

October 2021

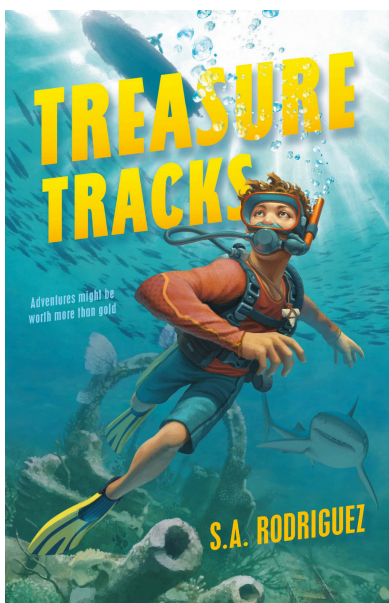
JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 20 Years!

Welcome to the fourth issue of our agency newsletter. This has been an amazing year for JDLA, with many exciting book deals, foreign deals, film and television deals, awards, and auctions. Here are just a few JDLA highlights, and interviews with a JDLA agent, author, and illustrator. Thanks for reading!

Recent Highlights



Debut Novel Sold in Pre-empt

Sallie Anne Rodriguez, a debut Latina author, has written an exciting middle-grade adventure novel, *TREASURE TRACKS*, set in Florida's Key West. Rich with description of Key West's beautiful coastal region, it's the story of Fin, who dives for hidden treasure with his abuelo (grandfather), a Cuban immigrant, but also a story of family estrangement and eventual bonding. It was sold in a pre-empt by Senior Literary Agent Stephen Fraser at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency to Wesley Adams at Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. Publication is slated for Spring 2022 (World).

Artist/Illustrator Graphic Novel Deal

New York Times' bestselling and multiple Eisner award-winning artist and illustrator (TINY TITANS) Franco Aureliani's graphic novel FAE AND THE MOON, illustrated by animators/illustrators Catherine Satrun and Sarah Satrun, about a girl who pulls her missing mother's adored Moon from the sky and quickly finds herself in a world of mystery and darkness battling ancient monsters hungry for the Moon and its powers, was sold to Charlie Ilgunas at Yellow Jacket, for publication in Spring 2023, by Literary Agent Marie Lamba at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (World English).



Memoir Deal

Twenty-year-old ski mountaineer Ryan DeLena and Robert DeLena's debut WITHOUT RESTRAINT was sold to David Legere at Globe Pequot by Associate Literary Agent Erin Clyburn at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary

Agency. WITHOUT RESTRAINT is a memoir in two voices chronicling Ryan's childhood diagnosis of autism that led to a years-long struggle with the education system and how Robert's discovery and championing of his son's prodigious talent for skiing at the age of seven ultimately saved Ryan's life. Publication is slated for Spring 2023 (North American).

Agent Spotlight: Roseanne Wells

Roseanne Wells joined The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency as an Associate Literary Agent in 2012. Previously with the Marianne Strong Literary Agency, she has also worked as a proofreader and a special sales/editorial assistant. She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College with degrees in literature and dance. An



avid reader, Roseanne discovered her passion for book publishing during her internship at W. W. Norton, and she approaches agenting as a writer's advocate and partner. She is a former volunteer for Housing Works Bookstore Cafe in Soho, NYC. You can find her on Twitter @RivetingRosie.

Q: How did you discover agenting as a career?

A: While I was in college, I interned at several magazines because I thought that would be a good career fit for me. I liked the work, I liked the people, and it was a good fit for my interests. But I wanted to find out more about book publishing just to say I looked into it and it wasn't for me, to not have any regrets about the road not taken. However, during my internship at Norton, I found that I really loved the process of book publishing and the people I met. So when I graduated, I started looking for a job in publishing--the summer before the economy crashed in 2008. It was so hard to get my foot in the door, especially in editorial. So a mentor from my work in magazines said, "Why don't you look into being a literary agent? And I answered, "What's a literary agent?"

I had a lot to learn. I did eventually get my break at a nonfiction agency as an editorial assistant, and I really enjoyed learning about proposals and positioning and contracts, all of that stuff. It was work I enjoyed and a great match for my skill set. But I also wanted to do children's books, and that agency did not have a lot of experience with that, so I came to JDLA.

