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JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 22 Years!

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2023! We're proud to announce that 2023 marks JDLA's 22nd year! Here are some highlights from the agency's last quarter of 2022, and interviews with an editor, author, and illustrator. Thanks for reading!

Recent Highlights



Middle-grade Fantasy

Eric Lide's debut *THE CHAMPION OF DRAELAND*, a middle-grade fantasy about a boy who discovers that he is the reincarnation of a great hero destined to defeat the evil fiendlord, but who keeps befriending the fiends he's supposed to destroy, to Laura Schreiber at Union Square Kids, in a six-figure deal, in a pre-empt, in a two-book deal, for publication in Fall

2024, by Tori Sharp at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world).

YA Anthology

Author of *DANCING BEARS* Rob Costello edits *QUEER BEASTIES*, an anthology that celebrates the monster as a positive and empowering metaphor for the otherness of being queer, with contributions from Costello, Kalynn Bayron, David Bowles, H.E. Edgmon, Michael Thomas Ford, Naomi Kanakia, Claire Kann, Sam J. Miller, and Alexandra Villasante, among others, to Britny Brooks-Perilli at Running Press Kids, for publication in May 2024, by Marie Lamba at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world English).



Her thirteenth picture book sold!

SCBWI Crystal Kite award-winner for *THE BOY & THE GORILLA* (Candlewick) Jackie Azúa Kramer's lyrical picture book *RHYTHM*, about a girl from a town in an economic downturn who finds ongoing comfort in a beloved tree, was sold to Sarah Fell at Magination Press by Stephen Fraser at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world).

Editor Interview: Wesley Adams

Executive Editor Wesley Adams started at Farrar, Straus and Giroux as an unpaid intern in the summer of 1987. Wesley edited *Dead End in Norvelt* by his longtime friend and author Jack Gantos, which won the 2011 Newbery Medal and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction. He also edited three-time Newbery Honor-winning author Gary Paulsen's memoir *GONE TO THE WOODS* and his final survival story *NORTHWIND*, as well as the recent Key West adventure debut *TREASURE TRACKS* by JDLA client Sallie Anne Rodriguez. His dream projects are both the books that end up on kids' summer reading lists for school and



the books they sneak-read during class. And anything that makes him laugh.

Q: You've been at Farrar, Straus and Giroux for thirty-five years. What are some of your proudest moments?

A: Honestly, one of my proudest was that very first day, when I showed up in a green sports coat like I'd just won the Masters and started my summer stint as a "warm body," which is what they called interns back then. Beyond that, I've been proud to celebrate so many wonderful highlights in the life of the company with amazing FSG adult and children's authors and artists and editors and other staff members. My first few years were spent as an assistant to a brilliant editor and publisher whose example I still try to follow every day of my working life. And rarely feel like I've done so.

Q: When your friend and author Jack Gantos won both the Newbery Medal and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction for his novel DEAD END IN NORVELT in 2011, were you surprised?

A: LOL. I'm shocked when any book I edited gets even a starred review or some other accolade so "surprised" is putting it very mildly. Over the years I've learned the hard way that the books I love and edit don't always get the love they deserve out there in the world. I've been an ardent proselytizer for Jack's work ever since I first read the manuscript of his first children's fiction, the crackpot sixth-grade story collection HEADS OR TAILS, which FSG published in 1995. So to get this pat on the back sixteen years later for another of his amazing books was a truly joyful and rewarding surprise. I was so happy for him.

Q: You edited one of the great Gary Paulsen's last books. What was it like working with this author of HATCHET, one of the most famous survival stories of the twentieth century?

A: Now you're breaking my heart. We just passed the first anniversary of his unexpected death and I am still reeling from that horrible moment. We had a remarkable connection from the very first time we spoke, when I told him my thoughts and suggestions for his astonishing memoir GONE TO THE WOODS, a conversation that quickly devolved into a long, hilarity-filled talk that went on into the night—the first of many. There was complete kismet between us, whether about a passage that needed a little massaging, a comma that needed deleting, a jacket layout that needed more time in the oven. We both believed ourselves lucky to have found our way to each other. And we were just getting started on a whole new chapter to his publishing career, but that book got slammed shut when neither of us expected it.

Q: What makes a manuscript stand out to you?

A: I'll tell you something: Reading submissions is hard, very hard. We don't like to say no, although we say it most of the time as far as submissions go. We editors are paid to see potential—and we see it all the time, in an agent's pitch,

in a title, in a first line. And when we do we are cheering for each manuscript to KEEP IT UP, to move us, amuse us, entertain and dazzle us, and to not just live up to whatever potential we might see, but also to surprise and delight us. Of course it's incredibly rare for things to line up just right, or nearly right, in relation to whatever an editor is seeing or hoping for. Which is why it's hard.

For me, humor is one of my main measures. If something catches my attention that way, makes me smile or offers up a delightfully twisted notion, like a James Marshall story or a Tomi Ungerer picture, and manages to keep that ball in the air for a long enough time, then I am zeroed in on that target and ready to rumble on its behalf.

I'm also a huge fan of survival stories of all shapes and colors, fiction and nonfiction, such as the memoir I'm working on now of a girl coming of age in Selma in 1965, the account of a child survivor of Auschwitz, the biography depicting a baseball superstar as a Civil Rights trailblazer, the novel about a kid and his sister caught out in the swamp in a Cat. 4 hurricane. So, high-stakes adventures about young people overcoming fear, evil, unfathomable powers of nature—I eat this stuff up, because it's the kind of stuff that moved me as a kid.

