NOVEMBER 2025

Story Monsters Ink®

The Literary Magazine for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents



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Fall Reading List

Book Reviews and More!

One to Read:

Katherine Schwarzenegger Pratt

Story Monsters Ink

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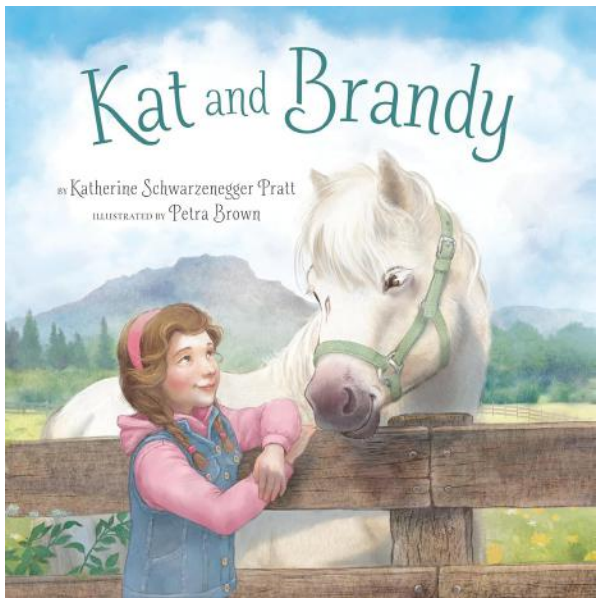
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2016 Irwin Award Winner
"Best Publisher of a Literary Magazine" and "Best Editorial Director"

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One to Read:

Katherine Schwarzenegger Pratt

by Raven Howell

Katherine Schwarzenegger Pratt is a *New York Times* bestselling author, the host of a weekly podcast and YouTube series called *BDA Baby*, works as an ambassador for Best Friends Animal Society and the ASPCA, and is a global ambassador for Special Olympics. Her most important work though? "I most look forward to being with my kids every day. I've always wanted to be a mom, and I'm in that phase, watching my kids being little people, having their thoughts and opinions about everything."

photo by Brian Bowen Smith

"Happiness looks like being with my family. My greatest form of happiness—being present with my family and being at the barn with my family. That gives me a sense of happiness and peace I just can't find anywhere else."

With her latest children's book, *Kat and Brandy*, Katherine recently went back to her elementary school library, where she recalled wonderful memories. "It inspired thoughts about the deep appreciation I have for librarians and teachers in our lives. The role that they play is such a gift, and they provide a precious and special time in our children's lives. Hats off to all librarians and teachers!"

The seeds were clearly planted for Katherine's career path during her childhood. "I always had a journal and was always writing … my mom would have us journal about our days—and that allowed a lot of self-expression. That helped. Now I write a lot."

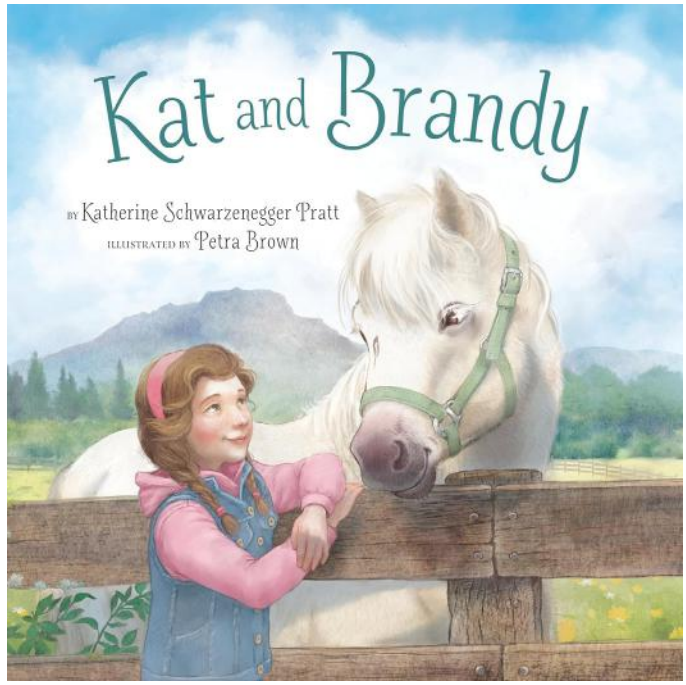
"Growing up, I loved any book that had a horse in it! I enjoyed reading words and loved Scholastic books and the ones my mom got me about girls and horses. Being in the presence of animals has always been so healing and calming. Animals are such a gift—incredible creatures."

"I spent a lot of time watching my mom ride, and I would bring my journal and books and write. I enjoyed school, but I loved being in the presence of animals, where I could be myself in a different way than with kids at school. Losing ourselves in the presence of animals is such a powerful thing. As a tween, I may have been seen as a bit odd, but I know now how that benefitted me today."

Katherine has always translated her own personal life experiences into her books, engaging readers of all ages. "I was 19 when I wrote my first book. I was a sophomore in college when it came out. This was before I had kids. Then I wrote my second book about sisterhood. My daughters inspired that, and it was fun to shine the light on sisterhood."

Katherine's first book, *Rock What You've Got*, a *NY Times* bestseller, speaks to women struggling with body image issues and self-esteem. *I Just Graduated…Now What?* provides tips and anecdotes by well-known people for those journeying out of college into the real world.

Her first children's book, *Maverick and Me*, illustrated by Phyllis Harris, offers a warm and loving look at the benefits and pleasure of pet adoption.

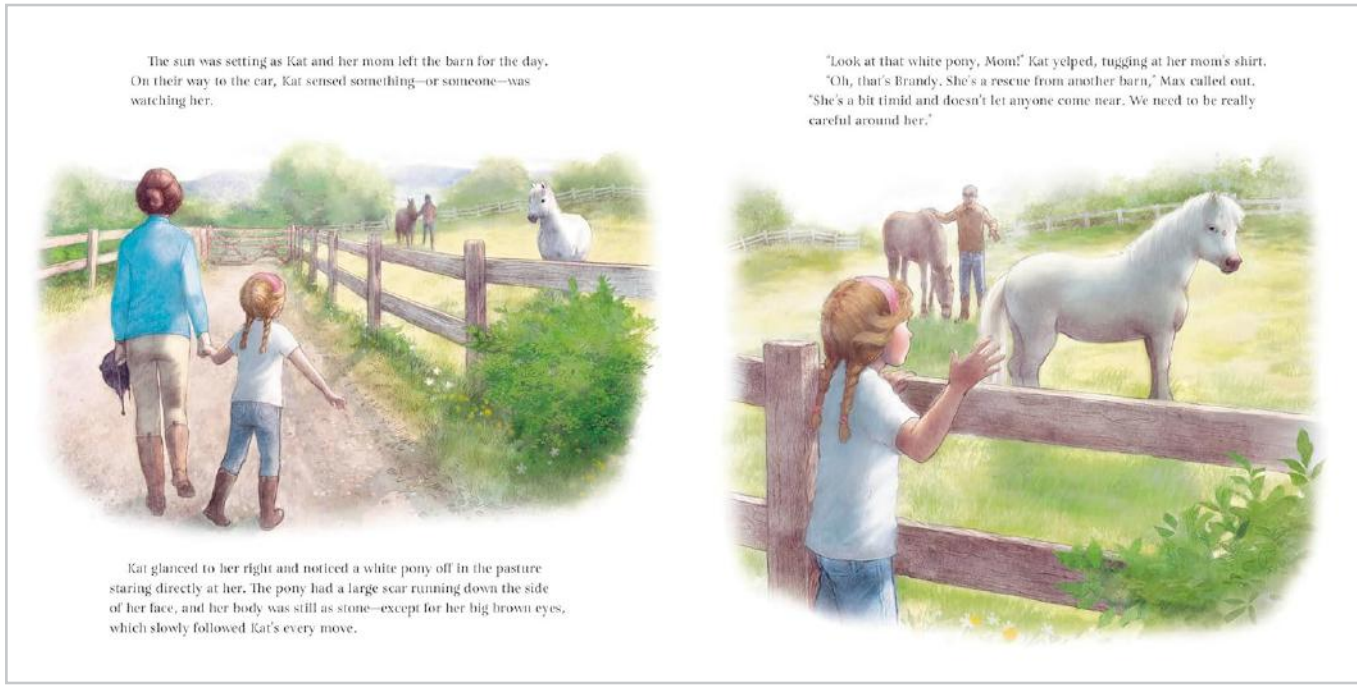


A few years later, Katherine released another *NY Times* bestseller, *The Gift of Forgiveness*, an inspiring compilation of interviews by people who have worked hard to overcome unforgivable experiences.

This year's *Kat and Brandy*, published by Penguin Workshop, sprang from Katherine's childhood experiences. It's illustrated by Petra Brown, and features Kat, a young girl who learns about courage and faces her fears with the help of Brandy, a rescue horse she befriends.

"This is my sixth book, third children's book," Katherine says. "The way that I wrote *Kat and Brandy* is dramatically different from the others. With this new book, I wanted to write about the connection between my animal friend and myself. These days I read with my children, and they are my test group, and I can see what words they hang on to, what illustrations they find appealing.… I feel so lucky to have worked with Petra Brown. My children were obsessed with her illustrations, and now working with her on this book was so special."

"The story isn't a total blueprint, but parts of it were drawn from my real experiences. My bond with Brandy and the time it took to earn her trust allowed me to start riding again (after the pony got scared and she fell off) and I was able to work through it to feel comfortable. Now I watch my own daughters interact with horses and that allowed me to write this story in a different way."



"Curiosity led to peace and comfort. While writing, I relived my own experiences at the same time—it was incredible and emotional. How powerful animals are always makes me emotional. They see us for exactly who we are—it's what we crave with humans. That level of acceptance."

Katherine shares a couple of key factors she incorporates into her stories. "I make sure the words I choose to use are digestible for children and they can see themselves in it. And I keep in mind the parents and caretakers, and the questions that would come up with the story. I want a natural conversation to come up. For example, "How do you tap into your bravery?" "How do you feel around animals?"

"You can tell with the good books that you read, how writers and illustrators have parents and caregivers in mind, while at the same time focusing on how children can fall in love with animals, with trucks, or activities, and so on, through the stories. It's important."

"Books give kids the ability to dream and imagine, and to be creative in a different way. I would get so lost in picture books! Reading allows children to use their creativity in a totally different way that is only something you can uniquely get from reading and looking at pictures, and letting kids dream with those images. It's such a huge part of childhood."

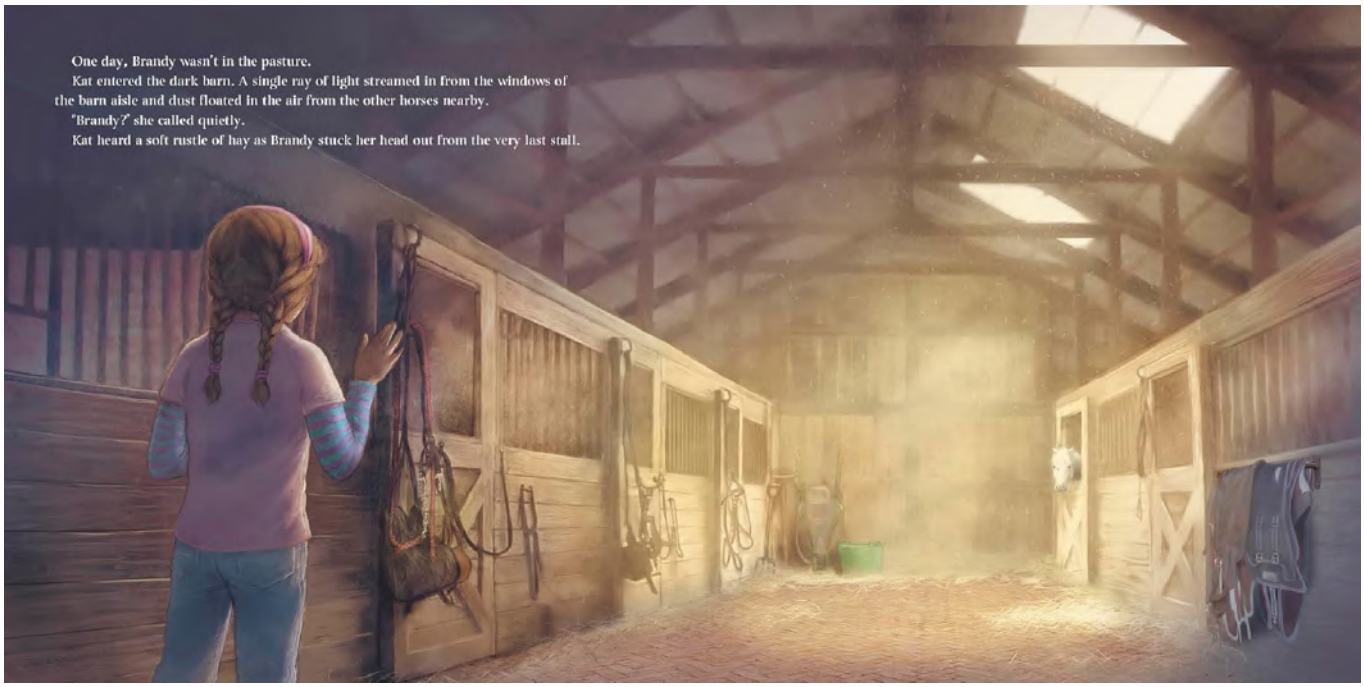
"I love watching my own kids focused on parts of picture books that maybe I didn't even notice. They ask questions and learn. The images in illustrations also allow children to ask questions. It's a special time! They are not sitting with a device or yet introduced into the fast-paced ideas, like movies, or life. They have that ability to sit with the books and let their minds wander. I don't take it for granted," she concedes.

"It's such a special season, this time in my kids' lives. It's a precious moment that I really love being able to watch them in. I let them know that they can do this too—draw pictures and write."

Katherine shares some fun horse facts:

Horses love peppermint candies!

Horses have hooves that are like fingernails, and they get their nails done!



Katherine encourages parents and caregivers to have conversations with their children about how illustrators create artwork, and writers can write books. "I'm an advocate to reading to your babies, your children, and using that time to have natural conversations about things. It's important, especially as parents, to work out how to navigate this topic or that topic. And it's okay to rely on books to help us get through that."

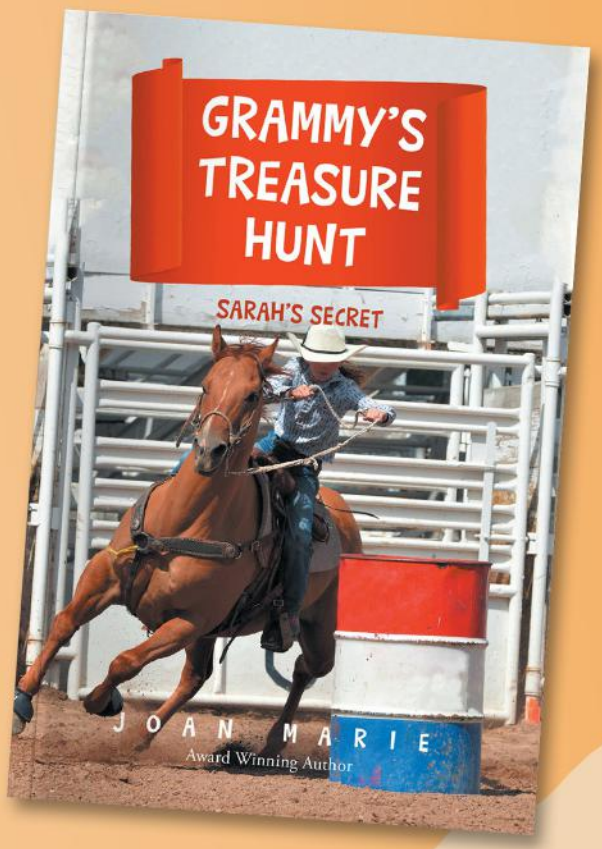
She says one of the best parts of writing is being able to see her kids enjoy her stories and the illustrations in the books. "They see the result of the time and energy I spend away from them, writing and creating. It warms my heart in a different way that I hadn't felt before."