Q: What is something you look for as you're reading manuscripts?

A: It's hard to quantify because you don't always know before you find it. My list includes several categories and falls on every part of the commercial-to-literary spectrum. But I do find there's a sensibility about the books that I'm drawn to: an energy, a momentum, a protagonist or ensemble that you can't help but want to know more about. They're not always easy to categorize as likeable or unlikeable, but they are always interesting. And that feeling can happen across category, age range, and format. I also love to learn new things, which is why I enjoy nonfiction, both in children's and adult books. If I can learn something new from a manuscript or proposal, I get really excited to share that with others.

Q: What is something that surprised you about agenting?

A: I did not expect to work on verse novels. I have always loved poetry, different formats and narrative styles, and verse novels have the great ability to distill emotion and capture readers' attention. But I had never found a project that drew me into that category until one of my clients, Kip Wilson, told me that her work in progress was a historical novel in verse. While reading it, I started tearing up, and I knew this project was special. And even before that book, *WHITE ROSE*,

was published as Kip's debut, I found another client who also had a verse novel in her back pocket, and I thought, maybe this is telling me something. There's a recent boom in verse novels and poetry; it has opened doors for so many types of readers, and I love being a part of that.

Q: Looking forward, what are you excited about? Both on your list and about publishing in general?

A: I sold a terrific contemporary YA novel called DANGEROUS PLAY by Emma Kress, which was just published in August by Roaring Brook Press, about a field hockey team that turns vigilante after their co-captain is sexually assaulted at a party. I also sold a dark fantasy novella by Zin E. Rocklyn that comes out in October of this year from Tor.com called FLOWERS FOR THE SEA about a Black pregnant woman on the last boat of humanity carrying a baby that might not be human. And next Spring, Kip's follow-up, THE MOST DAZZLING GIRL IN BERLIN, will be released from Versify, about a young orphan who finds a family, love, and her own voice in a 1932 Berlin queer cabaret. So I have a lot of exciting things in the near future, as well as some exciting things in the works!

Overall, I'm thrilled to see the explosion of interest in graphic novels and audio as formats to help new readers get into a new category. Whether that's children who didn't think they were "readers" or adults exploring a new type of book, it's exciting to see how a new format can change someone's perspective. These formats are finally getting the recognition they deserve, after being around with ardent fans for a long time, and the mainstream industry is finally catching up to what those early adopters have always known.

I'm also so glad to see the consistent work in diversifying publishing, both in the books we make and in the industry itself. I hope that these changes are only the beginning, and it's not seen as trendy or "hot," but as a requirement for our industry to become just and sustainable.

Author Spotlight: Bryan Reardon

Bryan Reardon's previously published fiction includes LET HER LIE (Crooked Lane Books, 2021), FINDING JAKE (HarperCollins, 2015), THE REAL MICHAEL SWANN (PenguinRandomHouse, 2018), and THE PERFECT PLAN (PenguinRandomHouse, 2019). FINDING JAKE was a New York Times Bestseller, and the film rights for THE REAL MICHAEL SWANN were optioned by Julia Roberts and Blumhouse Productions. His novels have been published in five world languages (in addition to English) – French, Polish, Russian, German, and Portuguese.

Q: How did it feel to have your very first novel, FINDING JAKE, hit the New York Times' bestseller list?



A: Every step of my journey as an author has felt nothing like I thought it would. I think we all dream about the lives we've seen portrayed in movies, or the fictional stories about authors we've read. The phone call out of the blue. The champagne waiting at your door. For me, it was so bittersweet. I got the news by email from my editor. Two days later, what I thought would be my second book received its final rejection from publishers. A day more, the champagne arrived. And a year after that, I sold my second book.

Q: Tell me about your writing process.

A: It's changed over the years, thanks to my diminishing memory. When I was young, the stories lived in real time, jumping forward when I sat down in front of my computer. Now, I can't recall what I wrote the day before, let alone the week prior to that. I have to outline and revise, two processes I did little of ten years ago.

