I get much satisfaction knowing millions of children read and enjoy the stories I've had in magazines. My advice to beginning writers would be to concentrate on selling stories to the magazine market before trying books. Such sales will give you a list of credits as well as good training.

When I look back at some of the stories I've had published, I can see the many changes that have occurred in the past 40 years. Some subjects just wouldn't do these days because children can't relate to them. Some pose situations we wouldn't encourage children to experience. For example, some years back, I had a story published in which some girls selling peanuts for their ball team went into the house of a lady who seemed frightening to them. It turned out she was a kind lady, but these days, we wouldn't want children to enter such a house. Also, children have shorter attentions spans now days, so we have to write shorter, livelier stories. I try to keep up with the latest trends by

subscribing to and reading the magazines to which I hope to sell my writing. I've also learned how to handle a computer. It's hard to imagine how I managed with that old second-hand manual typewriter I used in the beginning. Young people these days probably don't even know what "carbon paper" is—lucky for them! And what would we do without the Internet - the world at our fingertips. By the way, you can use it to find books out of print (such as my two—The Garden Book and Whose Garden?)

One thing hasn't changed much—the rate of pay for children's writing. It's not much different from when I began, and, in some instances, it's even less. Obviously, we don't write for the money! But there's so much satisfaction in creating a story or poem and knowing it's good enough for an editor to want to publish it and children will enjoy reading it. That's what keeps motivating me. And I have new inspiration now that I have three active grandchildren with another one on the way. They keep me thinking young.

Writing is more than just a talent. It requires skill. Writer's Digest, Once Upon A Time, the SCBWI Bulletin, and the Children's Writer newsletter are publications which act as a constant school of writing for me. But even more than those, I read children's books—not just to learn how to write them, but because I find them to be the best literature out there. If you don't believe me, just get a copy of The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett and see if you can put it down!

Who Gather Together

UND/SCBWI Conference in Children's Literature: Saturday, Sept. 17.
University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. Opening session is Friday, September 16 at 6:30 p.m. Speakers include Jennifer Weiss (editor, Simon & Schuster); Jane Kurtz (award-winning author); Heather Delabre (editor, Spider magazine); and Emily Rhoads Johnson (author and conference founder).

* Do you know others who would information about the conference? Please encourage them to contact Jean Patrick at jean@jeanpatrick.com She will be glad to add them to her mailing list.

More conference etiquette tips? Of course! Check out this article from Smart Writers Journal:

<http://www.smartwriters.com/index.2ts?page=swjarchive&sub=item&wrtid=513>

Querying the Editors

In a slight departure from our "Editor" feature, this month we'll listen in

on a conversation with author and conference presenter Jane Kurtz. You probably don't need to read ALL of her books before the conference (she's published more than 20) but there are a lot less enjoyable things you could do with your time. Check out the full list and more at www.janekurtz.com. Prepare to be entertained and dazzled.

1. Most of us have an image of what the life of a successful author is like. How does your life now differ from your early expectations?

I've been known to joke that I knew what rejection felt like before I managed to get any books published, but I didn't realize a whole long line of other people was waiting to reject me after publication.

While I was struggling—for 10 long years—to reach my goal of having a book accepted by a big NY publisher, my picture of what might lie beyond was murky. One thing I imagined, though, was that readers were waiting eagerly. My only job was to write a wonderful book and manage to get by the snarling gatekeepers at the publishing houses. But, alas, I now know that my editors struggle valiantly alongside me to try to get those books we work on so hard into the hands of readers—and that I have to be a partner in that tough task. And the rejection continues. I still have manuscripts rejected. In addition, I've been rejected by artists (people my editors have asked to illustrate my books), reviewers (who definitely bring their own subjective taste to the reading of a book that some other reviewer may have adored), customers (flipping casually through my book as I sit, nibbling my fingernails, at a bookstore table trying to pretend I don't care), conference organizers who have passed me over for someone more famous, one mother who assured her daughter "that's not OUR kind of book" when her daughter picked up one of my books set in Africa...and the list goes on.

I'm tempted to say it's not a good idea to have a thin skin if you're going to go public with your art. But, of course, it's probably partly a thin skin that makes us artists in the first place. If we didn't feel things acutely, we probably wouldn't have the tools to crawl, as it were, inside the skin of another human being. A writer is a gather-er of details, and some of those details have to do with what feelings really feel like. It does us no good to try to deaden ourselves to the aches. What I do think is useful is to continually focus on the joy of the writing, itself ... that passion for books, words, and stories that some of us are blessed (or cursed) with and can't quite imagine life without. I'm still amazed, some days, that I actually make my living as a writer and speaker.

