

July 2023

JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 22 Years!

Welcome to our Summer newsletter! We're delighted to share some recent deals, along with some interviews we think you'll find inspiring. Thanks for reading!

Recent Highlights



Alcatraz Mystery Finally Solved?

Award-winning author Mike Lynch and nephew of Alcatraz escapees John and Clarence Anglin Ken Widner's *ALCATRAZ: The Last Escape*, a reexamination of the famous escape and its aftermath, presenting evidence and providing an answer to one of America's enduring mysteries that Widner's uncles did, in fact, survive with help from mobster Mickey Cohen and fellow inmate Whitey Bulger, and eventually made their way to Brazil, where they married and had

children, to Rick Rinehart at Rowman & Littlefield, for publication in Spring 2024, by Jennifer De Chiara at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (NA). De Chiara

also brokered a deal for audio rights with Kim Budnick at Tantor Media.

Collection Sold at Auction

Author of SHADOWBRIDGE and the RHYMER series, Bram Stoker finalist Gregory Frost's short story collection BEYOND HERE BE MONSTERS, featuring 14 speculative eerie tales that explore what exists just beyond understanding in the dark uncharted waters of supposedly "normal" life, to Patrick Swenson at Fairwood Press, at auction, for publication in 2024, by Marie Lamba at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world English).



New Picture Book Explores Sense of Touch

TURKEY TROUBLE series author Wendi Silvano's HOW A FOREST FEELS, a lyrical picture book about a child who goes on an adventurous autumn walk and explores the many textures found in nature, to Sally Morgridge at Holiday

House, for publication in Summer 2025, by Marie Lamba at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency for the author (world).



Author Spotlight: Janice Harrington

Janice Harrington is an award-winning author of both children's books and poetry. Her children's books include the much-lauded verse novel CATCHING A STORYFISH (WordSong, 2016), the picture book HURRY, KATE, OR YOU'LL BE LATE! (Holiday House, 2023), and two picture book biographies, BUZZING WITH QUESTIONS (Calkins Creek, 2019) and the forthcoming ROOTING FOR PLANTS

(Calkins Creek, 2023). Among her many awards for her children's books are a

listing among TIME Magazine's Top 10 Children's Books and the Ezra Jack Keats Award from the New York Public Library. Among her many awards for her books of poetry are the Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award for Emerging Women Writers, and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship for Poetry. Harrington lives in Chicago, Illinois, where she teaches Creative Writing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Q: How was writing your verse novel *CATCHING A STORYFISH* a different process from writing your picture books?

A: For a verse novel, I not only have to write poetry, I have to organize those poems into a narrative arc: character, desire, problem, resolution. A picture book offers a different kind of complexity. For a picture book, I am striving for vibrant language and concision. I have to shape a powerful story in the smallest container possible: it's easier to climb Mount Everest. A verse novel gives you a longer runway to tell your story. When Rebecca Davis, my editor at WordSong, proposed that I turn a collection of poems into a verse novel, I was excited, intrigued, and scared to death. A novel? Did I have that many words? I did! But first, I had to find a spine for the story's narrative. Once I had the spine, I could generate poems. That's the hard part—finding the spine. I can't move forward unless I know all of the vertebrae and exactly where they fit.

Q: You've written two picture book biographies: *BUZZING WITH QUESTIONS*, about entomologist Charles Henry Turner, and *ROOTING FOR PLANTS*, about botanist Charles S. Parker. Do you feel a sense of mission with these biographies of little-known black individuals?

A: *BUZZING WITH QUESTIONS* grew from the delight of discovering a scientist that I didn't know, and curiosity generates more curiosity—so I kept searching for other scientists. I discovered Charles S. Parker because of a 1940s article on outstanding Black scientists. A Black scientist who had plants named after him? Who had discovered different species of mushrooms? Who collected plants? I had never heard of him! I am fascinated by people who have passions and who overcome great challenges to follow their dreams. They inspire us to pursue the subjects that interest us, to set goals, and to keep going even when things get difficult. So far my books are about hidden or forgotten Black scientists, but readers are bringing me the names of other scientists who deserve attention. I have to admit—I'm curious—and who knows where that might lead?