Q: What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

A: If it means something to you, deep down in your most inner core, never stop. Seek out rejection from professionals because it ensures you learn and grow. Cultivate a very thick skin. And write at least five days a week. The truth is that some of my favorite books were written by people that gave up before they were published.

Q: What are you working on now?

A: A very slowly growing story about a father and his son, who suffers from heroin addiction.

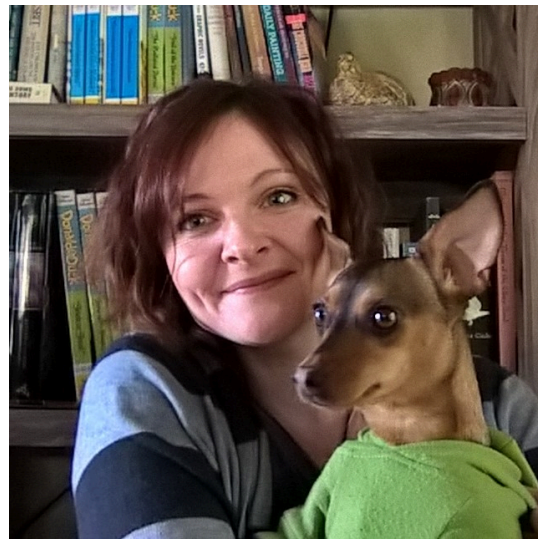
Q: What books are on your nightstand?

A: I just finished rereading *GODS AND GENERALS*, after a long kick of finishing Westerns by Louis L'Amour and Cormac McCarthy. Before that, four from Hemingway.

Illustrator Spotlight: Dora M. Mitchell

Dora M. Mitchell is a writer, illustrator, and former children's librarian based in California. Her debut middle-grade novel, ***THE HAUNTED SERPENT*** (Sterling), includes her hilarious illustrations. The breadth of Dora's spooky humor and

illustration talent is on full display in her deliciously creepy webcomics ***CURSE OF THE CROOKED MILE*** (curseofcrookedmile.com) and ***NINECROW*** (doramitchell.com/ninecrow/comic). She is also the illustrator of the middle-grade novel ***THE BOATMAN*** (BookFish Books). Dora's graphic novel **THE PUZZLING FATE OF MILLICENT GRAVES** was just sold to Algonquin Young Readers at auction, in a two-book deal.



Q: Your works, whether middle-grade novels, web comics, or graphic novels, all blend truly creepy elements with humor. Where does this come from? And what are some of your biggest influences?

A: Even as a kid, I was always drawn to stories of creeping dread—the feeling that something awful lurks just behind the façade of everyday life. I've struggled with anxiety for much of my life, and I think reading eerie stories was a way of dealing with it long before I had a label for how I felt. If you're a little kid who's feeling

worried for no particular reason you can pinpoint, I think reading a good creepy story is a way of focusing that feeling and giving it an outlet that you understand and control.

As for mixing spooky with humor—I blame my dad for introducing me to the work of Charles Addams and Edward Gorey! I remember being immediately drawn to the black-and-white artwork and the blend of humor with the weird and unsettling. It's a question of nature vs. nurture—would I have always loved to mix humor with creepiness anyway, or did Dad warp my soft little brain? We'll never know!

Q: How has your experiences as a children's librarian impacted your writing and illustrating?

A: Working as a children's librarian, it was tremendously inspiring to see first-hand how much joy, inspiration, and comfort kids still find in books, even in the digital age. Those experiences help me hold onto my passion for creating

books for kids, even when the day-to-day grind threatens to drain the joy out of it!

Library work also showed me how graphic novels can grab reluctant readers in a way nothing else does—a big part of the reason I began to explore creating my own comics. I also loved to see how comic books inspired my library kids to create their own artwork. I'm a huge believer in the therapeutic power of art, so I think that's incredibly important. Overall, I think comics have a unique power to help kids discover a love of both art and words.

Q: Congratulations on your two-book graphic novel deal with Algonquin Young Readers! What can you tell us about your upcoming graphic novel THE PUZZLING FATE OF MILLICENT GRAVES?

A: I'm so excited for this book to come into the world! I love stories about magic gone wrong. I also love to dream up characters who are radically different than I am, and then drop them into wild situations to see what they'll make of it. This led me to Millicent Graves—a girl with boundless faith in herself, who isn't afraid to jump in and take command. Millie is out to make herself, her family, and her world the best they can be.