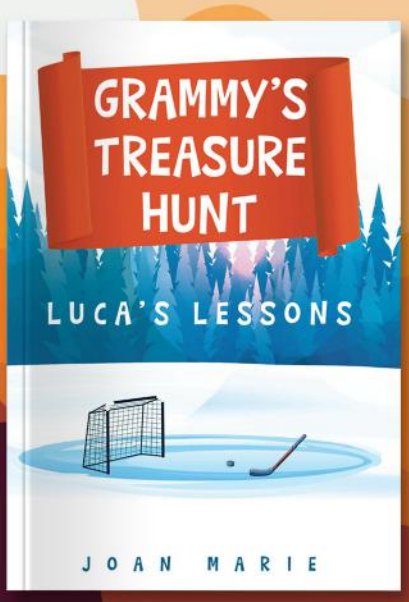
Katherine also keeps in mind the conversations that come from her books, and the stories that she's putting out in the world. "I grew up with the understanding that we're here on this earth to make the world a better place in whatever way we can, on whatever scale we can. I really try to do that with my books."

"My goal is to release books that talk about important subject matters that allow for positive messaging around that certain topic. I also aim to allow a child or adult to see themselves in the story, to feel less alone in their experience or journey and feel seen through the book. That's super important to me. If I have one child read the new book and see themselves in the character of Kat and feel like they can work through their fears and tap into their inner bravery at a young age or work through something that may have scared them for a very long time like Kat overcame her fears, then this book will have served its purpose. It will have been a book that will have done exactly what I hoped it would do, which is allow a child to see themselves in whatever phase of life they're in and for conversations to be able to happen. I hope that readers can feel it's possible to overcome their fears." ●

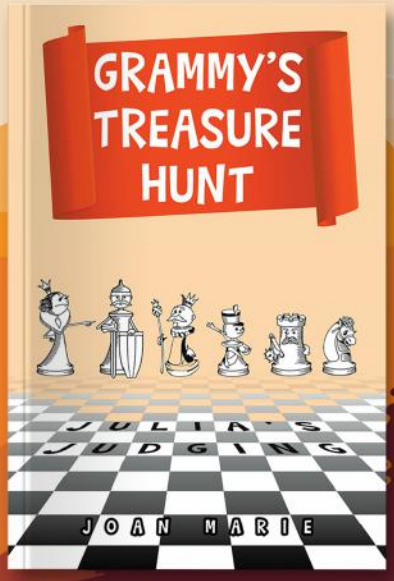


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Andrew Maraniss

Invites Young Readers to the Sports Zone

by Raven Howell

"This was a fun book to write because it really centers on friendship as much as sports," says author Andrew Maraniss over a soup and sandwich lunch break. His new release, *Sports Zone!: Hut! Hut! Hike!* is the first in a Scholastic Branches series about a diverse group of friends who explore and participate in a variety of sports.

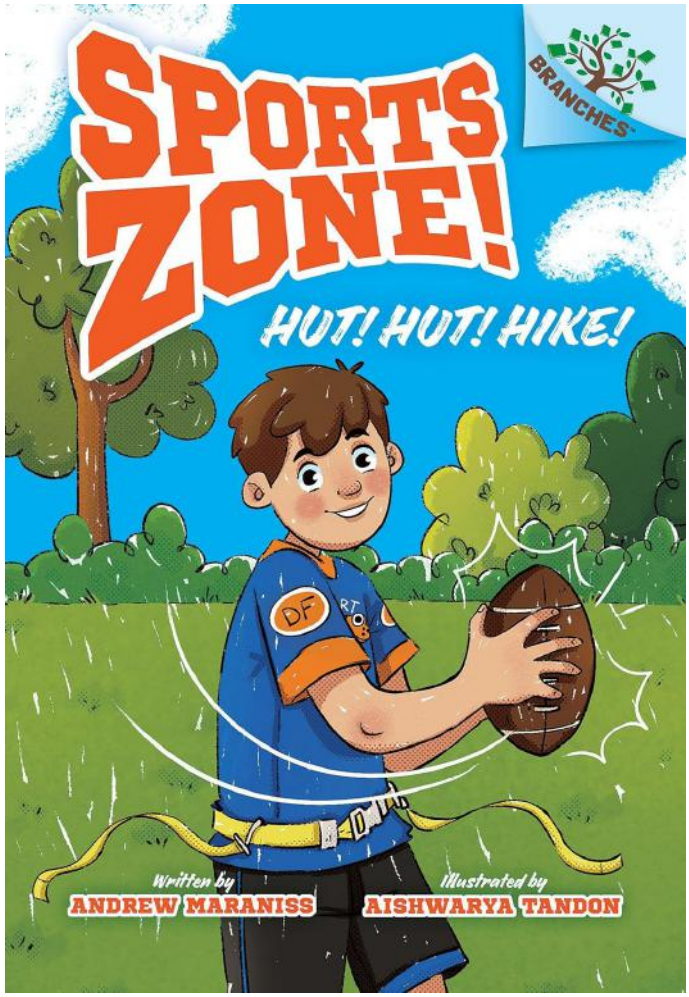


"Jasper, Mo, and Ruby are nine-year-old friends at school who decide to try out for a flag football team for the first time. They each come with anxieties—of getting hurt, of flag not being 'real' football, of trying something new. Their coach is a bit of a bumbling idiot who dramatically inflates his prowess as a backup JV quarterback in his high school 'glory days.' The kids learn some skills, the rules of the game, some of the history of the sport, and overcome their fears. Most of all, they support one another as they learn to enjoy something new."

"The friends rely on each other for support as they begin to play flag football for the first time. There can be a lot of pressure on kids playing sports—wanting to do well for their own sake but also to please their parents or their coach. The skills don't always come easy, and dealing with both victory and defeat can be challenging. So while the book includes a lot about real-life football stars, information on the history and rules of the game, and some cool illustrations, at its heart this is a book about how friends support one another during good times and bad."

"I know there are some readers who are immediately drawn to the sports aspect," Andrew concurs. "There aren't many books out there with a flag football player on the cover. This is the first sports series within Scholastic's Branches series of early chapter books. The whole reason *Sports Zone* exists is because a bookseller in Nashville told my editor she was hearing from a lot of kids and families who wanted a Branches sports series. So I'm happy to give those readers what they want!"

photo by Keith Miles



"I also think there will be readers who connect to the book for other reasons—the illustrations and graphic novel treatment in some sections; the story of friendship and support among the main characters; and the idea of trying something new, working hard, and accomplishing a goal, whether that's in sports or any other area of life."

Sports Zone!: Hut! Hut! Hike! draws on Andrew's real life in a few ways. "The dog in the book is named after our family dog and some of the other names of people and places have special inside meaning to my family or friends. It's a fun bonus to be able to do things like that in a work of fiction! More significantly, much of my familiarity with flag football and youth sports in general comes from my own personal experiences growing up or my son's current activities. It's definitely helpful to have a kid in my own house playing sports with his friends. I've worked a lot of my observations into the book."

"Oh," Andrew exclaims, "and I was that kid who got in trouble for throwing balls in the house!"

"My parents say I learned how to read by reading the back of baseball cards. Growing up in DC, I remember playing touch football on the lawn underneath the Washington Monument, going to Georgetown basketball games when Patrick Ewing was their star, and subscribing to newsletters about the Packers and Brewers."

"Our family moved a lot—I had lived in five states by first grade and two more by high school. Experiencing different parts of the country came with advantages, but it also came with a lot of stress. Being the new kid created anxiety. But I think that feeling of being an outsider has helped as a writer in terms of being an observer of people and events."

"My mom worked for an environmental nonprofit and my father was a journalist, so I grew up around writers and others trying to make a positive change in the world. Sports were always a big part of my childhood. I loved playing baseball, collecting baseball cards, going to Major League Baseball games and college basketball games. When I was 13, I tried to write my own sports magazine. Sports, reading, and writing have always been connected in my life."

"For an assignment in third grade, I wrote that I wanted to either be a wide receiver for the Green Bay Packers or a reporter for the *Washington Post* (like my dad). I also would have loved to play for the Milwaukee Brewers. By the time I got to high school, I wanted to be a sportswriter. I was the sports editor of the school paper at Austin High in Texas and went to Vanderbilt on a full-tuition sports writing scholarship."

"Seeing examples of writers in my own family was a big influence for me. My father was a journalist at the *Washington Post* while I was growing up, and he's since written more than a dozen books. My dad has been my biggest influence as a writer by far. Everything I know about writing came from just reading his work. Also, one of my grandfathers was a newspaper editor and one of my grandmothers was a book editor. My sister writes plays. My mom wrote a children's book. So, writing is a big part of my family, and that example was hard to miss!"

"I have written 10 other books, and this book, and the entire *Sports Zone* series, is very different from all the others. Not only is this the youngest age group that I've written for, it's also my first foray into fiction. I feel a little bit like the *Benjamin Button* character who was born elderly and 'aged' backward. I

wrote my first book, *Strong Inside*, for adults." (*Strong Inside* was a recipient of the 2015 RFK Book Awards "Special Recognition" honor and the 2015 Lillian Smith Book Award.) "My nonfiction books have used the platform of sports to discuss important social issues like racism, antisemitism, fascism, homophobia, and women's rights."

"My first book took eight years—four years of research and four years of writing. I've gotten better about how I organize my research, and I take edits and revisions a lot less personally."

"Every story is different, and great children's books come in so many different genres, but I think one common element to a good story is that it allows kids to use their creativity as they imagine themselves in the center of the action. In this new book, I think different kids will relate to different characters and imagine how they would react in the same scenarios as the characters."

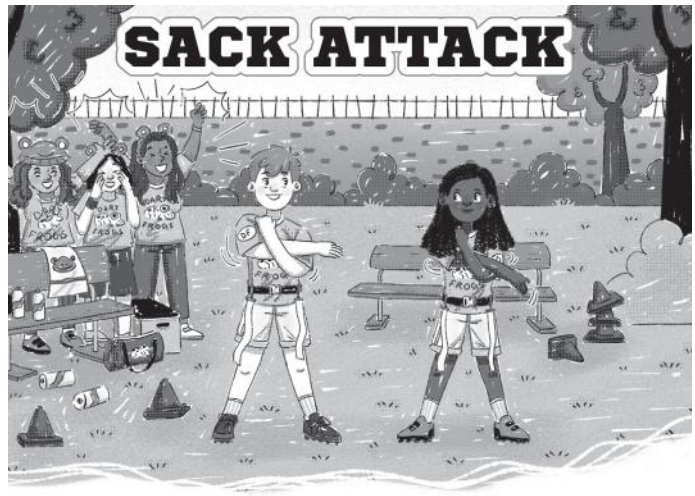
"Youth sports are supposed to be fun. They are supposed to be about what's in the best interest of kids. Too often these days we see adults basically ruining it. Parents living vicariously through their kids. Coaches more focused on short-term wins than long-term development. Adults putting their interests first and viewing youth sports more as a business model than as a way to create something positive for all kids. I hope some of those sensibilities shine through."

Andrew encourages children. "Adults shouldn't always be involved if at all possible. Play because you want to and because it makes you happy. Find coaches who are focused on teaching the game and helping all players improve. If you become serious about sports, understand that you'll have to work hard to keep advancing up the ladder. Sports are fun, but they also require dedication, hard work, and self-motivation if you want to keep playing in high school and beyond."

He finds the biggest reward from publishing *Sports Zone!: Hut! Hut! Hike!* is seeing kids get excited about reading. "Especially those who are characterized as 'reluctant readers' who haven't discovered the kind of books that they might enjoy yet."

"I have additional installments of the *Sports Zone* series coming soon, including books where the characters play soccer, baseball, and hockey. I'm also writing a Young Adult book on the first Special Olympics, which took place in Chicago in 1968."

"But for my day to day, I most enjoy time with my family, our dog, watching my favorite sports teams, reading a good new book, eating almost any kind of dessert, and visiting new cities."





"My favorite thing is watching my son and daughter pursue their interests. We have a sixth-grade son and ninth grade daughter, and it makes me so happy to see them growing up, trying new things, and pursuing what they love—namely baseball and theater!"

"I spend the vast majority of my life working at my regular job at Vanderbilt or as a father driving my kids around or watching their activities! It always surprises me when I actually finish writing a book. When did I find the time? It takes a lot of creativity and discipline to figure that out, not to mention sacrifices by everybody else in my family. Still, my favorite parts of being an author are the research for my books and interacting with readers on school visits."

For more information about Andrew Maraniss and his books, visit **andrewmaraniss.com**. ●

Christine Whan

Serves a Two-List Thanksgiving

by Raven Howell

One of the year's most delightful debut picture books is *Two-List Thanksgiving* (Beaming Books/Augsburg Fortress) by children's author Christine Whan. The story lovingly offers readers a sense of belonging as a family celebrates Thanksgiving across two cultures.





Christine's book was inspired by her personal experience. "Growing up, we lived a block away from my cousins and only 10 minutes from more distant relatives, whom we would see every week. We had a lot of fun! Even though my cousins and I were the only Asians at our elementary school, we were a small crew and stuck together. I also was able to visit Korea every other year for several years to stay connected to relatives. Through these experiences I was able to straddle two cultures from an early age, without feeling socially isolated."

Christine was born in Seoul, South Korea, but raised in the United States. During her childhood, she recalls her dreams of growing up to be a poet. "I owned Ogden Nash's *Custard and Company* and Shel Silverstein's *A Light in the Attic* and loved reading them out loud because of the fun and funny ways it sounded. I won a small writing competition at my Korean school by writing a poem, and I think that really bolstered my confidence in writing poetry. But it was short-lived. After that year, I'm pretty sure I wanted to be a singer," she laughs.

"I taught English for years at a charter school program in Los Angeles, serving primarily Central American students, where English was their second language. I found that the students learned best when I provided a space for them to share their stories and connect their stories to what we were reading in class. In my writing, I hope to do something similar. I hope my stories connect with the lives of my readers and spark conversations."

Originally, Christine left teaching because she wanted to be a present mother to her children. But it wasn't long before inspiration struck.

"We had just moved to a new city for my husband's job, and for the first time in my adult life, I wasn't in school or working. Pregnant with my second, I became restless. I wasn't sure of what I wanted, but I felt a deep creative energy to start something new. I considered my options as I worked through *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. One of the assignments was to list any career you would be interested in without stopping for 10 minutes. I read through my list and upon reading, 'children's book author,' I paused, surprised that I even wrote it. I think the next day I enrolled in a certificate program for children's book writing."

"*Two-List Thanksgiving* tells of a biracial, bicultural girl's experience of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a cornerstone of American culture."

"I drew on my experiences as a Korean American, straddling two cultures as an immigrant child, but mostly this story is a real look at our family's experience of Thanksgiving. Our kids have an aunt with red hair, just like in the book, who often plays games with them like hide and seek, and some kind of sports game is usually playing in the background with family members rooting for opposing teams. We usually have the traditional American Thanksgiving fare while also including dishes commonly eaten during Chuseok, a Korean harvest festival celebration."

"So far, I have received so many sweet and touching messages from readers. Korean immigrants and Korean Americans love seeing Korean foods and a Korean family depicted in the book. Biracial Asian American families have been gracious with their support and love to see a version of their family represented in print. But I've also received so much support from American





families of a variety of backgrounds. Readers who immigrated from Dubai, Lebanon, and India have all shared how their families do something similar for the holidays. When I hear from readers in this way, I feel like I've been invited inside their home to sit at their tables to witness their family traditions. It's so precious."

"I love hearing children giggle when I'm doing story time, most consistently after I read the Grandpa's reaction to trying kimchi. And a few kids have been bold enough to tell me that they love my book after I read it to their class. It's the best."

"Connecting to readers who feel seen in the story of *Two-List Thanksgiving* is the biggest reward. And that includes my own kids," she acknowledges.



The book is illustrated by the multi-talented Sienna Youngsun Kim, no stranger to children's illustrating and animation. Christine felt a connection to her artwork right away.

"I was immediately drawn to her work," she tells me. "Sienna's work is whimsical and playful. Her color palette and composition is colorful and detailed, without being overwhelming. I'm not an artist, but I do have a sense of the art that I like. And I definitely love her work. I feel so lucky to be partnering with her on marketing the book together. Sienna is so incredibly talented and easy to work with."

Currently, Christine is working on three new picture book manuscripts. "I have dedicated writing days while my kids are in school, where I create deadlines for myself. I am trying to be more active within the SCBWI community, attending workshops and conferences as well. And now that my book is out, I've been doing school author visits, library story times, story time and craft events at local bookstores."