2. You seem to be known for your generous spirit as well as your books. In what ways can writers support one another?

During that awful 10-year struggle to get published, I had some generous writers who reached out to me, including some in classes and critique groups. I don't know an author who wouldn't be happy to answer specific questions about why he or she made such-and-such a craft decision in a certain book, and I'm often surprised that beginning writers with access to published authors don't carefully read the authors' work and ask those kinds of questions. That's one of the most important ways I learned. But at a certain stage, I also longed for a mentor—and didn't find one. So it felt like a healing thing, later, to mentor other writers and give them what I needed. The people I've been most drawn to mentor are those who—like me at that stage—have been working at the craft of writing for a while and have been sending out stories that are often wonderful but maybe don't have that extraordinary spark that makes an editor tumble.

An editor at a conference where I once spoke said, "We're waiting to be entertained and dazzled." I like it best when I'm not the very first responder to a story but someone on the team with the writer to try to figure out how to entertain and dazzle.

3. We are often warned against writing didactic stories. Can you suggest ways to talk about peace or tolerance without preaching?

I think it's a matter of voice. Certainly people's preaching would grate on anyone's nerves. When I sent out my early stories, I occasionally got the editorial comment "too didactic," and I quickly "got it" that no one likes to be preached at. (I'm the often-rebellious daughter of a Presbyterian minister, so I'm probably even more sensitive than most people to people who sound preachy.) But then there are the people in my life who say wise and amazing things in a dead-on maybe humorous, maybe wise, maybe I've-been-there-honey-and-I-know-it-hurts kind of way. Writers, just like parents, have to know when to cut the words off and let life speak for itself, through what our characters experience, and we also need to know how to enflame characters who can say profound and sensitive things without sounding preachy.

4. How do you maintain authenticity in your writing? How can someone just starting out strive for authenticity?

I'm a strong believer in the phrase "good writing is in the details." No matter what we're writing about, our reader is sitting back, a bit skeptical, asking, "Is she just making this up, or does she really know what she's talking about?"

Does she know any more than I know or could imagine?"

Our job is to write with such vivid, startling immediacy and texture that the

reader says, "Wow. She must know. Nobody could make up THAT kind of detail." Ironically, many times the author has made it up. But often he or she has drawn on memory, observation, or research to get it right.

5. You've already accomplished so much. What motivates you now?

Right now, the path feels like a rough and rocky one for children's books, so I have plenty of motivation to find new ways through. I thought it would be easy by this point in my career. It isn't. I'm still driven by stories I want to tell, and I'm still (almost) completely smitten by the path I've chosen as a writer and speaker in spite of how hard it is.

Who Work at the Houses

Henry Holt announces a change in submission policy. They are no longer returning unsolicited manuscripts. If interested, they will respond within four months. Exclusive submissions only, please. Details at www.henryholtchildrensbooks.com.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY reports that HarperCollins is expanding its children's Spanish-language publishing program from five titles in a year to 15-20. The books will be a mix of translations and originals. Adriana

Dominguez, formerly a book review editor at CRITICAS, is the new Executive Editor.

Simon & Schuster has promoted Michelle Nagler to Senior Editor at the Simon Pulse imprint.

Who Publish the Books

A few resources recommended by Marilyn Kratz:

- ® Writer's Digest (available at bookstores)
- ® Once Upon a Time Magazine (www.onceuponatimemag.com)
- ® SCBWI Bulletin (free to SCBWI members. www.SCBWI.org)
- ® Children's Writer newsletter (available at www.childrenswriter.com)

The 2006 Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market book is now available. Retail price is \$24.99. One more reason to join SCBWI—Amazon.com discounts!

Discovered by Readers

Good news for August. Grab your backpacks and head back to school.

® Shawndra Shofner (www.shawndrashofner.com):

Ancient Wonders of the World: Stonehenge (The Creative Company, August 2005)

Ancient Wonders of the World: Taj Mahal (The Creative Company, August 2005)

Send your good news announcements to Lori at byerswalsh@aol.com Let's celebrate together!

Who Find Their Own Voices

"Originality does not consist in saying what no one has ever said before, but in saying exactly what you think yourself."

—James Fitz-James Stephen

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