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JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 25 Years!

Welcome to our Winter issue! JDLA is thrilled to be celebrating its 25th year. A heartfelt thank-you to everyone who has been a part of our journey. In this issue you'll find essays from Jennifer De Chiara, Marie Lamba, and Stephen Fraser, and some fun photos from the past 25 years. Thanks for reading!

How JDLA Began

Jennifer De Chiara,
President/Owner/Agent

I started this agency from the drop leaf kitchen table of my studio apartment in Manhattan. I remember putting my landline phone handset on it, along with a pen, and wondering what else I'd need. Years later, I ended up with an office in a skyscraper on Park Avenue, with receptionists and conference rooms and even full kitchens.



After years spent pursuing careers as a dancer and actress that never really materialized, I'd been searching for a career: something creative that would let me use my writing talent, but something where I could make money. I was tired of being poor.

I tried a lot of different jobs in the writing world, but nothing felt right. Then one day I went to jury duty – I almost didn't – and it changed my life. I met a woman who'd been a best-selling author in 1929 and 1930 (she was in her late eighties at the time); although she was still writing every day, her agents had all died, and her husband who had managed her career had recently passed away. I decided to help her get published.

After she assured me that I couldn't get arrested for starting a phony literary agency, that's exactly what I did. I called it The NGU Literary Agency; the NGU stood for "Never Give Up," sort of my life's theme. I am the daughter of Italian immigrants, grew up poor, and, honestly, that theme was sometimes the only thing that kept me going.

I didn't know the first thing about getting someone published, aside from having sent out some of my short stories in the past, but I was determined to help my friend. I had a job working evenings as a legal proofreader, but my days were free, so I tried to learn everything I could about what an agent did. I'd already finished editing some of her work, and it was ready to be submitted to publishers, but I had no idea how to do that. Anyway, I went to the library, went to bookstores, and tried to figure out how to submit manuscripts to publishers. All those years ago, there wasn't much out there on publishing, or, at least, I couldn't find much. But one thing I did find out: agenting seemed to be an accumulation of all the things I loved: books, writing, editing, and working with creative people.

My friend suggested that I become a real agent and start a real agency. My response: "No way. I'm a creative person, not a business person, and agents are leeches." (I'd had my own experiences with agents as a dancer and actress.) She disagreed and said she thought I'd make a great agent, and that agenting was a wonderful, nurturing career. Normally, I would have just dismissed her comment, but this time I resolved to seriously consider it.

That's when the phony agency became a real agency. My friend had a lot of writer friends, and before I knew it, I had fifteen clients. I didn't want to mislead any of them, so I told them I had no idea what I was doing, but I would figure it out. Their responses were all the same: "You can't be any worse than the agent I already have."

I ended up taking a publishing course with an established New York City agency (I realized that I needed more guidance, especially with negotiating contracts), and they invited me to be an agent at their agency. They said: "You don't just wake up one morning with absolutely no experience in publishing and start your

own literary agency.” (I didn’t know I couldn’t do that, so I did.) I stayed with them for a year and eight months. At that point, I figured I’d learned everything they could teach me, and I’ve always had an independent streak; I wanted my own agency. I didn’t want to work for someone else.

So in 2001, The NGU Literary Agency became The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency, and the rest is history. I’ve been very fortunate to find amazing agents along the way, and heartfelt thanks to all of them, and our amazing clients and interns, who make all of this a total joy. A special thanks to Stephen Fraser, who’s been with my agency for twenty-one years and keeps me laughing every day; he is, quite simply, my best friend and the best man I’ve ever known.

Here’s to the next twenty-five!

*If anyone is wondering if I ever got my friend published: sadly, she passed away before that happened. But I keep her photo on my office wall, and I know she’s cheering me on from above.



Here I am with clients Tippi Hedren and New York Times best-selling ghostwriter and award-winning screenwriter Lindsay Harrison at Tippi’s book launch at The Hollywood Museum.



Client Sylvia Browne and husband Michael Ulery backstage at The Morning Show in NYC. I got Sylvia a multi-million-dollar multi-book deal and her own imprint, The Sylvia Browne Collection, at HarperOne.



Me with Regis Philbin.

Clients Marion Ross, Anson Williams, and Don Most backstage at Megyn Kelly Today, promoting Marion's memoir.