"When I initially write a story, I like to bring it to my trusted critique group. We've been together for six years! They're amazing editors, and I like to hear if they think the bones of the story are good at the start. I try writing the story in first person or third person, sometimes in second person. I think about pacing and whether I am losing my reader's attention at



any given point. All the while, I ask myself what is the heart of the story, and whether each line is moving the story along."

"I spent a lot of time, while writing *Two-List Thanksgiving*, thinking about how to create warmth and emotion in my writing without being too wordy. The inclination is to use more sentences and more descriptors, but with picture books, there's an art to achieving a level of emotion with limited words. It's a lot like writing poetry that way."

"I love that picture books introduce kids to reading and art. I love how picture books connect young readers to parents or other loved ones, and the conversations that they spark. I love how they create active listeners and foster empathy. And I think oral storytelling through picture books absolutely creates communities through the shared experience of hearing the story."

When she's not writing or promoting her new book, Christine tunes into watching her favorite stand-up comedians and podcasts from the likes of Good Hang and Amy Poehler. "I enjoy reading other picture books, connecting to authors, or reading craft books, but I love watching a comic and experiencing a moment of pure delight. I come away from that moment, saying, 'How do they do that?' My answer: good writing. And it inspires me to take a stab at it myself!" she exclaims.

"And I love '90s music—I'm a bit stuck in that era. I blast it in the car, and I love having friends over to karaoke to those songs."

Christine says she'd love to have *Two-List Thanksgiving* translated into Korean. "Overall, I hope that it encourages readers to think about their own family traditions, what they're thankful for, and what it means to be American."

For more information about Christine Whan and her book, visit **christinewhan.com**. ●



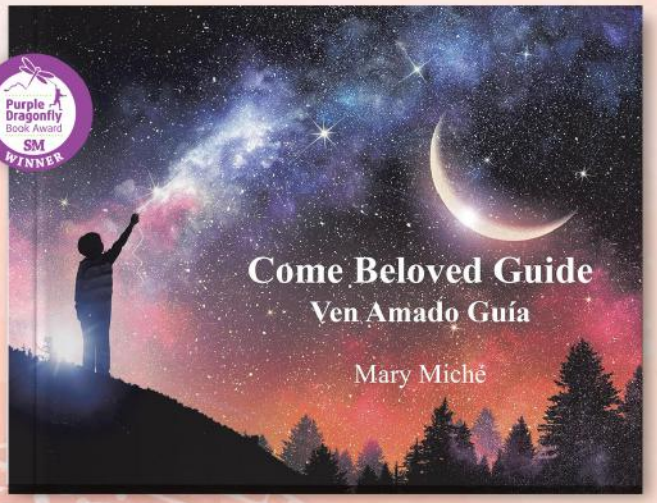
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Children of all cultures pray in varied ways. Sharing this book with children gives us the opportunity to talk about spirituality.

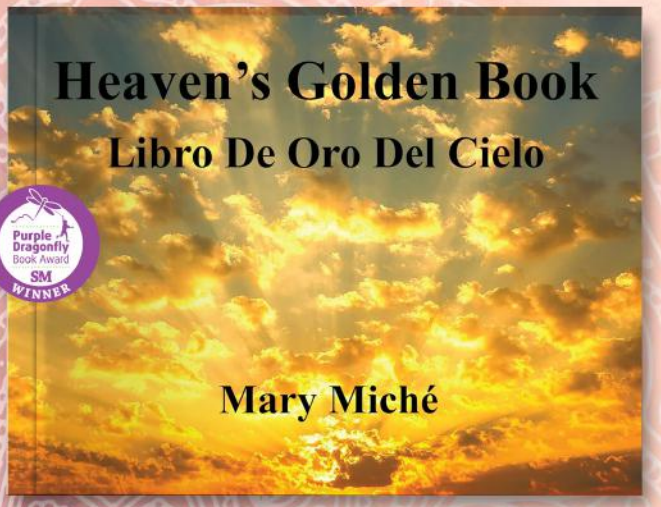
2025 Purple Dragonfly Award Winner



Come Beloved Guide

Children can enjoy the beautiful images that bring spirituality into their lives and adults can use this book to share their spiritual journey with children.

2025 Purple Dragonfly Award Winner



Heaven's Golden Book

We often tell children that someone who has died is in heaven, but we don't have much to say about what heaven is like. Sharing this book with children encourages them to talk about their thoughts and feelings.

2025 Purple Dragonfly Award Winner

Available on Amazon.com for $9.95 each.

Alan Salisbury

Inspires a New Generation of Leaders

by Raven Howell

Alan Salisbury's professional transition from a distinguished 30-year career in the US Army to a children's author had a more natural flow than one might imagine. "It was really pretty easy," he says, "because in both roles I was dealing with computer systems and technology."



Alan retired as Commanding General of the US Army Information Systems Engineering Command. His decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal and two Bronze Star medals. Following his Army service, he held senior leadership roles in technology and education.

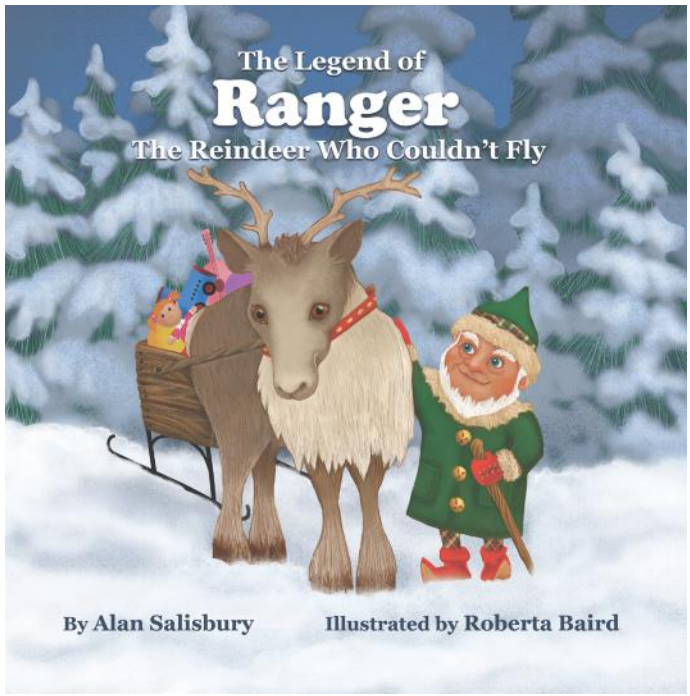
He was President of Contel Technology Center, COO of the Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation, and later Chairman and President of Learning Tree International (NASDAQ: LTRE).

Among several other notable accomplishments, Alan is co-founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Code of Support Foundation, dedicated to transforming how America supports its veterans and military families. Furthermore, he founded Opus One Studios to produce books, music, and other creative works supporting worthy causes.

But of his role as a grandfather, Alan says, "I loved reading to my granddaughters. The idea for a children's book came to me and I said to myself, *Why not?* I thought it would be fun. As it turned out, I also became a publisher, so there was a professional aspect to it as well."

Alan has written a children's book, 2013's *The Legend of Ranger: The Reindeer Who Couldn't Fly* and the newer graphic novel, *Johnny Vet: America's Original Superhero: The Story of America's Veterans*.

He tells me creativity runs in his family. "My mother wrote poetry and was an amateur songwriter herself, so there may be some genes at work here. She had three songs in various stages of being published in the immediate post-WWII timeframe. Sixty years later, I found a singer and accompanist to record these as a tribute to her, and that CD is also on the Opus One store product roster."

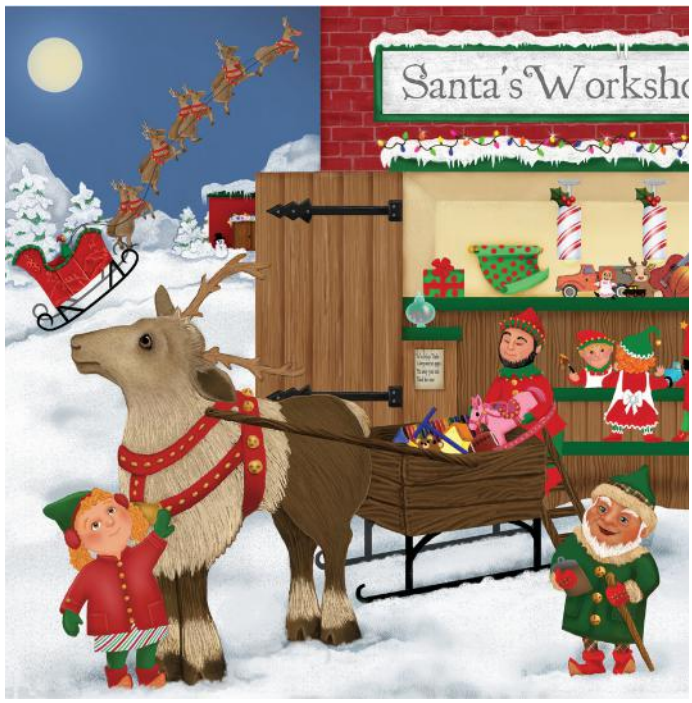


"More important, I have been very active professionally, both in my military career and my subsequent civilian career in writing both technical and management papers and articles, as well as a technical reference book on Microprogrammable Computer Architectures, published in 1976."

"When my first children's book, *Ranger*, was published, I decided that any and all profits would go to charity. My whole family had become fast friends with the family of one of my West Point classmates. His wife was an art teacher in the local school system who had developed a substantial program using art as a therapy for children with cancer. When she was diagnosed with cancer herself, and eventually succumbed to it, "children's art for children's cancer" became her legacy, supported by a family foundation. I decided that it would be the beneficiary for Ranger sales."

"Over time, I expanded the Ranger product line to include a soft toy; a CD with *Dream & Believe*, which is billed as Ranger's Song since it tracks with the story, and the full book as an audiobook track; and recently, I added a board game called SANTALAND which is Ranger's game, also based on the story."

Alan's Opus One Studios offers all of these products via a Shopify store. "The company has evolved into something closer to a 'B' for benefit corporation, with all author and publisher profits donated to a charitable beneficiary. We have added other products including other authors who select their own beneficiary. As to where this is headed, I'm grappling with that question right now since I'm in my late eighties and have to figure that out pretty soon."



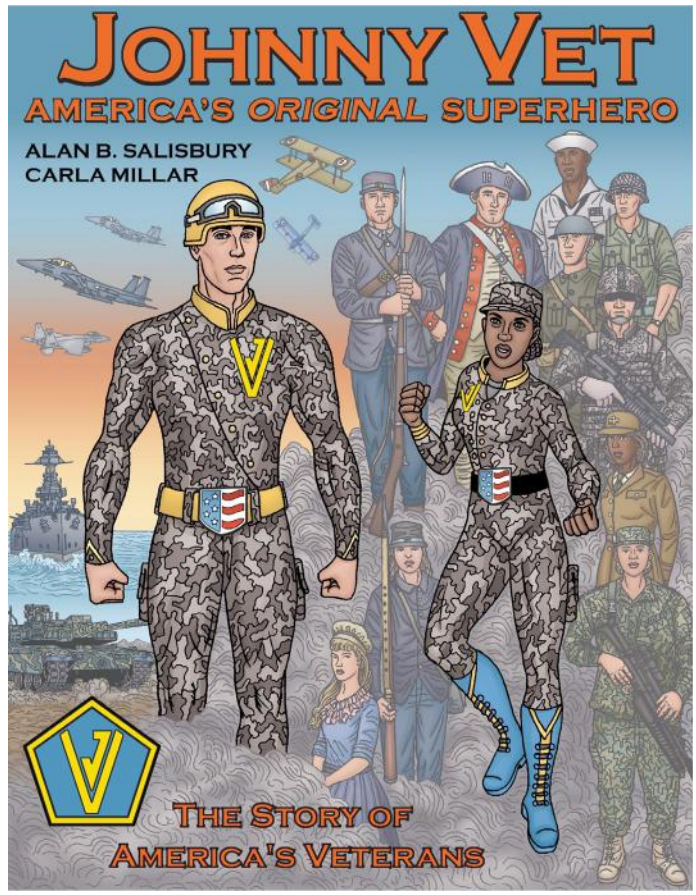


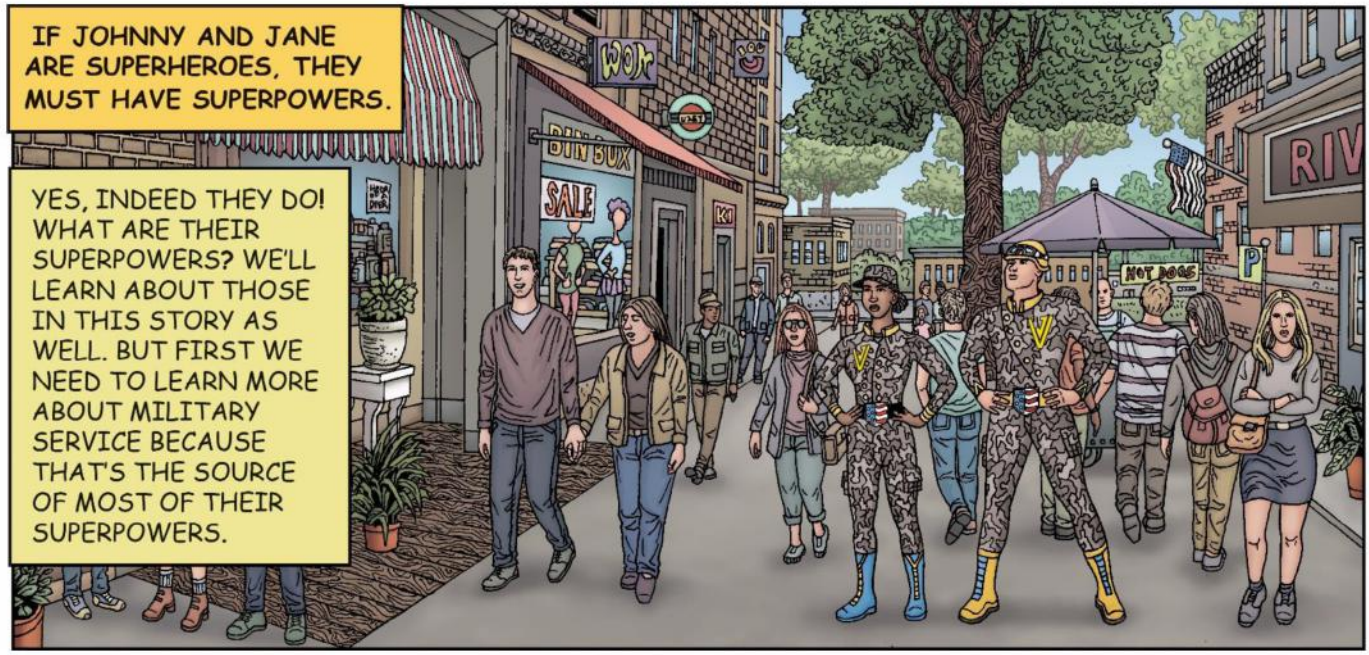
"Many of the reviews of *Ranger, The Reindeer Who Couldn't Fly* credit it for being an inspirational story, and that's what I intended."

"In the story, Ranger's dream is to be part of Santa's sled-pulling team. When he finally decides to make his dream come true, he starts out on a journey to learn the secret of flying. The father figure in the story is Norgrum, the wise old elf. When Ranger asks him for the secret, the answer he gets is that the secret lies within, which is somewhat ambiguous. Ranger thinks it means within some place or object. So he goes in search of something physical."

"Meanwhile, a bug of some kind starts infecting the reindeer which puts Christmas itself in jeopardy. The medicine to heal the reindeer is not available in Santaland, so Ranger is asked to pull a sleigh, with Zarvett, the elf in charge of the reindeer, to the village of Krystalwite where they can get the needed medicine, a journey that will take more than a day each way."

On the return trip home, Ranger comes face to face with a big chasm. Summarizing the story's pinnacle point, Alan says, "Proving his mettle, Ranger is determined to jump the crevasse. In the process, he realizes that it's not jumping that gets him and the sleigh across, but flying. It becomes clear to him that the secret lies within himself. The lost time that was going to doom the trip to failure is more than made up as they continue to fly all the way home and receive a hero's welcome on landing. Ranger has made his dream come true!"





