

January 2022

JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 21 Years!

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2022! We're proud to announce that 2022 marks JDLA's 21st year! Here are some highlights from the agency's last quarter of 2021, and interviews with a JDLA agent, author, and illustrator. Thanks for reading!

Recent Highlights

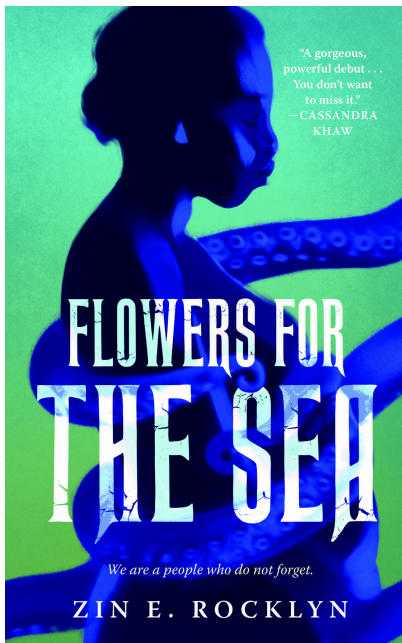


Debut Picture Book Deal

Debut Latina author Jamie Bechtelheimer's bilingual picture book, *MIGUEL MUST FIGHT!*, about a young boy who must choose between his love of art and his family's legacy of sword fighting, was sold to Esther Cajahuaringa at Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, with Samantha Gentry editing, by Savannah Brooks at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency. Publication is slated for Summer 2024.

Illustration Deal for Young Adult Graphic Novel

Ravi Teixeira to illustrate *A QUICK & EASY GUIDE TO COMING OUT*, written by Kristin Russo, the next installment in the *A Quick & Easy Guide* series, providing guidance, advice, and validation to people exploring how and when they might want to come out. Zabé Ellor at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency, on behalf of the illustrator, and J.L. Stermer of New Leaf Literary Agency, on behalf of the author, brokered the deal with Amanda Meadows at Oni Press.



Debut Adult Dark Fantasy Two-Book Deal

VONA and Viable Paradise graduate and 2022 Clarion West candidate Zin E. Rocklyn's debut *FLOWERS FOR THE SEA*, in which a Black pregnant woman trapped floating with the last of humanity faces off against dangerous creatures that threaten to kill them all, pitched as Rivers Solomon's *THE DEEP* meets *THE SORCERER OF THE WILDEEPS*, in the tradition of Octavia Butler; and an untitled novella, to Ruoxi Chen at Tor.com, in a two-book deal, for publication in Fall 2021 in print, by Roseanne Wells at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency.

Agent Spotlight: Marlo Berliner

Marlo Berliner (www.marloberliner.com) is the author of the multi-award-winning, best-selling young adult series, *THE GHOST CHRONICLES*. Marlo has been actively building her list as an Associate Literary Agent with The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency since November 2018. Prior to her career in the publishing world, Marlo was an accounting manager for a Fortune 500 company. She holds B.S. degrees in Economics and Industrial Management from Carnegie Mellon University.

Q: How did you get into agenting?

A: I've been involved in publishing now for close to fifteen years, as a writer, the chair of a major publishing conference, a published author, a freelance editor, an intern at two literary agencies, and a children's lead bookseller for Barnes & Noble. As a freelance editor, I had always enjoyed helping writers develop their stories. After a while, I realized I was able to recognize which stories in my inbox had more potential than others. So, when I saw an opportunity to intern at The Bent Agency, I jumped at it. I learned a great deal from that first year-long internship, and even more from my second internship with The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency. After a year, Jennifer promoted me to Associate Literary Agent, and I couldn't be happier.



Q: Can you share some details about yourself, and how these have shaped who you are as an agent and as someone working with authors?

A: Being an agent is a great fit for me because I've had a nearly 360-degree view of publishing—as author, agent, editor, and bookseller. As an author, I've spent years honing my craft and I love working with stories to make them stronger. I have a sharp editorial eye and I know just how high the bar is for publication, so I usually go through multiple rounds of revisions with my clients—as many as it takes—to make sure every manuscript I send out has its best shot at publication. I also understand firsthand the trials of this profession, so I love being an advocate for writers, but especially for my clients. And because publishing can be so daunting, I strive to impart as much knowledge to my clients as possible about the submission process, contracts and negotiations, the business of being an author, and even all the marketing and publicity tricks I've learned over the years!

Q: Any recent deal highlights you'd like to share?