Then...and Now

Marie Lamba, Senior Literary Agent

Twenty-five years ago, I was a writer drafting novels, attending conferences, and trying to land a literary agent. Back then, we writers had to mail hard copies of our entire manuscripts, and include a self-addressed stamped return envelope. At that same time, when agents submitted their client's work to publishers, they had to copy and mail

off multiple copies of entire manuscripts, too. That meant tons of trips to the post office with piles and piles of paper!

I joined the JDLA family as a client in 2005 (thank you, Jennifer, for believing in my work!), and I became an agent for JDLA in 2011. Since then, I've seen a lot of changes. We used to conduct a lot of business over the phone, including pitching our clients' works to editors. But by 2011, post recession, it was harder and harder to reach editors. Publishers had leaner staffs and editors had less time to answer calls, so there was a lot of telephone tag going on. Now, most communication is via email. And when it comes to pitching, editors prefer that we just email them our pitch with our client's work attached. Much more efficient!

There have been plenty of changes marketwise, too. Back in the day, no one was talking about graphic novels, and now they are hugely popular, and the number of graphic novel imprints keeps growing. Back then, horror was out. We had to label titles with horror elements as thrillers before we could even get editors to consider them! Now – horror is on the rise, even in children's books.

Another huge change? Audio rights used to be not that lucrative. But today, with so many people now listening to books, audio rights have become really hot. We fight extra hard to hang onto these rights, and have done many terrific audio deals for our clients.

It's also worth mentioning the big shift toward online appearances. Pre-pandemic, we agents often traveled to conferences all around the U.S., and sometimes internationally. Sure, travel took a lot of time, but we all enjoyed meeting creators face-to-face, and it was always a great opportunity to

connect with editors and other agents. Now most of our “appearances” are online. There are advantages. My travel time only involves walking to my computer, and it does give writers from far-flung locations an affordable opportunity to meet with us, attend our workshops, and pitch to us. I do admit, though, missing those spontaneous in-person interactions a bit.

One thing that hasn’t changed over the years? The importance of great books. I’m especially honored to be part of the Agency family, both as a client, and as a Senior Agent working with such a wonderful team of agents and with so many gifted writers and illustrators.

Happy 25th Anniversary, JDLA!



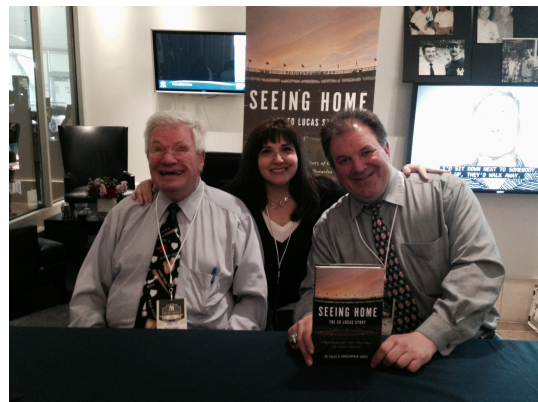
Client Charlotte Rae and Jerry Stiller at Charlotte's book launch at Sardi's.



Client Lana Wood narrating her audio book, LITTLE SISTER, about the tragic death of her sister Natalie Wood.



Agent Stephen Fraser with client Jackie Kramer. Award-winning author of many children's books, Kramer's beautiful and moving picture book, THE BOY AND THE GORILLA, won SCBWI's 2021 Crystal Kite Award.



With clients Ed and Chris Lucas at Yankee Stadium promoting Ed's memoir SEEING HOME. This book was one of the first three books published to kick off Derek Jeter's imprint at Simon & Schuster.

Select Highlights by Year

Stephen Fraser, Executive Literary Agent



As our agency celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary, we wanted to look back at some of the high points we've had over the years. We have established ourselves as the home for celebrity memoirs, and some of the many celebrities we've worked with include Danny Aiello, Tippi Hedren, Marion Ross, Lana Wood, Toni Tennille, Eric Braeden, Charlotte Rae, George Chakiris, Jeanne Cooper, Maurice Benard, Catherine Hickland, Denny Dillon, Jess Walton, Ed Lucas, Sylvia Browne, Greg Louganis, Tanya Tucker, Lisa Velez ("Lisa Lisa"), and son of Hollywood legend Debbie Reynolds and brother of Carrie Fisher, Todd Fisher.

The Christmas tradition Elf on the Shelf began here, right from our slush pile!