"More than once, I have heard an author talk of how a character can evolve independently and the author just has to let it happen. To some extent, I found this true with Ranger. You can pre-plan that evolution to some degree, but a good character can lead the author as they learn together who the character really is."

The full set of Ranger products is packaged in a box as "The Ranger Collection," which is promoted as "A Family Tradition in a Box." Alan's hope is that the Ranger box is "put away with the ornaments and reopened and re-read, year after year."

His second book, *Johnny Vet, America's Original Superhero* is written for young readers, but serves as a wonderful resource to families as an introduction to America's military. These superheroes represent the millions of American men and women who, from 1775 to the present, have kept America strong and free.

Alan says, "I created Johnny (Jane) to be the everyman (woman) of veterans. And I decided on the Superhero model in hopes of connecting with my target audience, centered on middle school kids, with even younger kids being able to follow the first few pages, and older kids (and their parents!) able to stay with it through the full details of the chain of command."

"The single most important sentence in the booklet is, in reference to his being a superhero, "*Johnny Vet* is not a man of steel, he is a man of character!" That's what I want kids to see in our veterans, and what I want them to aspire to be themselves."

"As a graduate of West Point, I believe in their mission of educating and training "leaders of character." I view veterans as a tremendously valuable asset of our nation. I focus on the overlapping values of each of the six services and select four as common to all, and then use the profiles of a set of veterans representing all the services to illustrate those values."

"More than one friend has told me it should be required reading for every political appointee in the Department of Defense!"

"I selected Carla Millar for the artwork because she illustrates with great detail and is committed to authenticity. All of the military equipment and weapon systems shown are extremely accurate in detail and I thought this was particularly important in a book of this type."

Interestingly, the book, *Johnny Vet*, followed five years after Johnny Vet, the Musical. Alan explains, "I was the executive producer of the show *A Veteran's Musical Journey Through History* in 2017. The show followed from the song, "Johnny Vet," which I wrote and then we built a full two-hour show around it. Jim Lehrer (PBS news personality) and his wife were the live narrators. Check out johnnyvet.com."

For now, Alan doesn't have plans for another book, yet smilingly suggests "...but stay tuned." He keeps up with favorite pastimes such as reading, walking, and spending precious time with his family and friends.

He credits his ability to communicate with others and his sense of humor as spurring his career, and offers inspiration to younger generations: "When you see something that needs to be done, don't wait for someone else to do it."

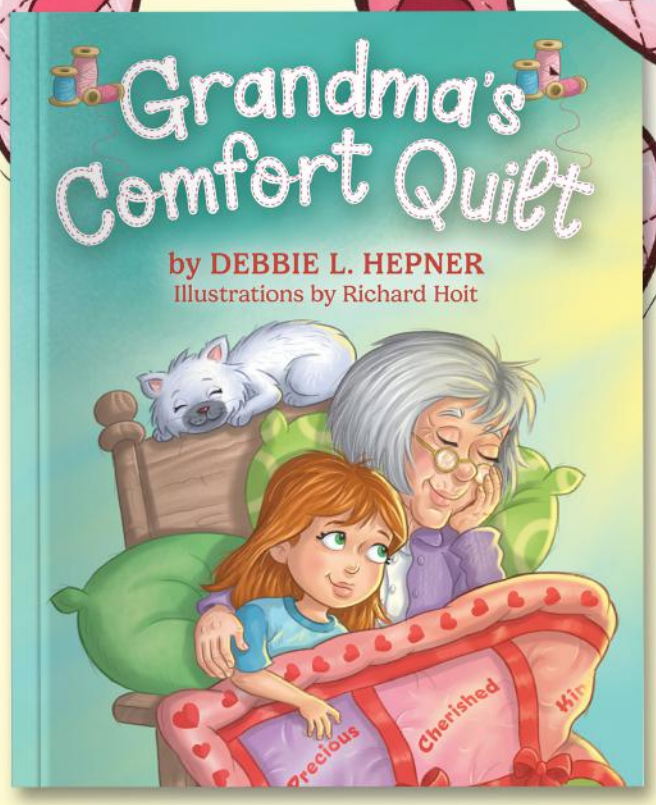
For more information about Alan Salisbury and his work, visit **opus-one-studios.myshopify.com**. ●



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A quilt of esteem-building affirmations, lovingly crafted by Grandma for her granddaughter. As their bond deepens, Grandma unfolds the meaning behind each cherished affirmation. But when illness casts a shadow, the granddaughter tenderly wraps her grandmother in the comfort quilt, whispering her love as a heartfelt return.



Purple Dragonfly Book Award SM WINNER

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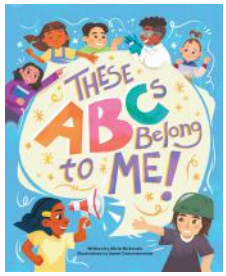
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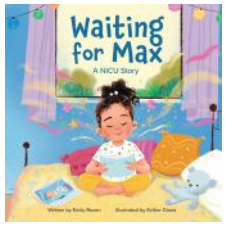
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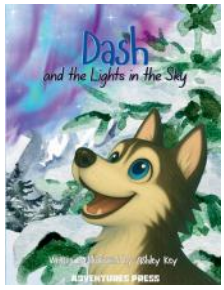
FALL READING LIST



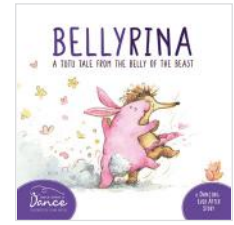
These ABCs Belong to Me!
by Alicia McKenzie
These ABCs Belong to Me! is a joyful picture book that turns labels into superpowers, helping kids reclaim the words used to define them. From "bossy" to "quiet" to "picky," each trait is reframed as a personal strength, building confidence one letter at a time. With inclusive, pronoun-free text and vibrant, playful art, this empowering ABC book celebrates individuality, sparks meaningful conversations, and reminds every child that who they are is something to be proud of. ISBN: 9781685557997



Waiting for Max: A NICU Story
by Emily Rosen
Waiting for Max is a heartfelt, imagination-filled picture book that helps families navigate the NICU journey through a big sibling's eyes. When Louise's baby brother arrives early, she must wait for him to grow strong enough to come home—so she uses her bright imagination to feel close to him. Inspired by the author's own NICU experience, this comforting, hopeful story validates big emotions, sparks meaningful family conversations, and reminds readers that love and patience make even the longest wait worth it. ISBN: 9781685552800



Dash and the Lights in the Sky
by Ashley Key
Dash and the Lights in the Sky is a poetic, science-rich picture book where Dash, a curious husky, discovers the northern lights with help from Echo the snowy owl and Nimbus the Arctic fox. Gentle storytelling meets real STEM learning as young readers explore auroras, Earth's magnetic field, and colorful night-sky phenomena. Perfect for classrooms, libraries, and homeschool settings, the book includes vocabulary, hands-on extensions, and nature-based wonder to inspire budding scientists.



Bellyrina: A Tutu Tale from the Belly of the Beast
by Once Upon a Dance
Bunny leaps from the wolf's belly with only one memory: She loves to dance. But something, or someone, is still missing.... "A charming, beautifully illustrated book that encourages kids to get up and move." —Kirkus Reviews. "Sure to send young readers into fits of giggles." —Chanticleer Reviews. "With a captivating plot, delightful illustrations and a successful frame of storytelling through motion, Bellyrina will enchant readers young and old, particularly those who love to move." —BlueInk Reviews



When We All Get Together
by Heather Bradley
From a mischief of mice to a loveliness of ladybugs, groups of creatures have beautiful, descriptive names. Join the Canadian wildlife in the maple tree forest. They're all gathering together one by one-until unwanted pests arrive!



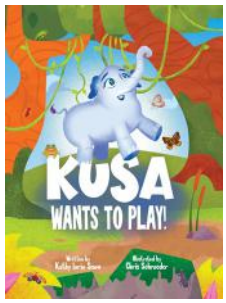
Sticky Pineapple and the Little Precious Gems: How I Came Into This World
by Stephanie Boag
Inspired by a conversation between a 5-year-old girl and her mummy at bedtime when she asked, "Mummy how did I come into this world? Did I come out of your tummy? This multi-international award-winning book is a perfect gift for parents to read to their young children to help explain to them in an engaging, beautifully illustrated, creative and imaginary way, how they came into this world, especially via IVF.



Stressed Little Bun Bun Takes a Deep Breath

by Stefanie Jubert, Amber Orozco

Calling all adventurers! Stressed Little Bun Bun is in terrible trouble! He needs your help to navigate the dangerous island that trapped his big brother. Can you help him find the courage to face his fears? *Stressed Little Bun Bun Takes a Deep Breath* is told in playful rhyme and teaches children mindfulness breathing techniques to help them take control of their strong emotions.



Kusa Wants to Play!

by Kathy Iorio Snow

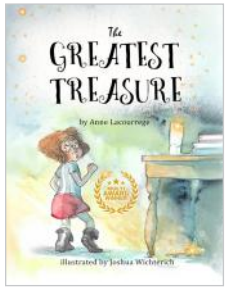
Kusa is ready for some fun! She finds the other animals down at the water hole and asks them to play ... but nobody feels up to it. Just when she thinks it will be the most boring day ever, Chacha Cheetah shows up to help lift everyone's mood. At the end of the day, Kusa and her pals learn firsthand that you can have fun with everyone—especially those who move and groove differently from you.



We Both Speak English but...

by Heather Bradley

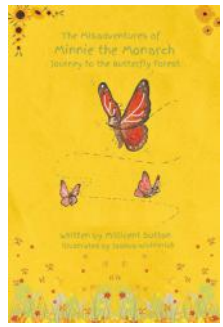
Two cousins. Two countries. One language. Sort of. Cousins living over three thousand miles apart (five thousand kilometers) enjoy many of the same things, though they say them differently. One cousin wears a slicker, Wellingtons, and carries a brolly to splash in the puddles. The other cousin wears a raincoat, rubber boots, and carries an umbrella to play in the rain. Discover a new kind of bilingualism.



The Greatest Treasure

by Anne Lacourrege

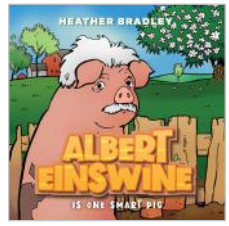
A lonely child is living in a house by the banks of the Mississippi River. The house is mysterious, with a closed door between two apartments. The child hears a voice encouraging her to open the door, but it is locked. Ultimately, the key is found. The child is scared to open the door, but at the same time, her curiosity is piqued. What is trapped behind the door?



The Misadventures of Minnie the Monarch: Journey to the Butterfly Forest

by Millicent Sutton

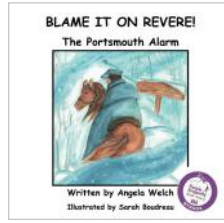
Embark on the journey with Minnie, a miniature butterfly, who sets out on a 3000-mile trek in search of her kaleidoscope family. Get ready for a page-turning chapter book filled with colorful illustrations, unforgettable characters, and exciting twists that will keep kids reading from cover to cover and is sure to engage even the most reluctant reader! This heartwarming story of hope and perseverance will inspire young minds to dream big and never give up!



Albert Einswine is One Smart Pig

by Heather Bradley

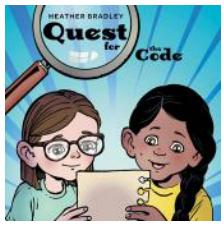
Meet Albert Einswine, a clever pig with a big heart and an even bigger plan! When Farmer Harold is taken away in an ambulance, the animals must figure out how to care for themselves. But no one is sure what to do. Albert comes up with a plan for all the animals to work together to keep everyone happy and full. But will Albert's plan work?



Blame It On Revere!: The Portsmouth Alarm

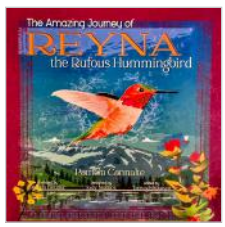
by Angela Welch

Paul Revere's famous ride in April of 1775 is well known by many. However, his first ride took place on a cold, stormy day in December of 1774 where he headed to the quiet coastal town of Portsmouth in the colony of New Hampshire. What message was so important that led to this journey? Read about the ride that led to the first shots of the American Revolution before those at Concord and Lexington, Massachusetts. **www.lunabooksnh.com**



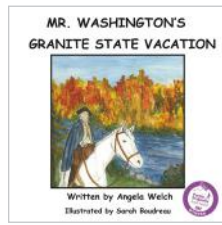
Quest for the Code
by Heather Bradley

Brenda and Arpita love reading mystery stories. When an unreadable note blows into their clubhouse, they see their chance to solve a real-life mystery! The two best friends set out to discover its meaning. On their journey, they discover many cultures that use different writing systems, including Sanskrit, Hebrew, Chinese, and Cree. But, at the end of the day, Brenda and Arpita will need to use their very best detective skills to discover just what kind of writing they've stumbled on—and what code they'll need to decipher it!



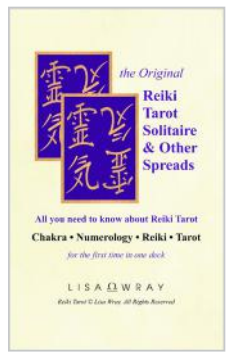
The Amazing Journey of Reyna the Rufous Hummingbird
by Pamela Cannalte

The Amazing Journey of Reyna the Rufous Hummingbird is the story of this tiny but amazing hummingbird's epic 4,000+ mile journey, which follows her from her birth nest on an Alaskan island in late spring, to her wintering home in central Mexico via the Rocky Mountains. To prepare for her marathon flight, Reyna must learn to fly, find enough insects and nectar to make her strong, and survive an encounter with a cunning cat. Readers are welcomed into the awe-inspiring world of this bird that weighs less than two U.S. pennies as she matures and migrates from the northern reaches of the United States to the tropical forests of Central America.



Mr. Washington's Granite State Vacation
by Angela Welch

In the fall of 1789, George Washington decided to visit the northern states to talk about the new Constitution. He wanted to meet and listen to the people he met along the way. During his trip, he crossed the Merrimack River in Massachusetts, heading for Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the capital of the state at that time. Come along as President Washington takes his Granite State vacation.



The Original Reiki Tarot Solitaire and Other Spreads
by Lisa Wray

The Original Reiki Tarot Solitaire and Other Spreads—all you need to know about Reiki Tarot is a new and original deck for cartomancy. Reiki Tarot soul cards employ Chakra, Numerology, Reiki and Tarot, legendary ancient arts for spiritual guidance and the art of divination for yourself or others if you so choose. If you're seeking a mystical connection by way of intuition, you can learn the Reiki Tarot by yourself or with help from an experienced Reiki Tarot practitioner.

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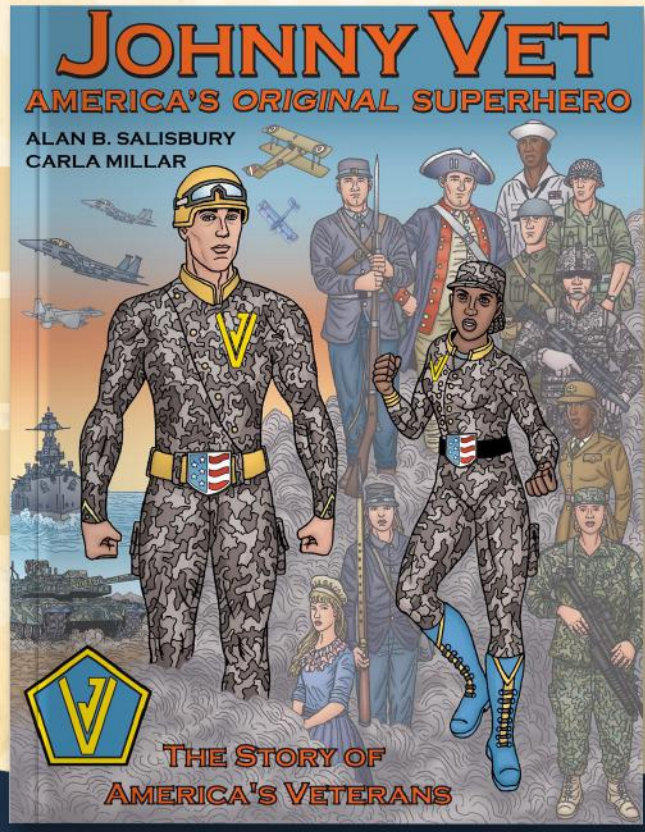


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Also includes an introduction to the armed forces including all six services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and the newest service, the Space Force.