A: I sold a charming middle-grade fantasy called JOURNEY BEYOND THE BURROW by Rina Heisel, which was just published in July by Harper Children's, and follows one mouse's exciting adventure to save his baby brother from a sinister evil. I also sold a historical fantasy by Refe Tuma to Harper Children's in a two-book deal; the first book, FRANCES AND THE MONSTER, comes out in August 2022. This middle-grade debut follows Frances, a lonely and precocious budding scientist who accidentally brings a monster to life and must stop him before he destroys her entire town...and before her parents find out. The second book will follow in Summer 2023. I also sold, at auction, Charity Alyse's YA debut, OTHER

SIDE OF THE TRACKS (Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster), about a racially divided town where Zach Whitman, a white boy, moves in and befriends Black siblings Capri and Justin Collins. When one of their friends is murdered by police, the town erupts into an all-out war, with Capri, Justin, and Zach caught in the middle. Publication is slated for Fall 2022. So, I have a lot of amazing books on deck, as well as some exciting projects in the pipeline!

Q: What are you looking forward to in your next ten years as an agent?

A: I'm looking forward to continuing to build a prolific and diverse list of authors who are creating fantastic books. I want to be there with them every step of the way to help grow their careers and ensure their success. Books have the power to change the world, and it's exciting and rewarding to be part of that. At the end of the day, I want to be able to say that I helped shepherd books to market that represented a diverse range of voices, stories, and settings; entertained readers; but also impacted lives.



Author Spotlight: Carmella Van Vleet

Carmella Van Vleet (www.carmellavanvleet.com) is author of the Christopher Award-winning middle-grade ELIZA BING IS (NOT) A BIG, FAT QUITTER, and its sequel, ELIZA BING IS (NOT) A STAR (Holiday House). Her non-fiction picture book (co-authored with astronaut Kathy Sullivan) TO THE STARS! THE FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN TO WALK IN SPACE

(Charlesbridge), is an Amelia Bloomer list title. Her newest middle-grade novel NOTHING IS LITTLE comes out through Holiday House in Summer 2022, and her newest picture book, YOU GOTTA MEET MR. PIERCE!, co-authored with Chiquita Mullins Lee, will be published by Kokila in 2023.

Q: Your debut middle-grade ELIZA BING IS (NOT) A BIG, FAT QUITTER won the Christopher Award. Congrats! And you've gone on to write two more middle-grade novels. Did you always know you wanted to write novels? Why middle-grade?

A: Thank you! The Christopher Award was such a surprise and an honor.

I spent the early part of my career writing non-fiction, which I love. But, yes, I always knew I wanted to write novels someday. It's been my dream since I was ten. So about eight or nine years ago, I took a conscious step back from non-

fiction to focus on fiction. I enrolled in some online classes, joined a critique group that focused on middle-grade, and got busy.

What I love so much about writing middle-grade is that these are the books that made me fall in love with reading in the first place. They're still my favorite genre to read. Ask an adult what their favorite book is and, many times, they'll tell you about a book that they loved when they were twelve. People remember that time in their lives. For better or worse, it's special. And the books we read when we're young can influence our whole lives.

Q: Your newest novel, *NOTHING IS LITTLE*, comes out in July 2022. Can you tell us about it? Where did you get the idea for this novel?

A: *NOTHING IS LITTLE* is about an eleven-year-old boy named Felix who has Growth Hormone Deficiency. He likes being the smallest kid in school and knowing how he fits in. But when he learns that his biological dad is short, too, it opens a hole in his life. Using the skills he's learned from Forensic Science Club, Felix searches for his dad. But the further he gets into his investigation, he starts to wonder: What if his dad doesn't want to be found? And what if his mom, stepdad, and the new baby on the way need Felix right where he is?

Like Felix, my youngest was diagnosed with Growth Hormone Deficiency when she was in middle school. I've always thought it would be interesting to write about that, especially since it's not something many people are aware of, unless you happen to know someone with it. And I also wanted to write what it was like to get a new sibling at that age. I was ten when my youngest brother was born, and I remember all the feelings (good and bad) that this life event stirred up for me.

The plot for this book has changed multiple times over the years. I loved the character and his family. The heart was there, but I was having trouble finding the right storyline. So, one day, after a morning of fruitless brainstorming, I sat down and watched an episode of one of my favorite shows, *Psych*, to unwind. (If you don't know, it's a funny tv series about a psychic detective who's not really psychic, just highly observant.) And suddenly it popped into my head that Felix should join his school's forensic science club and start an investigation! After that, the rest of the story came together fairly quickly.