Q: How has your work as a published poet influenced your children's book writing?

A: Writing is an art that rewards practice, practice, practice. My adult poetry strengthens my sense of language and imagery when I write children's books. By writing poetry, I am constantly practicing those skills that I need to write

better biographies or verse novels or picture books. But my children's books are also a source of joy for me, which in turn makes me a better poet. When I write for children, I am always writing love stories: an unstoppable chicken chaser in love with a glorious chicken, a little girl loved by the best daddy in the world, a born storyteller who uses her stories to help an ailing grandfather, a scientist who loves to ask questions about the world around him. I like the way children's books ask us to look at the world with a sense of hope.

Q: Which writers have inspired you? Which writers are you currently reading?

A: All kinds of writers! I love to read. The women in my writing group are mystery fanatics and we're passing around Penelope Lively's *MOON TIGER*. As a poet, I'm completely besotted with Nikky Finney's new collection *LOVE CHILD'S HOT BED OF OCCASIONAL POETRY*. But whenever I am writing a children's book, reading books by others in that genre is a critical step. For children's biographies, as an example, my touchstones are Barb Rosenstock, Pam Muñoz Ryan, and Mélina Mangal. I'm getting ready for a new biography project, so I'm currently reading Carlo Rovelli's *ANAXIMANDOR AND THE BIRTH OF SCIENCE*.

Q: Do you have any advice for beginning writers who wish to establish writing careers with longevity?

A: "Fall down seven, get up eight," the Japanese proverb, reminds me that failure is part of the process. Don't give up. If you want to write, keep writing, and make time for it. It's also important to sharpen the saw. Learn as much as you can about how to write for children. Never stop learning and never, ever stop reading. Still, let's be honest—it's not an easy profession. Build a support system for yourself: find or start a writing group, find a beta reader who will tell you the truth, and celebrate your growth as well as your accomplishments. Sometimes, it won't go your way. But it's still rewarding to search for the right words for a poem or to tell a new story. As Gwendolyn Brooks writes in "Speech to the Young": "Live not for battles won. / Live not for the-end-of-the-song. Live in the along." Enjoy the everyday process of your writing wherever it takes you. And finally—keep your eyes, ears, and mind open. You never know when you'll meet your next story. *HURRY, KATE OR YOU'LL BE LATE!* came about when I met a father waiting to catch a local bus with his young daughter. He told me that they were always late for school because she would make him stop to look at the construction equipment. My imagination and love for writing did the rest.

Editor Spotlight: Rick Rinehart

Rick Rinehart, Executive Editor at Rowman & Littlefield, was formerly Publisher at Roberts Rinehart Publishers in Boulder, Colorado. A former Colorado Humanities

Scholar, he is also Chair of the Mary Roberts Rinehart Foundation's awards program for talented, emerging authors. He is a member of The Leander Club, Henley-on-Thames, England, the oldest, largest, and most successful rowing club in the world. Rick is a contributor to the websites American Thinker, Icecap, and Denver Examiner and is a published author of several nonfiction books, including DARE TO SURVIVE (Citadel) and MEN OF KENT (Lyons Press). He has a degree in history from The University of California at Santa Barbara.



Q: You've been at Rowman & Littlefield for a number of years. What are some of your proudest moments?

A: Heavens, that's like asking who my favorite child is. The titles that really stand out are the ones that are still in print after thirty or forty years. Before I sold it to Rowman & Littlefield, I had my own company (Roberts Rinehart) for about fifteen years, and several of those titles are still selling. One of those titles is DEATH IN YELLOWSTONE: ACCIDENTS AND FOOLHARDINESS IN OUR FIRST NATIONAL PARK. It still sells about 10,000 copies a year in print and ebook. It also gave birth to an entire genre of "Death in..." books, a phenomenon that's even been written up in The New York Times. It will certainly make my epitaph interesting upon my demise.

Q: How has the industry changed over the years?