Johnny Vet is the "everyman" of America's veterans throughout our history, and Jane is the "everywoman." They represent the millions of American men and women who, from 1775 to the present, have kept America strong and free. They are, indeed, America's original superheroes, and this is their story....



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MONSTERS AT THE MOVIES

John Candy: I Like Me

Grade: B+

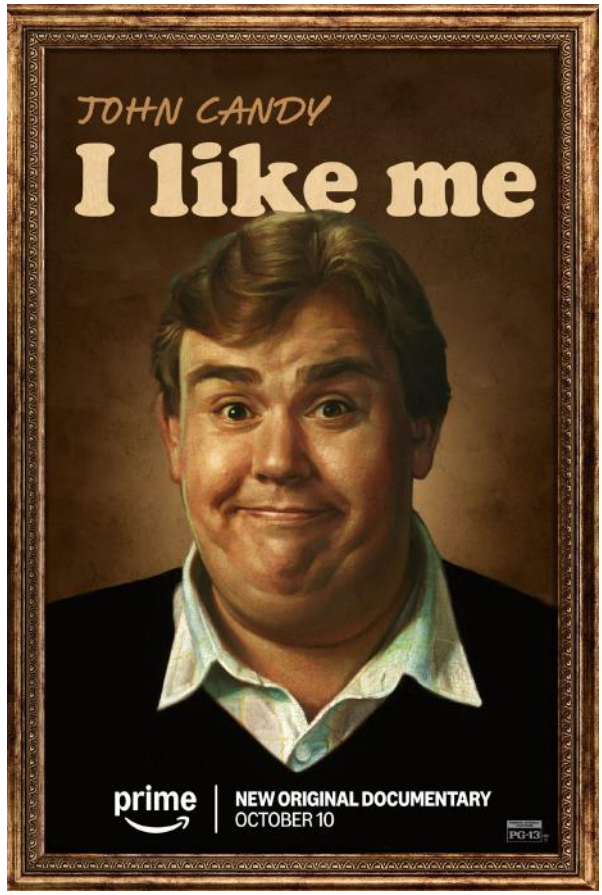
reviewed by Nick Spake

John Candy is often grouped with John Belushi and Chris Farley. All three were comedic geniuses, all three struggled with health issues, and all three were taken far too soon. These similarities aside, all three were unique individuals who couldn't be replaced. Belushi and Farley have both been the subjects of documentaries. It's about high time Candy got one. Director Colin Hanks and everyone else behind *John Candy: I Like Me* have nothing but love for the man. Fitting, since Candy had nothing but love to give, be it to his family, fans, co-stars, or a random person he passed on the street.

The documentary immediately hits the audience in the heart with footage of Candy's funeral. Like Belushi over a decade before and Farley three years later, Candy's death was shocking, yet not out of the blue. Those closest to Candy could see that he wasn't taking care of himself. Having lost his own father as a five-year-old, Candy always sensed that death was looming over him, even if his family didn't like to discuss the trauma. Yet, Candy has such a warm presence on and off screen that it was hard to imagine a world without him.

It hit especially hard knowing that Candy left two young children behind. Hanks interviews the now-grown-up Christopher and Jennifer, along with Candy's widow, Rosemary. Interviews extend to Candy's numerous collaborators, from Steve Martin, to Catherine O'Hara, to Mel Brooks, to Tom Hanks, the latter of whom probably wasn't hard for Colin Hanks to track down. They have no negative stories about Candy to share. The only one who even tries to come up with some "dirt" on Candy is Bill Murray, although even he cheekily struggles. One might argue that the film views Candy through rose-tinted glasses, but as Del Griffith says in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, "I'm the real article. What you see is what you get."

While Candy had his inner demons, he was about as genuine and generous as a person can be. Perhaps to a fault, as Candy's willingness to do favors led to him popping up in a few "turkeys," which journalists at the time seemed eager to point out. Years later, though, the turkeys have faded. Candy's memory lives on through his work in *SCTV, Splash, Spaceballs, National Lampoon's Vacation, Home Alone*, and *Uncle Buck*. It would've been nice if the documentary went into greater detail on some lesser-known Candy classics like *The Great Outdoors*



and *Only the Lonely*. Although not forgotten, his friendship with John Hughes also could've used a deeper dive. Who knows how many more films Hughes would've directed had Candy lived longer?

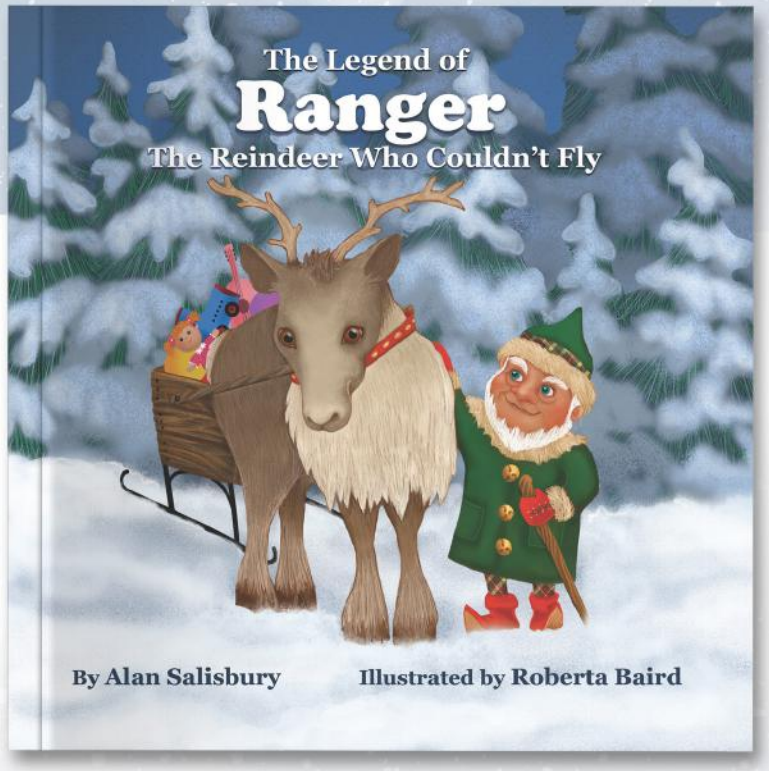
If you're looking for a further exploration of Candy's career, it's also worth checking out Joe Ramoni's YouTube channel, Hats Off Entertainment. For an account of Candy's life from those who knew him best, though, *I Like Me* is the definitive documentary. If you're not familiar with Candy's work, this film is a great place to start. For longtime Candy fans, it's an essential watch that'll have you laughing one minute and crying the next. If you like John Candy (and who doesn't?), it's impossible not to like this film. ●

Nick Spake is the author of *Bright & Shiny: A History of Animation at Award Shows Volume I*. For more information on the book, please visit CartoonContender.com.

A Magical New Story for the Christmas Season!

A young reindeer named Ranger has a big dream—to be part of the reindeer team that pulls Santa's big sleigh. Ranger searches all over Santaland for someone who can help him learn the secret of flying. But everyone he asks, including the elves, Mrs. Claus, and even his famous older brother, Rudolph, gives him the same advice: "The secret lies within."

The Legend of Ranger contains a heartening and inspirational message about the power of believing in yourself, no matter what challenges lie ahead.



All proceeds are donated to the Antonia J. Giallourakis Endowed Fund in Art Therapy for Children with Cancer at Massachusetts General Hospital.

opus-one-studios.myshopify.com/collections/ranger-collection



Giving It Up for *The Giving Tree*

by Judy Newman

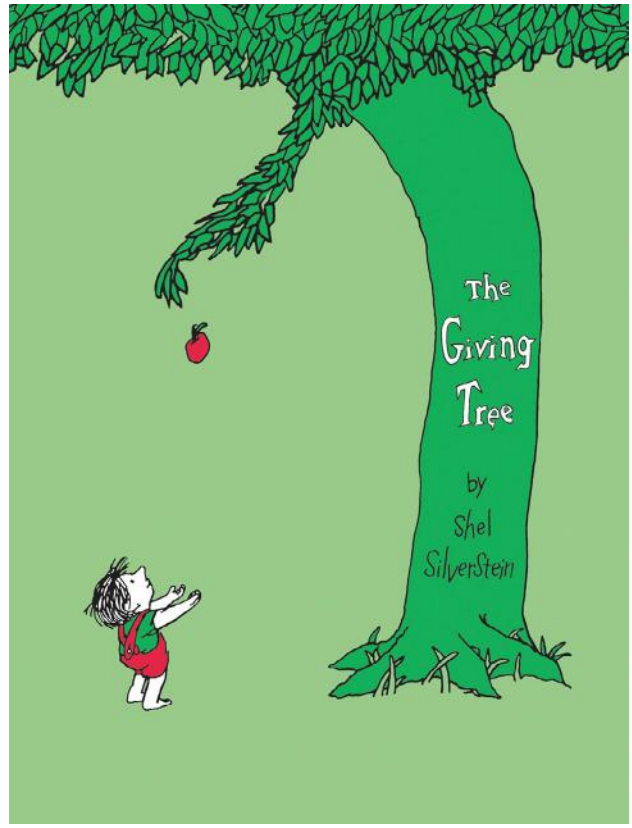
This time of year, many people I know are talking about giving: Giving Tuesday, the Giving Pledge, holiday gift giving (really, we say in my family, "This year—*only* gifts for the kids!").

Given all this talk about giving, I thought it was a good time to re-examine how I feel about Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, arguably one of the most hotly debated children's books ever published.

First of all, I think that any children's book that sparks debate for decades is worthy. As a children's book publisher, marketer, and author myself , I can tell you with confidence that it's very, very hard to make a lasting impact across generations with your book. *The Giving Tree* was first published in 1964, and gift givers, book lovers, feminists, tree huggers, book reviewers, and psychologists have been arguing about it ever since. That's quite an impact!

For 60+ years, readers have argued about whether the Tree is a sap or a saint. And debating whether the boy who becomes a man is a selfish taker or a cherished friend. No doubt: *The Giving Tree* strikes chords. And because of its ability to galvanize feelings and connect with so many people across generations, I believe it deserves a firm place on all shelves where children's literature lives. Said simply, everyone should read it.

The small people closest to me are a little too young to really get into a conversation about giving and gratitude and sacrifice and selflessness, but I do find my physical copy of *The Giving Tree* provides a wealth of entry points to discuss with my reading buddies how a book is made and where it comes from.



I love talking with kids about all the parts of the book—beyond the pages of the story and illustrations. The copyright page (*The Giving Tree* was published in 1964 situates it in an era in history); the dedication (Shel Silverstein dedicated *The Giving Tree* "To Nicky" and I encourage my young readers to try to figure out who Nicky is); the author photo (the picture of Shel Silverstein alarms some of my young friends but it does give us

an opportunity to explore Shel's past and the other aspects of his career—and his baldness).

The flap copy on the book (historically written by an editor who really understands how to synopsize the book) says *The Giving Tree* is "a tender story, touched with sadness, aglow with consolation. Shel Silverstein has created a moving parable for readers of all ages that offers an affecting interpretation of the gift of giving and a serene acceptance of another's capacity to love in return." Ursula Nordstrom was Shel Silverstein's editor at Harper, and I bet, like many excellent editors, she wrote that original flap copy.

When I went to my bookshelf to pick out my copy of *The Giving Tree*, I remembered that the jacket is green, unlike the other Silverstein children's books I own, which all have white jackets. Why, I wonder, did Ursula and Shel and the art director decide to make *The Giving Tree* jacket green? Was it just an ecological theme? Was green supposed to signal envy? Or was it just the color du jour in Harper & Row's art department?

Many books that have been out for years get repackaged with new covers and new marketing copy. But not *The Giving Tree*. To my knowledge, it has never been repackaged and is sold and read today in the same edition in which it was first published in 1964. I have one very good friend who worked at Harper & Row when *The Giving Tree* was first published, and I am going to call her to see if she remembers who worked on the jacket, flap copy, and color choices of this time-honored book that has remained the same for more than six decades.

As far as the story itself, my feelings are pendular. At certain times in my life, I read *The Giving Tree* as a boy abusing a tree's generosity, and it made me cringe. Today, I read it as a narcissism-free story of love and generosity.

I used to hate *The Giving Tree*. I was so upset that the boy who grew up to be a man took advantage of the tree who was giving wholly. I railed against the tree for having no spine and letting this abuse continue. But with age and experience, I have come to appreciate the sadness and reality of the story. Like Silverstein, I don't think we do right by kids to force-feed them only happy



endings. This is a sad book, but it is also about constancy and loyalty and acceptance, qualities I am finding all too rare in our step-over-the-other-guy cancel culture.

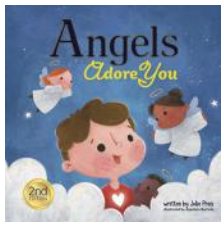
But most of all, whether you agree that *The Giving Tree* is about generosity or abuse—or both—it has achieved what we all want in a book: to spark interest and imagination and stay in print.

Season's Readings!

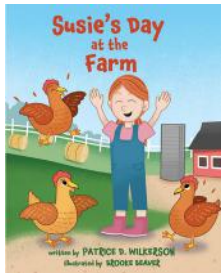
Judy ●

Judy Newman, Chief Impact Officer, Scholastic.

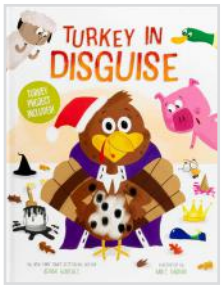
BOOK REVIEWS



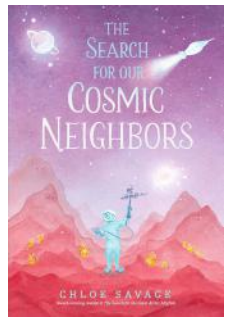
Angels Adore You
by Julie Marie Preis, Agustina Barriola (Independently Published)
Reviewer: Lindsay Moretti
A tender story that reminds readers we are never alone. Our guardian angels are always near, offering guidance and protection. Told in rhyme from the perspective of a loving parent, this heartfelt book encourages readers to release their worries and place their trust in the care of their angels. A comforting and faith-filled read, perfect for bedtime and quiet moments of reflection. (Ages baby-9)



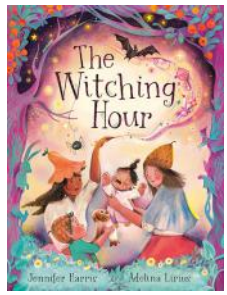
Susie's Day at the Farm
by Patrice Wilkerson, Brooke Beaver (Skippy Creek)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg
Introduce your kids to the excitement of a farm, as Susie joins her class for farm day. Not only does she get to see the sheep, chickens, and pigs, she also gets to ride on a horse and feed the goats. It's a full day of adventure and one that'll spark excitement and imagination in little readers. Super adorable illustrations complement the catchy, rhyming text. (Ages 2-6)



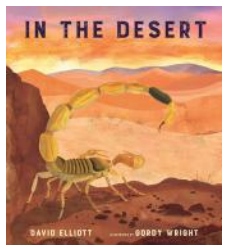
Turkey in Disguise
by Adam Wallace, Mike Moran (Silver Dolphin Books)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg
It's the festive fall November Ball and all the animals are invited and excited ... except for Turkey who thinks she's too drab and boring, and has nothing to wear. But what if she disguises herself? The ideas start flowing and the costumes are aplenty ... a dalmatian, a unicorn, a ninja, a pirate, and even a stinky big toe? Nothing seems to fit, until her friends give her the best idea yet. Join the party to see the solution and learn an important lesson about being yourself. Rhyming words, delightful artwork, and a creative turkey activity in the back complete the package. (Ages 2-8)