Q: You've collaborated with astronaut Dr. Kathy Sullivan for your non-fiction picture book *TO THE STARS!* And now you are collaborating with Chiquita Mullins Lee on the non-fiction picture book *YOU GOTTA MEET MR. PIERCE!* What have you learned from collaborating with others?

A: The most important thing I've learned about collaborating is that, in order to be successful, you have to check your egos at the door. There are different writing styles and processes, different work schedules, and a lot of back-and-forth and compromise. And all of that should be for the shared goal of a great story. Story first, always.

Something that goes along with this is realizing what you bring to the table, but also respecting what your co-author brings, too. I can honestly say that I couldn't have written these books without my co-authors. And I hope they'd say the same about me.

Q: What is your writing process? Does it change from book to book?

A: My process for writing non-fiction has pretty much always been the same. Outline, research, write. But fiction was a whole new ballgame for me. It works a completely different creative muscle.

When writing fiction, I tend to be a "pantser" at the beginning of a new project. Even though I know how the book will end - or at least, the general direction it'll go - I don't usually outline before starting. I'll sit down and begin writing and see where the character is taking me. (The character always comes first for me.) About 50 pages in or so, I'll stop and then hash out an outline for the rest of the book.

My last two middle-grades were sold with sample chapters and synopses, though. This made things a little easier because I had a structure to work with before I dove in. It definitely made writing quicker and less stressful. So maybe I should try to do this from now on!

Q: What's the best writing advice you've ever received?

A: After I'd finished the novel that would eventually be my debut, but before I searched for an agent, I sent my manuscript to a friend who's a freelance editor. One of the most important things she taught me was to "Go deeper."

My characters were interesting, but not interesting enough. My plots were fine, but the stakes weren't quite high enough. Emotions were solid, but not fully explored. I needed to "go deeper" across the board and keep digging, even when I was convinced it was already good enough.

This is a lesson that I've carried with me ever since. And I always try to ask myself what Diane (my friend) would say when I'm writing a scene. Have I gone deep enough? I still fail miserably, of course. But, hey, at least I'm asking. And the asking helps keep me accountable.

Illustrator Spotlight: Franco Aureliani

Franco Aureliani is a *New York Times* bestselling and multiple Eisner award-winning artist and illustrator. His works include *TINY TITANS*, *SUPERMAN FAMILY ADVENTURES*, *YOUNG JUSTICE*, *GREEN LANTERN* the animated series, *ITTY BITTY HELLBOY*, and the *DINO-MIKE* series. Franco's most recent titles include *SUPERMAN OF SMALLVILLE*, *ARKHAMANICS*, and *THE GHOST, THE OWL*. He has worked for Dark Horse Comics, Archie Comics, IDW, Action Lab Entertainment, and Cartoon Network. Franco is also owner of the *AW YEAH COMICS* publishing

and retail stores featuring Action Cat and Adventure Bug. Franco's newest project, the graphic novel *FAE AND THE MOON*, illustrated by Catherine Satrun and Sarah Satrun, will be published by Yellow Jacket in 2023.



Q: You've worked on some truly iconic comic book characters, including Superman and Green Lantern, among others. Did you always love comics as a kid? And how did you break into the field?

A: I've always loved comic books and superheroes! I actually learned to read with comics. My parents didn't speak much English and encouraged me to read, even though they couldn't help me. They recognized, and so did I, that I could interpret meanings of the words with the pictures to help. I would read any comics I could get my hands on, and that's also how I learned to draw. I would copy the images and would draw Superman and Batman and

Spider-man all the time. Both reading and drawing naturally led me to constantly making up new stories in my head. Eventually I went to college and studied film and art and worked different jobs, but inevitably I would always be drawn back into the world of comic books. I gave into my ambitions and decided to try and get a job as an artist in comics. I tried to break into major publishers like DC and Marvel, but just wasn't good enough, or what they were looking for. When I decided to work on my own ideas, those stories eventually caught the attention of an editor and a publisher at DC Comics, and since then I've worked for them on many titles over the years. It was a real thrill to work on titles like *Tiny Titans* and *Superman* and *Shazam!* Eventually, I worked for many of the major publishers.