When Millie meets a strange woman who seems to have the ability to control people's lives, of *course* Millie decides she should try wielding this power herself. Magically rearranging the lives and personalities of your friends and family—what could possibly go wrong?! Oh, only *everything*.

Q: Whether through your words (as in the hilarious middle-grade novel THE HAUNTED SERPENT) or your illustrations, you always do such a great job of capturing character expressions and emotions. How did you learn to do this? (Any techniques you'd like to share?)

A: I'm fascinated with emotion and expression, so I've always paid very close attention to how we pick up on the feelings of others (verbally and non-verbally). For an illustrator, I think it mostly comes down to *really* looking at the world and the living things around you. I think there's also something about sympathetically *feeling* the movement or the expression you're trying to capture in your own body, if that makes sense. For example, I often catch myself making the facial expression I'm trying to capture on the page (very embarrassing, and one of many reasons I rarely draw in public!). As a writer, this applies too—I'm pretty sure I scowl when I write angry characters and grin like a loon when I write a goofball like Lucy in THE HAUNTED SERPENT! Empathy is crucial to both writing and illustration, I believe.

Q: You have two very popular web comics – THE CURSE OF THE CROOKED MILE and NINE CROW. Why web comics? And what are some of the joys and challenges of creating these?

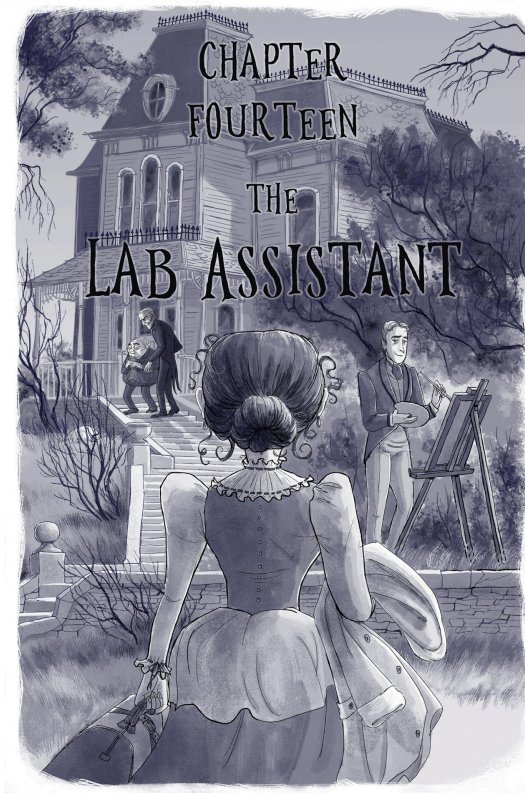
A: Web comics are fantastic because they let you get your work into the world without finding a traditional publisher and see for yourself if your stories can find an audience. Web comics are also fantastic if you struggle with perfectionism—you come to realize readers want a compelling story, engaging characters, and frequent updates (ESPECIALLY frequent updates) much more than they want you to spend 16 hours perfecting the background scenery in a panel!

For me, the biggest joy is also the biggest challenge: web comics let you connect with readers directly. Knowing there really *are* people out there reading my work and waiting for every new page is a huge gift—but as a person with anxiety, it also forces me to face a lot of fear every time I hit that “publish” button. That’s something I think I’ll always struggle with!

Q: Any advice for aspiring writers and illustrators?

A: My top advice for aspiring writers is simple: read as much as possible. To illustrators: draw every day. Those really are the biggest keys! After that, my top advice for creative people of any stripe: remember to do it for the love of creating. Don’t get overly focused on external measures of success like being published or making money or being well-known—those are outside your control. It’s a recipe for depression to get hung up on those motivations (ask me how I know). What you *can* control is enjoying the act of creating. Whether it’s writing, drawing, needlepoint, crocheting toilet roll cozies...whatever you enjoy making, remember that you do it for *yourself*, because you love it.

You can find more of Dora's work at www.doramitchell.com.



To see the work of other illustrators represented by JDLA, please visit our website at www.jdlit.com/illustrators.

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