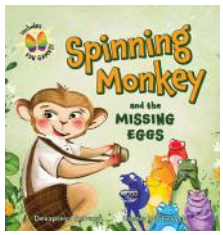
The Search for Our Cosmic Neighbors
by Chloe Savage (Candlewick Press)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg
Savage presents a creative way to introduce young readers to our universe, while using watercolor artwork to paint a magical picture of scientific quests. In the story, Commander Julia and her team have been in a rocket ship for a decade, trying to answer the question: Are we alone? But after visiting moons and planets of every size and color, they have gained no answers. See what happens when Commander Julia says they'll check one more planet before returning to Earth. Join the crew on their adventure in the universe in this magnificently illustrated tale. (Ages 3-7)



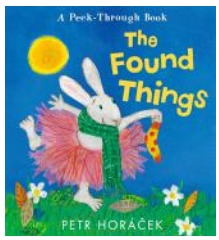
Annabelle and the Spaghetti-Confetti Surprise
by Jenna Beatrice, Annabel Tempest (Two Lions) Reviewer: Christine Irvin
Annabelle is a whiz at planning parties. Her parties are the best! When she is given the job of planning the neighborhood block party, she is determined that everything will go smoothly to make it her biggest and best party yet! Of course, things don't go quite as planned. Bright, colorful expressive illustrations pair perfectly with an amusing storyline to create a fun-filled book for everyone! (Ages 3-7)



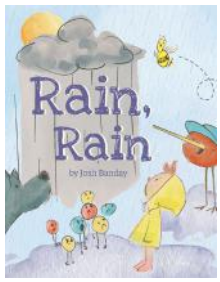
In the Desert
by David Elliott, Gordy Wright (Candlewick)
Reviewer: Christine Irvin
Author David Elliott shares the beauty and wonders of the Sahara's desert creatures, using short descriptive poems. Few words and vibrant illustrations create an intriguing picture of this harsh environment inhabited by a variety of creatures. The back matter of the book gives greater descriptions of the creatures featured in the text. (Ages 3-7)



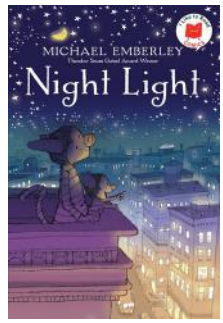
Spinning Monkey and the Missing Eggs
by Devapreya Selvaraj, Ksenia Markevych (Myactivecrab) Reviewer: Deb Greenberg
Join Spinning Monkey and his friends as they tackle the mystery of the missing eggs. The Rainbow Frogs' eggs disappear one by one each day. Can they work together as a team to figure out the thief before there are no more eggs? Little ones can use clues, logical thinking, and their imagination as they play detective. Complete with bright and colorful artwork, active play ideas, and interesting facts and activities in the back. (Ages 3-7)



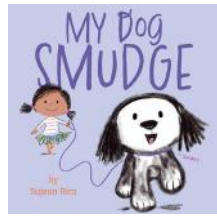
The Found Things
by Petr Horácek (Candlewick)
Reviewer: Christine Irvin
When Rabbit wakes up, he's ready for a walk. But he has a problem: he can find only one sock. Where is the other one? He decides to go on his walk anyway and looks for his sock along the way. Will he be able to find it? This is a "peek-through book" as readers can peek through some of the pages to see what's coming next. This interactive feature, short sentences, a cute premise, and colorful illustrations combine to make a delightful book for young readers. (Ages 3-7)



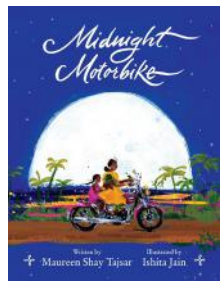
Rain, Rain
by Josh Banday (North Star Editions)
Reviewer: Christine Irvin
On a rainy, dreary day, a child must accompany his mother on errands. The child would much rather stay home, but since that is out of the question, he uses his imagination to escape the weather, burrowing into his raincoat where he goes into an imaginary room where he meets three friendly creatures. But one of them needs the child's help to overcome an invasion of Weeples. By the time the child has helped with the Weeple problem, the rain has stopped and the sun it out again. This is a fun and creative way to show kids how to deal with unwanted situations. (Ages 4-8)



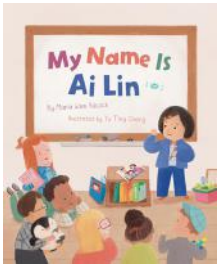
Night Light
by Michael Emberley (Holiday House)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg
The *I Like to Read Comics* series adds *Night Light* to its bright and energetic variety of children's graphic novels, perfect for new readers. When a blackout hits while a parent is reading a story, the child cries that it's too dark. When the parent snatches stars out of the sky to light up the room, the moon cries that it's too dark. Tune in to see the solution in this sweet tale from award-winning author Emberley. (Ages 4-8)



My Dog Smudge
by Sujean Rim (Atheneum Books for Young Readers)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg
When a little girl's dog doesn't bark like other dogs, she tries to figure out what exactly he's saying. Can any of the other animals understand Smudge's language? With eye-catching illustrations and lift-the-flaps of each barnyard friend, little readers will learn what Smudge has been trying to tell his owner. A super sweet story that'll be a wonderful addition to your child's book collection. (Ages 4-8)



Midnight Motorbike
by Maureen Shay Tajsar, Ishita Jain (Neal Porter Books) Reviewer: Christine Irvin
Join this mother and daughter as they ride through the jungles of southern India on the back of a motorbike. The book works well as a bedtime story. Its text, with descriptions of the sights and sounds and smells of the jungle will excite the imagination, and the warm illustrations will help soothe as the book is read aloud to a sleepy child. (Ages 4-8)



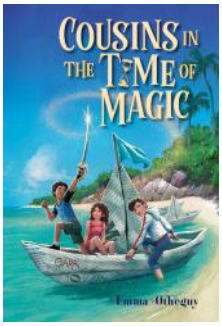
My Name Is Ai Lin
by Maria Wen Adcock, Yu Ting Cheng
(Sleeping Bear Press)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

What's in a name? Ai Lin's classmates are about to learn that a name can be a person's story, it's special and unique, and it's significant and often can have cultural connections. When her classmates can't say her name properly and ask if they can call her Eileen, Ai Lin explains that Ai means "love" and Lin means "gem" in Chinese. Her name is part of her identity and has ties to her family and its traditions. Along with expressive illustrations, the story teaches us to make the effort to say someone's name correctly, and includes Chinese naming traditions and the author's personal connection in the back. (Ages 5-8)



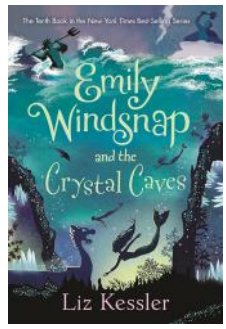
Spark: Jim West's Electrifying Adventures in Creating the Microphone
by Ainissa Ramirez, Setor Fiadzigbey
(MIT Kids Press)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

The enlightening story of inventor Jim West is the subject of the first picture book in the *Black Innovators* series. West had an interest in anything electric and went on to patent the foil-electret microphone, which is an important part of everything from cell phones to hearing aids, transforming how the world communicates today. In the process, West paved the way for many scientists of color to follow. Additional detailed information about West is included in the back. Super interesting and informative. (Ages 5-9)



Cousins in the Time of Magic
by Emma Otheguy
(Athenium Books for Young Readers)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Cousins Jorge, Camila, and Siggy are transported back to 1862 via a large clay pot in their aunt's backyard in this historical action-adventure tale. Their trek takes them to Mexico where they see how much U.S. history has been shaped by Latin communities, and they play an important role in the Battle of Puebla, the reason Cinco de Mayo is celebrated today. Otheguy offers an incredibly interesting and educational middle grade fantasy adventure with black-and-white illustrations throughout. (Ages 8-12)



Emily Windsnap and the Crystal Caves
by Liz Kessler, Erin Farley
(Candlewick)
Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Emily Windsnap is a semi-mer. That means she is a human when on land but her legs turn into a mermaid's tail when she is in the water. As such, she is able to swim underwater for indefinite periods of time. While swimming around deep in the ocean, Emily and her friends uncover a mystery, something so profound and unsettling that it could alter life on the planet forever. Emily and her friends face the challenge head-on in a valiant effort to thwart a disaster. (Ages 8-12)



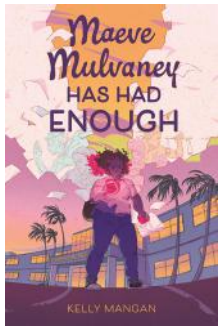
Rise of the Spider
by Michael P. Spradlin
(Margaret K. McElderry Books)
Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Rolf and his older brother, Romer, live in Bavaria, Germany. World War I is over, but there is major unrest across Europe, particularly in Germany where many citizens are disgruntled with the terms of a treaty that was signed to end the war. Author Michael P. Spradlin gives readers a ringside seat showcasing the events of the time as seen through the eyes of 12-year-old Rolf. Rolf sees Hitler as a menace to the country, but Romer is sucked into the idea that Hitler can make things right. The book is well written. Although it is fiction, the narrative contains lots of facts and trivia about the war. Ages 8-12)



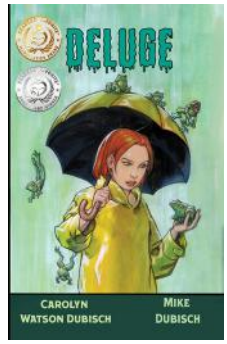
Planet Perfect
by Amy Bearce
(Jolly Fish Press)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

When aliens landed on Earth 20 years ago, all they left behind was an alien reality TV channel that became Earth's obsession. Fourteen-year-old Meg becomes one of two Earth teens invited to Planet Perfect, which makes its own clean energy with zero waste. With her desire to fight climate change, Meg must learn this technology, but in the process, she learns a lot more about Planet Perfect's secrets. Part of a Hi-Lo set of books with engaging and fast-paced themes, and easy-to-read sentence structures, making them ideal for tween reluctant readers. Highly recommended. (Ages 10+)



Maeve Mulvaney Has Had Enough
by Kelly Mangan
(Holiday House)
Reviewer: Christine Irvin

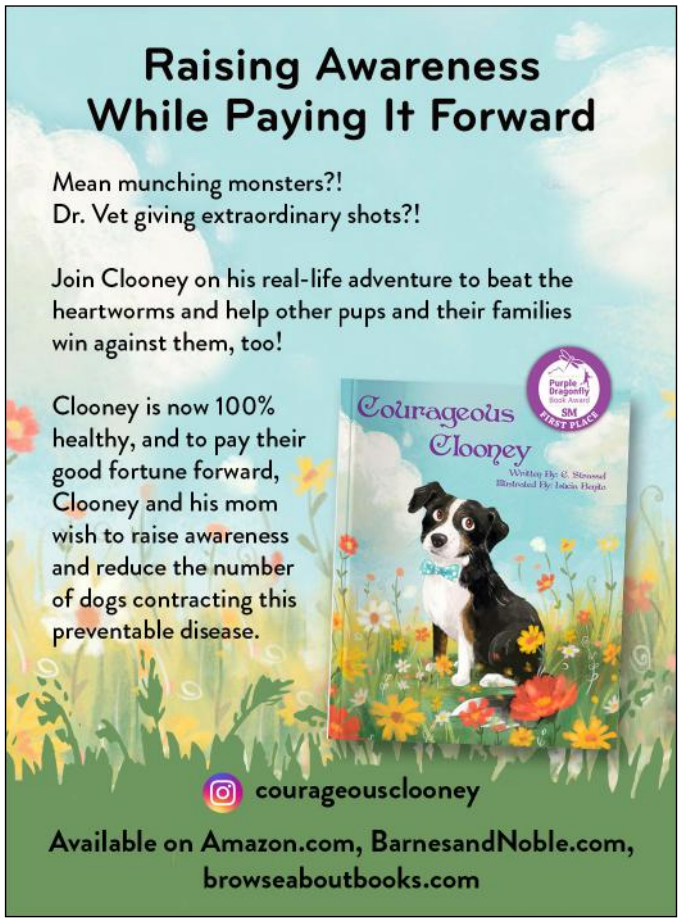
Author Kelly Managan tackles many topics in this middle grade novel. The main topic is bullying, but in the process of presenting that theme, Managan hits on many other issues, such as discrimination, transgender and sexual orientation issues, the definition of literature, and the value of comic books and the value of art. Although this was a good story and one very much worth reading, I was disappointed that Maeve's parents never acknowledged Maeve's talents for drawing comic art and her passion for reading these books and wanting to create them herself. (Ages 10-14)



Deluge
by Carolyn Watson Dubisch, Mike Dubisch
(Abigail Books)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Book one in this mysterious graphic novel series follows 12-year-old Laura, whose mother decides to move them from Seattle to Deluge, a strange town in the mid-west where hundreds of frogs rain from the sky and the woman in a painting in her school library calls out to her. A suspenseful storyline complemented with eerie artwork that's bound to captivate readers and keep them on the edge of their seats. (Ages 11-18)

To submit your book for review, email Cristy Bertini at cristy@storymonsters.com for submission guidelines.





Q&A WITH

LISA MANTCHEV

by Julianne Black DiBlasi

Anyone who has ever had a giraffe as a best friend understands how difficult it is to find common ground to enjoy together. Taking a walk is a struggle to find a good pace that both of you can enjoy. Meals are vastly different. And of course, the ladder to the tree house is right out. But no matter the season or reason, best friends stick together—and sometimes that means finding a middle ground that works for everyone.

Quite often (I'm sure you can relate), we find it's simply impossible to have a treehouse social event with narwhals, elephants, armadillos, and, yes, giraffes. But if we want all our friends to be there, the party just needs to be relocated to a venue with a bit more flexibility.

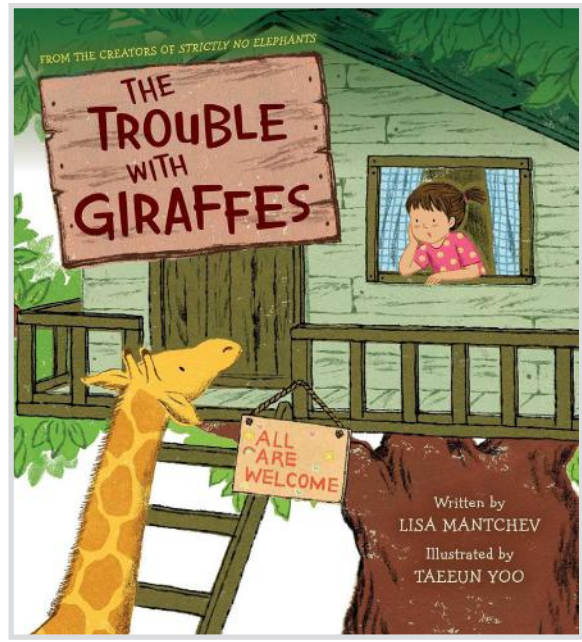
In life, adjustments are a part of growing and maintaining friendships, goodwill, and positive community engagement. The treehouse and animal friendships in this book offer a thoughtful way to understand the big picture of inclusion while breaking it down into mini vignettes of adorable comparisons and solutions.

The basics of walking, eating, and spending time with a giraffe present a kaleidoscope of new paradigms to see differences in everyday life and the importance of making it work when occasionally things get a tiny bit inconvenient.

A delightful tale of inclusion and kindness, *The Trouble with Giraffes* by Lisa Mantchev is a keeper with smiles to spare, and I was thrilled to catch up with her for a few questions!

Q: What inspired *The Trouble with Giraffes*? Was there a particular moment or idea that sparked the story? Or something about giraffes in general that caught your attention specifically for an inclusion theme?

A: When Paula Wiseman approached me about doing a companion book for *Strictly No Elephants*, the first question, really, was "Which animal do we want to showcase this time?" There were so many great options, but I wanted something that would focus on the physical differences



between the child and their animal friend, so the giraffe felt like a natural choice for that. (I might also be a bit biased, because I'm almost six feet tall, and I know the struggle of trying to fit in places that were not built for me.)

Q: I've always thought of giraffes as an animal of equal parts graceful and awkward, but your illustrator, Taeeun Yoo, created a sweet and thoughtful creature, eager to help and be involved. In fact, the kindness of all the characters really radiates through the artwork. How involved were you in the art direction, and what was your reaction to the final product?

A: The illustrator needs room to do their thing, because the final product isn't MY book, it's OUR book. I did make a list of animal friends that I would love to see in the parade of friends in *Strictly*, and I do leave notes in brackets if they are important to the narrative but not included in the text.