Many of our books have been New York Times best-sellers and award winners, have received starred reviews, and been optioned/adapted into TV and film properties.

It's impossible to list all of them, but here are some highlights:

2003

Tackling the topic of a gay-straight alliance established in a U.S. high school, ground-breaking young adult novel GEOGRAPHY CLUB (HarperCollins) by Brent Hartinger was adapted as a feature film that was released in 2013. The film starred Scott Bakula and Ana Gasteyer, and the book is still in print!

2007

DOUBLE FEATURE by Brent Hartinger won the Lambda Award.

2009

A multi-million-dollar multi-book deal for psychic and New York Times best-selling author Sylvia Browne, along with the creation of her own imprint, The Sylvia Browne Collection, at HarperOne.

Ann Burg's verse novel about a Vietnamese immigrant boy who finds solace and identity in baseball, ALL THE BROKEN PIECES (Scholastic), won the Jefferson Cup Award. It's still in print!

2010

Margi Preus's debut middle-grade historical novel *HEART OF A SAMURAI* (Abrams) won the Newbery Honor – the first major award for Abrams Children's Books. The novel was also a New York Times best-seller, sold internationally, and is still in print. There was even a Japanese stage version.

Carol Lynch Williams, with eight previous novels from Delacorte/Penguin Random House, won the PEN Award for *GLIMPSE* (Simon & Schuster), a provocative portrait of two sisters who help each other out of a horrific situation. It's still in print!

2011

Matthew J. Kirby's novel *ICEFALL* (Scholastic) about a Viking princess won the Edgar Award for Best Mystery/Suspense, as well as the PEN Award. It's still in print!

The Elf on the Shelf's animated TV holiday special, *An Elf's Story*, produced by Cathy Scorsese and Kenneth Waddell, premiered on television in November and made its official premiere at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. The Elf on the Shelf was added as a float in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in 2013. To date, The Elf on the Shelf's sales have surpassed \$100 million dollars.

2013

Jeanne Cooper's memoir, *NOT YOUNG, STILL RESTLESS* (HarperCollins), was a New York Times best-seller.

Jesse Klausmeier's inventive *OPEN THIS LITTLE BOOK* (Chronicle) was a Boston Globe-Horn Book Picture Book Honor winner. It sold in many foreign language markets and is still in print.

2014

Margi Preus's *WEST OF THE MOON* (Abrams), based on Norse mythology, won the Minnesota Award for Young People's Literature and received five starred reviews.

The middle-grade debut novel *ELIZA BING IS (NOT) A BIG FAT QUITTER* (Holiday House) by Carmella Van Vleet won the prestigious Christopher Award.

2015

A clever young adult novel, *OPENLY STRAIGHT* (Scholastic/Arthur Levine) by Bill

Konigsberg, won the Sid Fleischman Award for Humor and was a Lambda Award finalist. The audiobook won the Parent's Choice Award. It's still in print!

2016

M. E. Girard's outstanding young adult novel GIRL MANS UP (HarperTeen) won the Lambda Award. It's still in print!

Janice Harrington's poignant middle-grade verse novel CATCHING A STORYFISH (Wordsong/Boyds Mills) won the Arnold Adoff Poetry Honor and the Paterson Award for Young Readers.

2017

Jackie Azua Kramer's delightful picture book THE GREEN UMBRELLA (North-South) won the Children's Choice Silver Medal and sold in several foreign markets.

2018

Based on Native American culture, BLACK SHEEP WHITE CROW AND OTHER WINDMILL TALES (University of New Mexico) by Jim Kristofic won the Skipping Stones Honor.

Based on the immensely popular videogame, MINECRAFT: THE CRASH (Random House) by Tracey Baptiste was a New York Times best-seller.

Jackie Azua Kramer's elegiac take on grief, THE BOY AND THE GORILLA (Candlewick), won SCBWI's Crystal Kite Award and sold worldwide.

Benjamin Klas's middle-grade debut novel, SECOND DAD SUMMER (Elm Street), won the Nautilus Silver Honor Award.

2021

S. T. Gibson's A DOWRY OF BLOOD was both a #1 Sunday Times best-seller and a USA Today best-seller.

PROJECT SWEET LIFE by Brent Hartinger was adapted as a feature film (renamed PROJECT PAY DAY). One of the movie's stars was David Corenswet, who went on to play Superman in the 2025 movie.

We began our quarterly agency newsletter.