**Q: Congratulations on your new graphic novel deal with Yellow Jacket!
Can you share a little bit about FAE AND THE MOON?**

A: What an awesome opportunity! A real dream come true! I can't be more excited than to have Yellow Jacket publishing FAE AND THE MOON! This is a story I've had in the back of my head for a while, turning and toiling in there, and then one night it all fell into place and I couldn't write it down fast enough. I held onto that story for a while because I knew I wasn't the right artist for it. It needed a certain look and sentiment. One day I came across Catherine and Sarah Satrun and I fell in love with their artwork. I approached them about the idea and told them about the story of a young girl named Fae who lived in this world of magical ideas and terrifying creatures, but never really dealt with any of that until one day when her mother goes missing. Fae decides that in order to get her back, she must pluck her mother's beloved moon out of the sky. With that act she sets events in motion that bring her in direct contact with all of these monstrous and magical things that she thought were just stories. It's a fun story full of magic and adventure, and it shows what love is truly about. Catherine and Sarah's illustrations bring so much life and heart into this story. They really make the whole thing come alive. I can't wait for people to read it!

Q: How would you describe your illustration style? Anything unusual in your methodology or techniques?

A: My illustration style is mostly cartoony, but I love and I'm a student of a variety of art styles. I'm a big pop art fan, and I love to play with shapes and lines and color, much like Picasso did, though I'm nowhere near his talent. I love to pencil and ink in a realistic style, and I've developed a cartoon version style that works for me. I also like to paint on large canvas. Much like my stories, where I'm constantly thinking up new ones, I like to move from style to style in my artwork as well. Artwork for me is therapy, and a world where I could lose myself for days on end.

Q: As a writer, your graphic novels are sometimes silly, sometimes adventurous, and sometimes they are in the realm of epic fantasy. What do they all have in common?

A: They're fun!!! LOL! Or at least they are to me! I like to write what interests me. It's definitely that comic book influence from my younger days, so I love to write things that are humorous. I can't describe the feeling I get when someone laughs and tells me they found my story so funny. I also love stories about superheroes and moral values and just a good old-fashioned superpowers fight... which explains my work for DC Comics and other companies. I also love fantasy and science fiction works, which is why I also write stories about dragons and outer space and wild adventure stories with grand characters, which is squarely where FAE AND THE MOON fits in. It's just so satisfying when someone tells me how much they laughed or were moved in some way by my

stories. And when they say they can't wait to read my next work? It really drives me to keep doing what I'm doing.

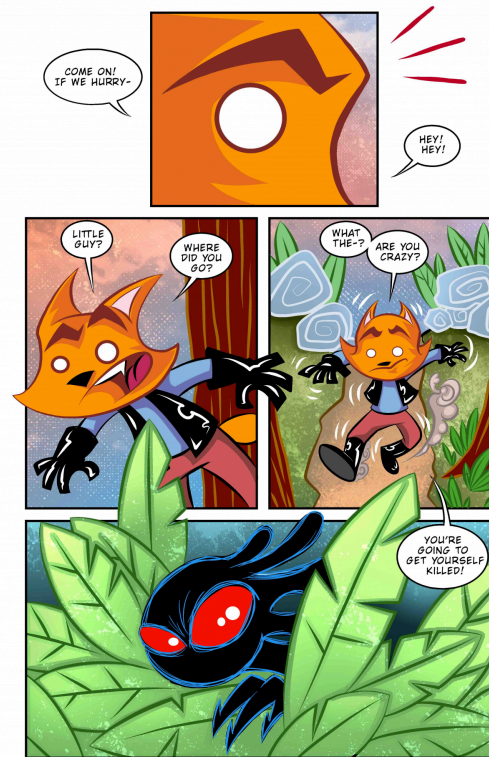
Q: You're an art teacher, you attend all the top comic cons, own a comic book company, and you also are working on numerous comics and graphic novel ideas at all times. What's your secret to staying productive and creative?

A: No sleep! LOL! Seriously, the thing that keeps me going is that I truly love everything that I'm doing. It all requires different brainwaves for these different things, so I'm constantly shifting gears. In the classroom it's such a thrill when a student gets what you're trying to show them. It's a wonderful thing to see a true artist emerge in a classroom. Comic conventions and publishing are all a natural extension of my love of comics. And the Aw Yeah comic shops? What kid doesn't dream of owning their own comic store? So, why not open one? I've never fallen into the trap of letting people tell me I "can't" do something. Instead, I've always taken that as a challenge and used it as fuel to get where I want to be. It's served me pretty well so far.

Q: What do you love most about what you do?

A: Everything! I love my wife (I'm the luckiest guy in the world!) for her steadfast support! I love my son – he makes me so proud! I've had so many great moments in my life. The success I've had with my ideas and artwork has been amazing, but the thing that really makes my heart so full is knowing that everything I write (and draw) has the potential to be the first comic or graphic novel a kid ever reads, like the first ones I read all those years ago. My work has the potential to be their favorite story, or their favorite piece of artwork. That is the best feeling in the world. I really do love what I do!

You can find more of Franco's work at www.blindwolfstudios.com.



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