All the magic that makes the animal friends in both books so sweet is entirely Taeeun's, and I love seeing every part of her process, from sketches to finished illustrations. I think because our shared journey spans more than a decade, seeing the finalized artwork for *Trouble* was especially momentous.

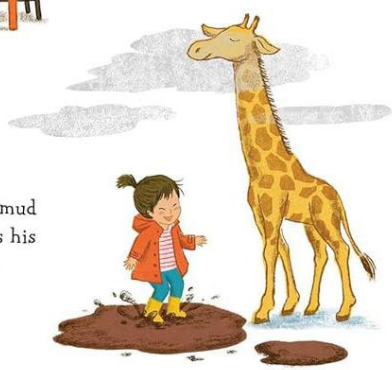
Q: So many excellent books feature animals as characters. They help build a connection with readers that transcends the personal attributes we use to identify how well we relate to each other. In your own experience, how do animals help children understand human emotions and relationships?

A: My own kids have grown up in a house full of rescues (both dogs and cats) and owned fish, rats, and (for a VERY brief stint) a snake. When children take on the responsibility of caring for the animals of the house, they get gentle lessons in helping creatures who cannot necessarily help themselves in



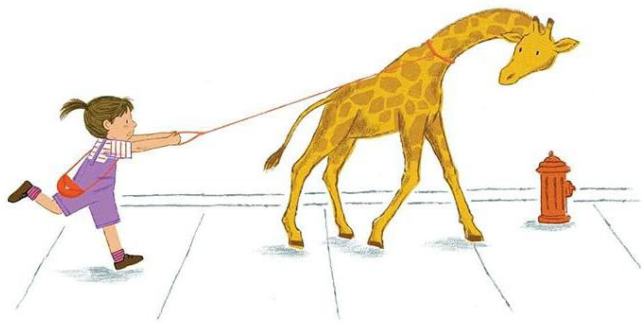


I choose soup, while he gets the salad.



I like to jump in mud puddles, and he has his head in the clouds.

When we need to get to exactly the right place at exactly the same time, I have to hurry up my short legs while he slows down his long legs.



Because that's what friends do: they find ways to meet in the middle.



given time. They learn about consent. They also hopefully learn what it's like to be in a position of power over something, and understand what a huge responsibility and privilege that is.

Q: There are some beautiful resources available at simonandschuster.com for educators about using books that highlight emotions, as well as a fun activity packet! What advice do you have for teachers using *The Trouble with Giraffes* in the classroom to get the discussion moving about empathy and inclusion?

A: Lean into the message that we are stronger when we work together. There are a lot of great improvisational theater games that require players to cooperate (mentally AND physically) to achieve a goal. Even something as simple as having everyone get in a clump, grab hands, and then work together to "untie the knot" teaches little ones about communication, teamwork, and patience. Some of the very best games don't need someone to lose for everyone to win.

Q: In addition to the activities that go along with the book, how can families extend the story experience at home during playtime, out doing errands, or through discussions?

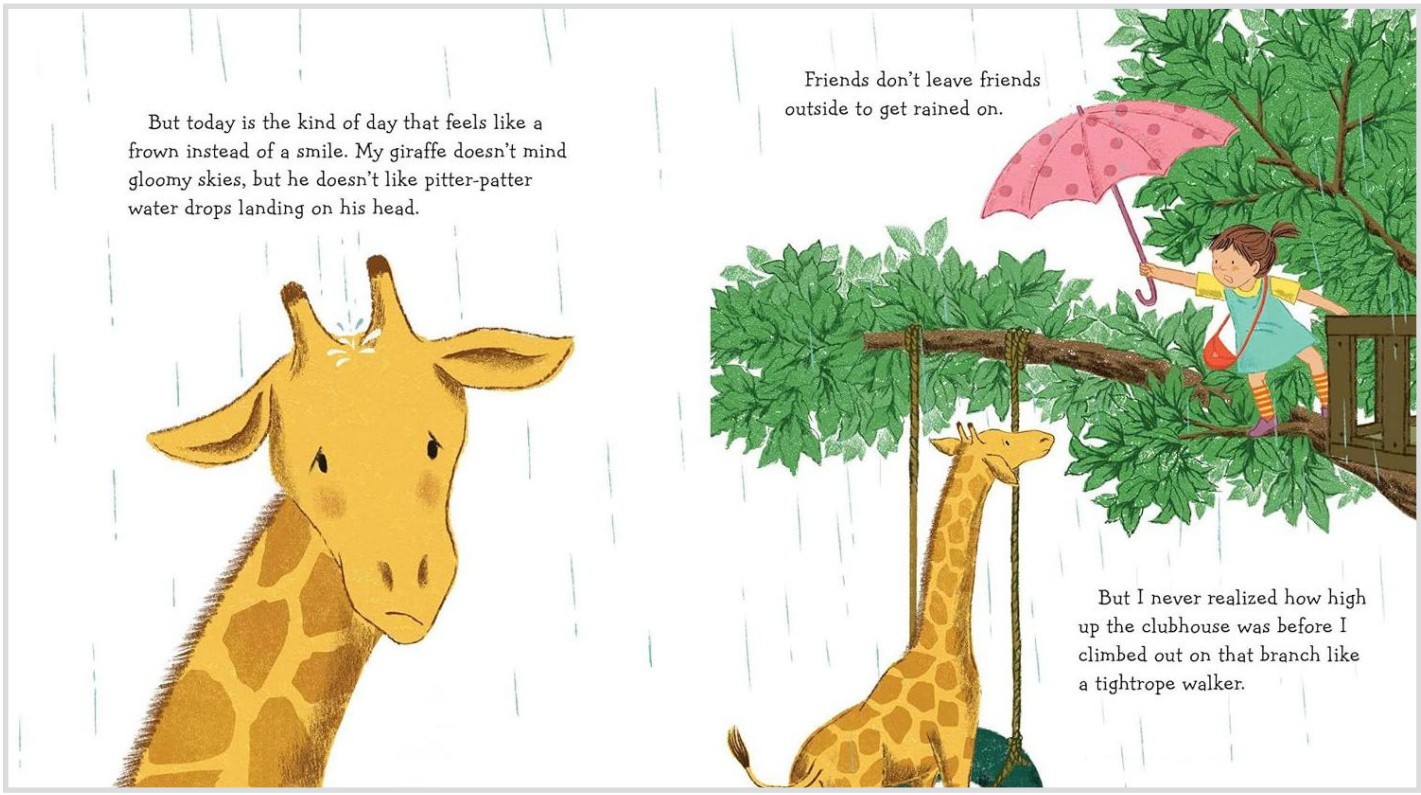
A: It's all about asking questions until they ask themselves those questions. Are we being mindful? Are we being kind? Children are enormously empathetic when injustice is clear to them, but they might need gentle explanations about more complicated situations.

Q: If you could add a tagline or a phrase that kids, teachers, and caregivers could repeat as a reminder to strive for a more inclusive environment, what would it be?

A: "Because that's what friends do..." is in both *Strictly* and *Trouble*, and I don't think I can top that.

Q: How has the response been since the release last month? Are there any stories you can share about the most surprising or touching reactions you've received from readers or teachers?

A: I've had an absolutely delightful time reconnecting with booksellers, teachers, librarians, and readers. The adults have been lovely in their excitement to see *Trouble*... I think my favorite take-away from that was "I wasn't sure how you'd follow up *Strictly*, but it's perfect." It's also great to see how many kids lit up at the sight of both books, saying "I have that



book!" or "We've read that book!" when the tiny elephant's story has been out for 10 years. It's wonderful to know it still has a place on many shelves.

Q: I always love to ask: where were you, and what was your reaction to seeing the final printed version of the book? Who was the first person you shared it with?

A: I'm almost always home, so I would have seen final art and/or the first finished copy in my office, surrounded by dogs and vintage typewriters and the dollhouse I've been decorating and all my D&D stuff. My family always gets the first look, and then I have several folks I call to yodel at when there's good news.

Q: Can you give our Story Monsters any hints about what you're working on next?

A: I am currently editing two different picture books and an adult fantasy novel. There's always something going on the desk or in my noggin.

For more information about Lisa Mantchev and her work, visit **lisamantchev.com**. ●



Julianne Black DiBlasi • Mom, wielder of pixel, paint, and pen. krakenSky.com

THE BOOK BUG

KATIE CICATELLI-KUC

Pens a Cozy New YA Romance

by Raven Howell

Hudson Valley author Katie Cicatelli-Kuc is no newbie to writing and the literary world. Today, she's a ***New York Times*** and *USA Today* bestselling author, and readers continue to fall for her YA romance, *Pumpkin Spice & Everything Nice*. But prior to her success, Katie spent many years working for children's publishers in various editorial roles.

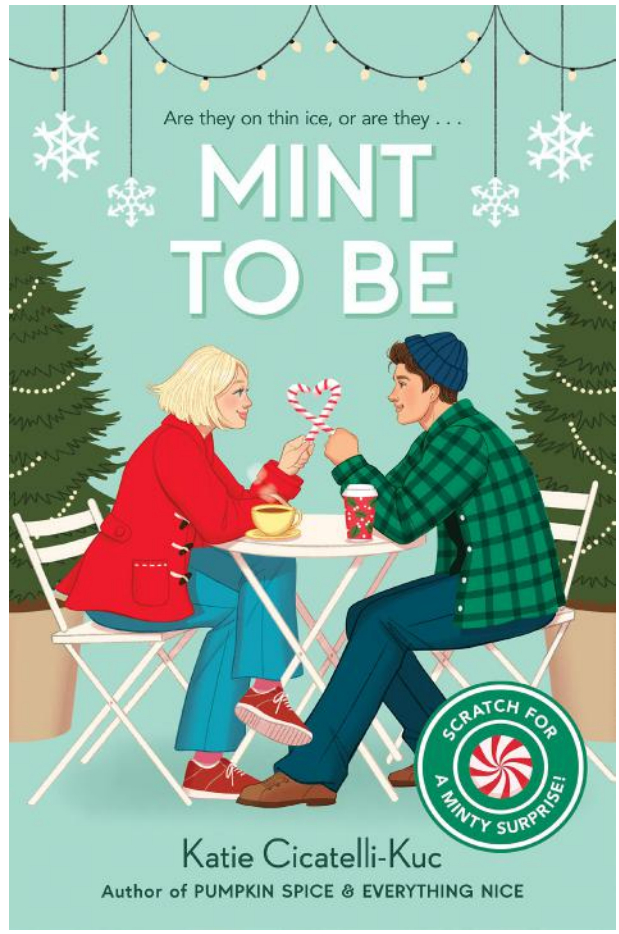
"I always knew I wanted to be a writer, an author, but I also thought for a while that I wanted to be a veterinarian because I love animals. Ultimately though," she confides, "I knew I didn't have the heart (or stomach) that such a courageous job required."

"I can't ever remember not writing," she muses. "I took the obsession to something I focused on in college (creative writing). After I graduated, I worked in kids publishing for a long time as a copy editor. I got to read all day! But after a while I realized I wanted to be the one writing the stories too. I started with *Thomas the Train* books, and soon I was lucky enough to turn writing into a full-time job."

Katie was raised in Wisconsin until the age of seven. "The winters were long and cold, but I loved the snow (and my birthday is the first day of winter!). Then my family moved to Florida, which I wasn't happy about at first because Florida is hot. Really hot. Eventually I grew to accept its beauty, though I think I appreciated it more when I moved to New York City after college."

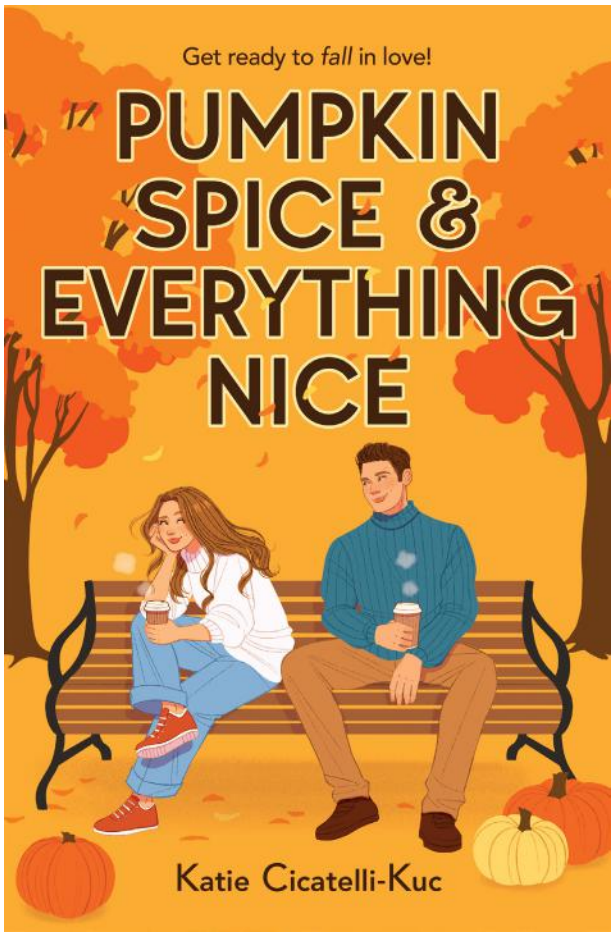
"My first published piece was in the kids' section in the local newspaper when I was in second grade. It was based on a prompt about what we wish we could change about school, and I wrote about how I wished I could bring my dogs to school. I also made little magazines about my dogs, and I have notebooks full of stories and journals. I loved reading too. My first favorite books were the Ramona Quimby books by Beverly Cleary. I liked that she wrote about 'real' imperfect families."

A fun fact: Katie was in fourth grade when she got her first cat. It was joyfully assigned the name "Ramona," after the Beverly Cleary books.



In recent years, Katie's book catalog has blossomed. She has authored several young adult novels, various collections for young readers, and nonfiction for adults. The brand new, *Mint to Be*, was recently released to much fanfare.







"*Mint to Be* has links to *Pumpkin Spice and Everything Nice*. Many scenes take place at Cup o' Jo, the same coffee shop in *Pumpkin Spice*, and Lucy, the main character, makes several appearances in *Mint*," she reveals.

"In this story, we meet Emma and her best friend, Aiden. It's the holidays, and Emma is returning to Briar Glen after attending boarding school in New York City. Aiden should be excited to see Emma, but she left for school without saying bye to him, and before he got a chance to tell Emma about his true feelings for her. To make things worse, Emma has brought her new boyfriend with her. The story is told from Emma's and Aiden's alternating points of view, and also features flashbacks to moments of their friendship, many of which occur while they're drinking peppermint hot chocolate. In this story, we also meet Mackerel, Aiden's dog, and there are some very 'sweet' moments with him."

"Both *Pumpkin Spice* and *Mint to Be* take place in a town that is a lot like the one I live in! As far as my characters, I base them on friends I had in high school, and ways I felt in high school. Feelings that range from heartache to the sense of love and security and comfort I had with my family and friends."

"Sometimes writing doesn't feel like a choice, but like something I have to do," Katie tells me. "And I don't mean just because I have a deadline! There is never any telling where or when inspiration may strike me, but when it does, the characters won't stop bugging me until I write about them. That's not to say I don't get stuck sometimes, because I do. When writer's block sets in I may try writing a different part of the story, or I may pivot to a completely different writing project. Or, sometimes, I do something as simple as taking a walk. Fresh air is clarifying."

"I've written a little bit of everything: books for kids learning how to read, four young adult romance novels, and short stories and essays for adults. It feels impossible to pick a favorite genre; I love all of them for different reasons—the early readers for encouraging literacy, the young adult novels



and short stories for getting to dig in deep with my characters, and the essays for the mental explorations I've been able to go on, about myself, and about the world around me."

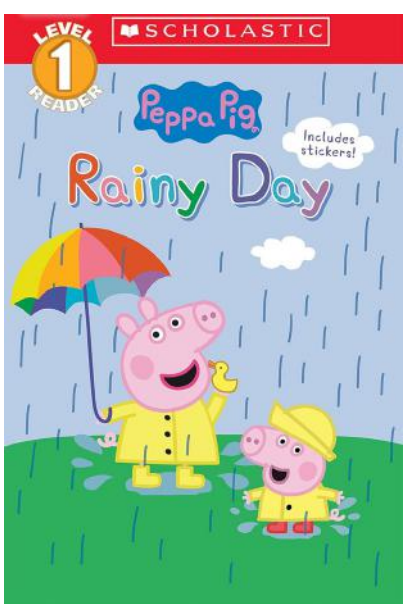
The world around Katie these days, in her own words, is "a bit scattered! I don't have a set schedule, and my husband, a pilot, doesn't either, so every day is different. I try to write when my daughter is at school, but that doesn't always happen for a multitude of reasons, so I often find myself seeking out time here and there at night. I also don't have a designated office, so I write anywhere from my dining room table to my couch, to a coffeeshop or the library."