The Bailey School Kids chapter book series (Scholastic), which has sold over 30 million copies, was optioned for TV.

Benjamin Klas's follow-up novel, *EVERYTHING TOGETHER: SECOND DAD WEDDING* (Elm Street) won the Independent Booksellers Association's Ben Franklin Award, as well as the Nautilus Book Award's Gold Medal for Middle-Grade Fiction.

Two-time Emmy Award-winning actor Maurice Benard's memoir, *NOTHING GENERAL ABOUT IT: How Love (and Lithium) Saved Me On and Off General Hospital*, won the Mental Health America Award.

2022

Queer horror novel *HELL FOLLOWED WITH US* (Peachtree Teen) by Andrew Joseph White was an instant New York Times best-seller. It is being adapted into an animated film by producers Lilly Wachowski and Powerhouse Animation.

THE TRYOUT (Graphix) by Joanna Cacao is a #1 best-seller.

2023

Alexandra Hinrich's *THE LOBSTER LADY* (Charlesbridge) about the 100-year-old lobster fisherwoman, won the Lupine Award from the Maine Library Association.

The middle-grade fantasy *FRANCES AND THE WEREWOLVES OF THE BLACK FOREST* (HarperCollins) by Reife Tuma was a Bram Stoker finalist.

Susan Edwards Richmond's lovely picture book about a mother and daughter who go "owling," *NIGHT OWL NIGHT* (Charlesbridge), was a Massachusetts Book Award Honor Book.

Gothic romance *A DOWRY OF BLOOD* (Red Hook) by S. T. Gibson was both a New York Times best-seller and USA Today best-seller.

Andrew Joseph White's *THE SPIRIT BARES ITS TEETH* was an instant New York Times best-seller and a Stonewall Honor Book.

2024

Award-winning screenwriter and New York Times best-selling ghostwriter (many times over) Lindsay Harrison's memoir of Kelly Bishop, *THE THIRD GILMORE GIRL* (Gallery Books, Simon & Schuster), hit the New York Times best-seller list.

THE SQUAD (Graphix) by Joanna Cacao is a #1 best-seller.

Andrew Joseph White's second young adult novel, *COMPOUND FRACTURE* (Peachtree Teen), was an instant New York Times best-seller and won the prestigious Michael L. Printz Honor for Young Adult Literature.

The dark teen mystery *WHEN MIMI WENT MISSING* by Suja Sukumar (Soho Press) won the Anthony Award for Best YA Novel.

WE MOSTLY COME OUT AT NIGHT (Running Press), a queer anthology edited by Rob Costello, was a Bram Stoker finalist.

Describing how the Anglin brothers escaped from the famous California prison in 1962 and what later happened, *ALCATRAZ: THE LAST ESCAPE* (Lyons Press) by the brothers' nephew, Ken Widner, and Mike Lynch, is being adapted into a four-part TV series.

C. G. Drews' *DON'T LET THE FOREST IN* was an instant New York Times best-seller, was a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection, and one of School Library Journal's Best Books of 2024.

2025

Jackie Azua Kramer's picture book about friendship and family, *WE ARE ONE* (Two Lions), won the Northern Lights Book Award.

A queer anthology of twenty-two stories, *AMPLITUDES*, edited by Lee Mandelo, was a USA Today best-seller on release.



Our client, New York Times best-selling and award-winning author of many children's books Margi Preus (right), promoting her novel *SHADOW ON THE MOUNTAIN* with her Italian editor in Italy. Her novel *HEART OF A SAMURAI* was a #7 New York Times best-seller and won the Newbery Honor Award.



Client Danny Aiello and Robert De Niro at Danny's book launch in NYC. Danny's cousin, actor Tony Ray Rossi, is in the background.



Client Toni Tennille co-presenting with Reid Scott at the Daytime Emmys.



Client Eric Braeden on The Talk, promoting his memoir.



Backstage with clients Catherine Hickland Fisher and Todd Fisher at Megyn Kelly Today, promoting Todd's memoir MY GIRLS about his mom, Debbie Reynolds, and sister, Carrie Fisher.



Elf on the Shelf in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade! From my slush pile to a 100-million-dollar-plus (and still going strong!) dream come true!



From my kitchen table to an office on Park Avenue!

Watch for our next newsletter, coming soon! You can access our previous newsletters here: [JDLA Newsletters](#).

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