A: Bookscan and sell-through reporting in general have really tightened up the business and have made publishers more honest. The 90s were a period of overselling and heavy returns simply because there wasn't much of a reality check until all those books came back; I recall returns as high as 60-70% on some titles. It was just a waste. Nowadays you couldn't get away with that. The introduction of POD has also helped to curb those excesses. (Also, authors are less likely to fib about book sales since we can know better now.)

Q: You did a number of books about old Hollywood featuring Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley, and the TV show The Golden Girls. Do these books connect with you on a personal level? Or do you try to gauge public interest?

A: Even though my grandfather was a screenwriter during Hollywood's Golden Age and my mother tried to break in as a child actress, I have no special affinity with the genre. I like movies the way everyone else likes movies, but I suppose I've grown to appreciate its history as I've worked on these books.

Q: What makes a manuscript stand out to you?

A: “A good story, well told.” You can usually tell by how well thought out a proposal is. Also, if it’s specifically targeted to a genre we publish in, then you know the author and his/her agent have done their homework. (You’d be surprised at how many proposals we get in genres we DON’T publish in, such as self-help.) Finally, is it authoritative? Is it a performing arts or sports book by an acknowledged expert, or is it by someone who is merely a fan?

Q: Is there anything an author can do to ensure that their book is a success? For instance, how important is social media?

A: Yes, everything, including social media. Our most successful authors are the ones who are constantly flogging their books: giving talks, doing signings, doing social media posts, and generally reaching out to just about everybody they know. I recently had quite a good manuscript come across my desk, but the author had such a low profile that I went back to the agent and asked for a marketing plan. Voila: a few days later the author had established a website, and Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook pages, and the agent sent me a media list that was 22 pages long.

Illustrator Spotlight: Joy Nelkin Wieder

Joy has written and illustrated more than 30 books for young readers, both chapter books and picture books. Her whimsical illustrations are created in a variety of drawing and water-based mediums, as well as digital media. Her books include *THE PASSOVER MOUSE* (Doubleday), *THE SECRET TUNNEL* (Hachai), *THE GREAT POTATO PLAN* (Hachai), and *GRANDMOTHER’S GIFT* (McGraw Hill). Her artwork has been exhibited in public libraries and synagogues all around the Greater Boston area. She lives in Massachusetts.



Q: You’ve written and illustrated over thirty books. Do you start with the text, or do you get an idea for an illustration first?

A: I almost always start with the idea for a story or a character first rather than the illustrations. But as an illustrator, I write with the artwork in mind. It makes it easier for me to

write a picture book text when I know what will be shown in the illustrations and what I need to have in the text or as an art note.

Q: What it is like to have someone else illustrate your stories?

A: It can be exciting to have someone else illustrate my text because they will interpret it in their own way. Sometimes my illustration style is not the best match for the story, so it's fun to see how someone else illustrates it.

Q: Where did you get your training as an illustrator?

A: I have a BFA from Washington University in St. Louis, and I majored in Graphic Communications, which included both graphic design and illustration. I worked as a graphic designer for many years—both at design studios and as a freelance designer. But when my first daughter was born, I knew I wanted to pursue my dream of writing and illustrating for children. I'm still developing my style as an illustrator. I tried digital art, but it wasn't for me. Give me a brush and watercolor paper over an iPad and electronic pencil any day!

Q: Are there any illustrators who have inspired you particularly?

A: I've been extremely inspired by Patricia Polacco. I imagined myself being just like her when I first started out, working on books in a beautiful studio, just like Patricia's. I can relate to her Midwestern background (I grew up in Kansas City) and her Ukrainian/Russian Jewish heritage (my Jewish family is from Poland), which has often been expressed in her books—just like my stories. An art director once told me that my illustrations reminded her of Patricia Polacco, which was the biggest compliment she could have given me. One of my earliest mentors was Ilse Plume, who taught children's book illustration for many years. She is still one of the biggest supporters of my books.

Q: What would you say to people who have ambitions to be both an author and an illustrator?

A: Just keep working at it and polishing both your writing and art. It's difficult to be at a professional level for both. There are some authors who illustrate and there are some illustrators who write. I've had the honor of writing and illustrating my own work, illustrating someone else's text, and having someone illustrate my story, so it gives you a lot of flexibility.



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

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