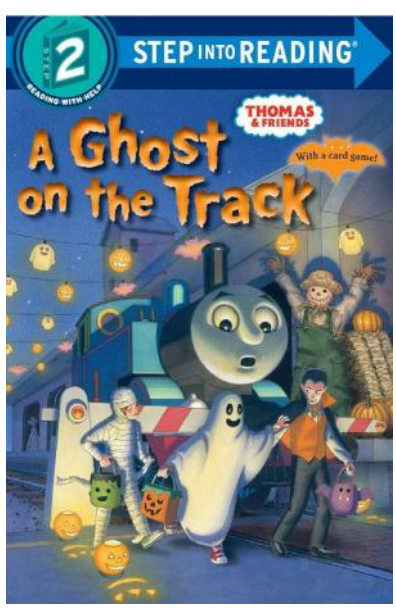
Local communities are important to Katie. Not only can you run into her writing the next bestseller at a café, but she considers the neighborhood literary institutions a stronghold.

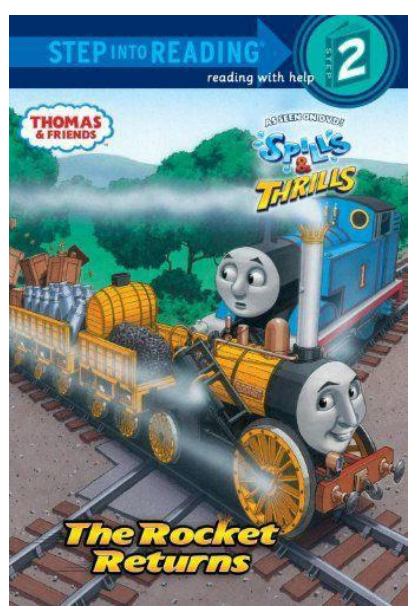
"Bookstores and libraries are a community's most valuable resource, for children and for adults. They give kids the opportunity to sift through piles of books, full of stories that can teach kids about people who may be different from them, and they are also places for kids to meet characters who are just like them. Now, more than ever, it's essential that these safe spaces exist, that we continue to learn about ourselves, and about others."

For more information about Katie and her books, visit **katiecicatelli.com**. ●

Raven Howell is an award-winning children's author and poet. **ravenhowell.com**







CONRAD'S CLASSROOM

SCIENCE DAYDREAMING ON A FALL AFTERNOON

by Conrad J. Storad • photos by Conrad J. Storad



Growing up in the 1960s, wetlands in northeast Ohio were both a playground and laboratory for me and my friends. Photo by Conrad J. Storad

Growing up in the 1960s, my friends and I spent a lot of time "playing" in the woods and wetlands near our neighborhood. Part of the tangled growth and swamp actually covered an old landfill.

We tromped through muck and waded in multicolored slime trying our best to catch turtles and frogs. Thinking back, we never really worried about what the colors floating on top of the water might be. Maybe we should have. Luckily, we never spotted turtles with two heads or frogs with extra legs.

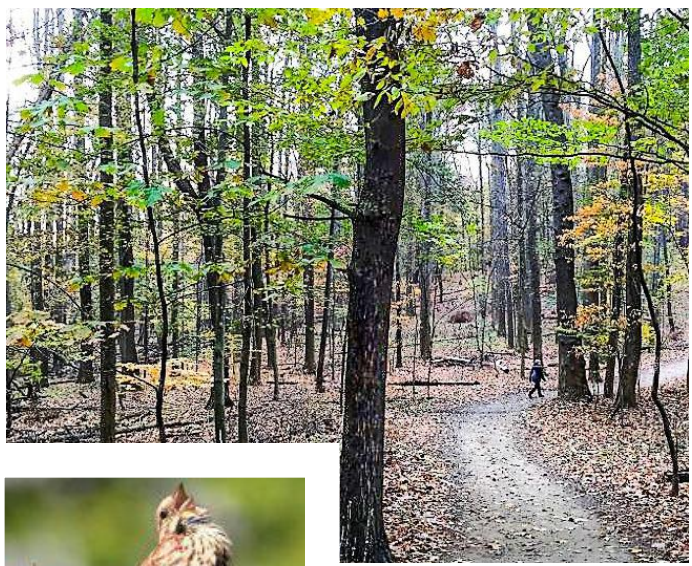
Rotten logs and pieces of rusty sheet metal tucked into the high weeds were potential treasure troves. On lucky days, striped snakes or big spiders lurked below. They were always returned after we proudly "showed" Mom our finds.

We got dirty as we reveled amidst nature's wonders without knowing that we were learning at the same time. Mom wasn't always happy about the dirty clothes part of our "learning."

All that "fun" fueled my curiosity to know even more. I often jotted observations in a lined school notebook. Sometimes I made rough sketches detailing the creatures we saw and captured. Little did I know then, but I was enjoying my own rudimentary "preschool" for becoming a science writer.















Clockwise from top left. 1) Bumblebees understand "working for a living!" 2) American Painted Lady on the butterfly bush. 3) Big snapping turtle in local camouflage. 4) Dragonfly at rest. 5) Pollinators come in all shapes and colors. 6) Stop. Look. Listen. The birds are all around you. 7) Nothing like a long afternoon autumn hike in the woods to clear the mind. Photos by Conrad J. Storad.

Plenty of scientists have similar memories. Some of these scientists are gifted writers. Their essays and musings about the wonderful world we live in make for fantastic and inspirational reading.

Many of their books have been part of my education as a science writer. I want to share with you a special book list. Call it my basic reading list of science daydreams.

Below are some of my favorite books, with excerpts. Perhaps these bits of amazing science and nature writing will pique your interest in learning more. ●

Book List for Science Daydreaming:

A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold

"Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language."

The Lives of a Cell (Notes of a Biology Watcher) by Lewis Thomas

"The Earth is like a single cell… I have been trying to think of the Earth as a kind of organism, but it is a no go. I cannot think of it this way. It is too big, too complex, with too many working parts lacking visible connections… If not like an organism, what is it like, what is it most like? Then, satisfactorily for that moment, it came to me: it is most like a single cell."

The Sting of the Wild by Justin O. Smith

"Children are born naturalists whose play is exploration of the environment surrounding them. Throughout most of human history, that surrounding environment was nature itself, a nature filled with sights, sounds, and smells of plants, animals, and the landscape."

The Medusa and the Snail (More Notes of a Biology Watcher) by Lewis Thomas

The medusa is a tiny jellyfish, a parasite that lives on the surface of a sea slug found in the Bay of Naples. These two organisms depend on each other for their survival. At various stages of their lives, their roles as predator and prey are reversed. What a confusion, what a mix-up of selfness! The thought of these creatures gives me an odd feeling. They do not remind me of anything, really. They are bizarre, that's it, unique. And at the same time, like a vaguely remembered dream, they remind me of the whole earth at once."

Sonoran Desert Summer by John Alcock

"Most human injuries caused by Gila monsters (and by rattlesnakes, for that matter) occur when a captive specimen is mishandled by its captor. Robert L. Smith of the University of Arizona warns that a person who finds his hand in the viselike grip of a tenacious Gila monster may well have to pry the animal's jaws apart with a stick to regain control of his hand. This vivid advice suggests that it is best not to fondle Gila monsters."

A Sting in the Tale (My adventures with Bumblebees) by Dave Goulson

"It is a common misapprehension that there is just one species of bee: they have yellow and black stripes, and they sting; they live in wooden boxes where they are looked after by bearded old men in funny hats and white suits; they pollinate crops and wildflowers; and they produce honey. Of course, by now you know that is untrue. There are perhaps 25,000 species of bee in the world. "

Conrad J. Storad is the national award-winning author or editor of more than 50 science and nature books for children and young adults. His first book in a new series, *Night Watchers: Nocturnal Creatures of North America*, is out now. **conradjstorad.com**

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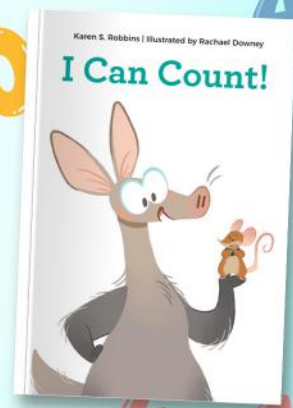
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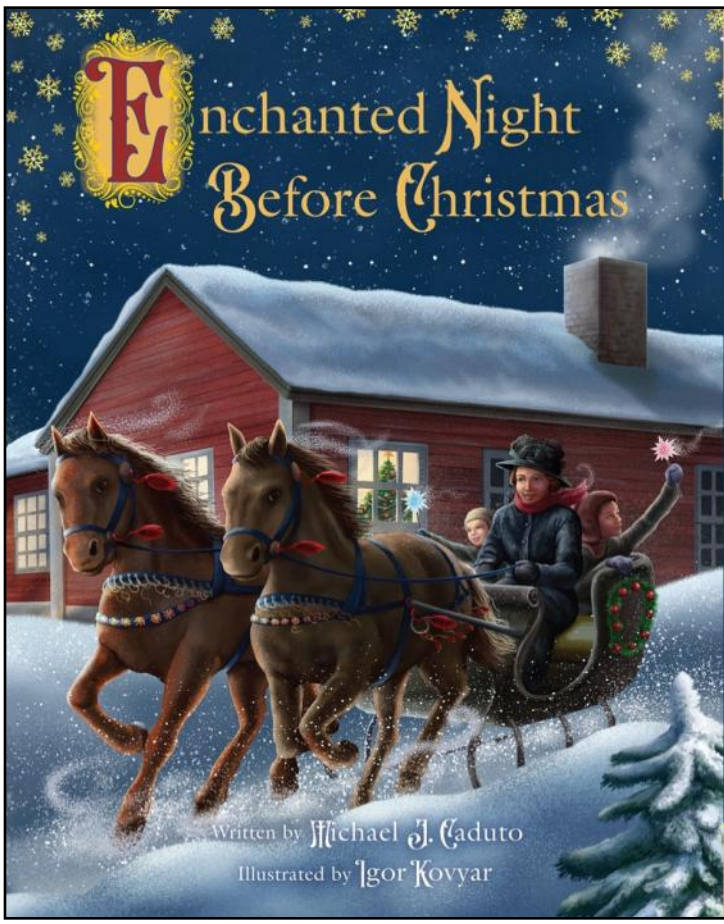
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LIV
ON LIFE

Coping When Our Daily Lives Seem Rife with Never-Ending Instability

by Olivia Amiri

Issues can be polarizing and overwhelmingly disarming. Seeking them out is easy; problems aren't hard to find. You only need to open up a browser in an electronic device to locate websites and platforms with a wealth of almost any type of injustice or conflict. In not even a second of hitting enter, you are greeted by a stream of generated articles, photos, and videos.

In the morning over breakfast, the faces of men and women on the news are crinkled, standing somewhere in front of something terrible. One could say to turn off the TV. Lower the volume. But you can't. These problems are not fabrications, and ignoring them merely stalls until you find them unearthed in dinner table conversation.

Most times, the volume dial is the only control you might have—you are so far away, unable to do anything for these vacant-eyed children and starving families walking away from ruin. You can just make it quieter, and sometimes you must, for the helplessness crowds your thoughts and you become numb.

This has created a population that is attracted to large problems and large solutions as we have become conditioned to accepting conflict and injustice in a routine sort of way. Each day the death tolls of various incidents become simply that. Tolls, numbers, measurements—whatever applied expletives to soothe the injustice and make us feel like the numbers are digestible, easy digits and not breathing people.

It would be wrong to assume that we play no part in these horrors occurring so very far away, but it seems at times like distance renders us barred from any influence. What is necessary is an adjustment of our current coping mechanism. "Ignorance is bliss" and so is silence, and in turning the volume down to an indecipherable murmur, we feel less uncomfortable, but their cries are smothered.

Seventeen-year-old Olivia Amiri is a little girl with big advice! Sharing insights and observations on the world around us, her message is clear: kids are still the best teachers to remind grown-ups of the simple joys in life. **livamiri.com**

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Embark on Adventures

with Logan and Louella!

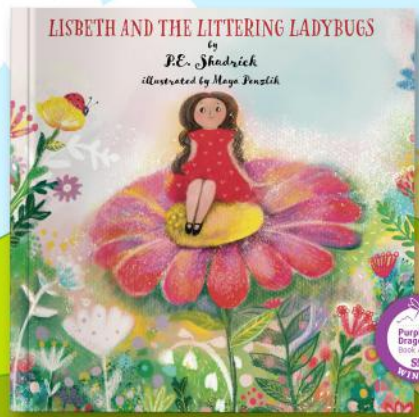
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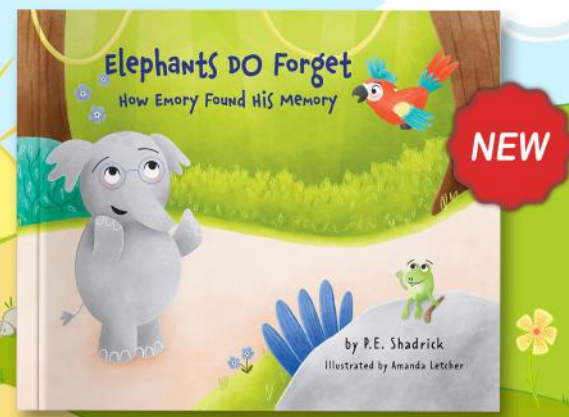
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Autumn Treasures Scavenger Hunt!

- ☐ Dry leaves
- ☐ Pinecones
- ☐ Small twigs
- ☐ Smooth rocks or pebbles
- ☐ A rain puddle to splash in
- ☐ A leaf pile to run in



*Bonus Activity:

Make a bug hotel with your treasures!
Find a sheltered spot outside. Lay a few pinecones flat on the ground for the base, and stick twigs in between the scales to hold them together. Stack up your pinecone bases, and fill in any gaps with dry leaves. Make a border of smooth rocks or pebbles, and add a roof over your hotel using two pieces of cardboard, flat pieces of wood, or tiles to keep it dry!



Illustration & activity by Anny Chen.
I love illustrating for children. If you'd like to explore more of my work, visit: www.annychen.art

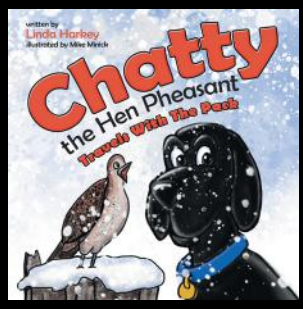
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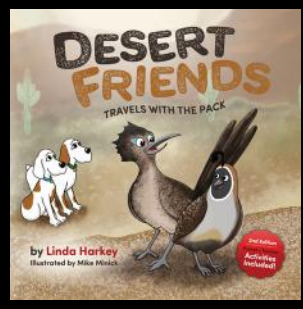
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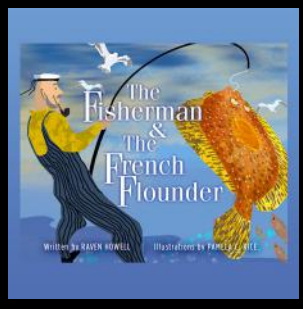
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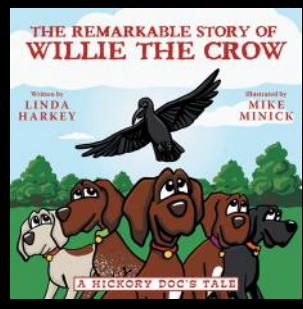


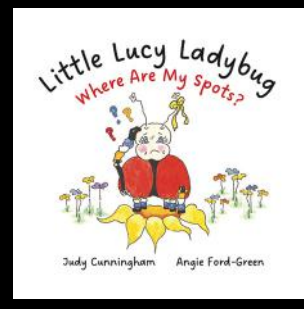












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