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

A: More important than social media is just the social part. The best thing a newly published author can do to help sweeten the chances of success is to get out in front of people and talk about their book, their artistic process, and whatever, mainly just trying to get better and better at connecting with, entertaining, and amusing an audience of, say, 25 antsy sixth-graders, or 6 grumps who show up at a library presentation in the middle of a snowstorm, or a roomful of skeptical teachers and librarians who have heard it all before. For an hour or so. Because really that's what you're doing when you write a book, you're trying to win the interest and admiration of a very antsy, grumpy, skeptical audience. So, in other words, the last thing you should do is get up there and read a few chapters from your book. They can do that for themselves when they get home. They want something a little different from you when you are standing in front of them. And you'll learn stuff in the process that will help you with your next book, and the next.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to tell writers who want to get published?

A: Keep pushing. Don't settle. Take yourself with a grain of salt. Ignore 95% of what your writing group tells you. Find one reader you trust and ask for unvarnished feedback. Trust the process, particularly the power of revision to uncover new and better ideas (Sendak's original story idea for WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE was titled WHERE THE WILD HORSES ARE). And read, all the time, everything you can find, not just the greats and near-greats, but the less-great

and even the not-so-good or even the very bad, where you can sometimes see how you might have done things better.



Author Spotlight: Gregory Frost

Gregory Frost is the author of the upcoming fantasy trilogy about Thomas the Rhymer, beginning Summer 2023 with *RHYMER* (Baen Books). Frost writes fantasy, dark fantasy, and science fiction for adults and young adults, including such books as *SHADOWBRIDGE* (Del Rey), *LORD TOPHET* (Del Rey), *FITCHER'S BRIDES* (Tor), and the story collection *ATTACK OF THE JAZZ GIANTS* (Golden Gryphon), all of which garnered

starred reviews from Publishers Weekly. Frost's works have been honored as finalists for the Nebula, the Hugo, the World Fantasy Award, the International Horror Guild Award, and the Theodore Sturgeon Award. His novelette *NO OTHERS ARE GENUINE* was a recent finalist for the Bram Stoker Award, and a collaborative short story (with Michael Swanwick) won an Asimov's Magazine Readers' Award. Visit him at www.gregoryfrost.com.

Q: Congratulations on your upcoming fantasy trilogy, which kicks off with *RHYMER* this summer! The book is based on a character from Scottish balladry. Can you tell us a bit about this novel and about what drew you to Thomas as a character?

A: It's really an amalgam of two Scottish characters from folksongs: Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin. The project started back in 2013 when Jonathan Maberry and I collaborated on a novella called "T. Rhymer" for the anthology *DARK DUETS* (Voyager). We imagined a kind of eternal champion character (to borrow from Michael Moorcock) fighting the elves today. Initially I had taken a run at the first draft, and in going back to the source material kept finding more and more things to build upon, and which could not be fit into a novella. So I set it all aside, but I really wanted to take it up again and write the origin story. I couldn't leave it alone. So with Jonathan's blessing, I dove in and wrote this: a novel where Thomas is altered by the Queen of Elfland—what she perceives as a small gesture to amuse herself sets in motion a centuries-long war between Thomas and the elves, which in this novel are an alien race living in a world they're rapidly using up. They ultimately will work for a millennium behind the scenes, manipulating societies to poison our world for us and make it a garden for them. So it's a secret cli-fi fantasy novel underneath all of the balladry, fights, archery, and legends.

Q: In the *RHYMER* trilogy, Thomas starts off in the 12th Century, then the next book takes place much later alongside Robin Hood and his Merry Men, then the third book jumps ahead to Shakespeare's time. You include lots of wonderful period details in your narrative, and that takes a lot of research! How do you go about researching these time periods, and do you have advice for others looking to pin down historical details in their fiction?

A: Just *carpe eruditio*, which is to say “embrace the research.” I can remember chasing down research leads for my two Bronze Age Irish novels, *TÁIN* and *REMSCELA* (Ace), which led me to take a 10-week bicycle tour of the U.K. so that I could ride the original route of the Cattle Raid of Cooley across Ireland, which is the heart of the *Táin*. Loving research is definitely a mindset with which you want to make friends. Otherwise, write steampunk so that you can make up anything you like and skip the research. But I'll tell you, research often provides you scenes, details, or elements you'd never have uncovered otherwise—like for this second book in the trilogy, I came across information on “the waits of Nottingham.” They started out as the watchmen of the town: They would blow horns and bang drums to sound the alarm if Nottingham was attacked; they evolved into a troupe of traveling minstrels. They provide some comic-relief in the novel, but I wouldn't have written them in at all if I hadn't come across them while researching the history of Sherwood Forest.

Q: When did you first know you wanted to be a writer? And were you always drawn to fantasy and science fiction?

A: Always. Honestly, though, I thought I wanted to be a comic book illustrator. I was in love with the work of Jack Kirby, Carmine Infantino, Russ Manning, Steve Ditko, etc. So I spent a lot of time in high school writing and drawing my own comic books, and covering my notebooks with sketches (probably more drawings than notes). It never occurred to me at the time that I might prefer writing to illustrating. I dutifully went to art school, and in the second year there I took a night class on writing short stories. Pretty soon I was writing a lot and not painting much at all. One art teacher gave me some H.P. Lovecraft to read, definitely the wrong thing to do. And then my off-campus apartment caught fire, destroying every canvas and charcoal sketch I'd done in those two years, while the manuscript of the first short story I'd written survived intact—which was maybe a sign, but definitely killed my desire to continue painting. Then I joined a small writing workshop on the campus, led by the poet Gary Gildner. I was attempting then to write a science fiction novel, and Gildner was remarkably gracious in letting me participate, because a lot of workshops (and most MFA programs at the time) frowned on genre fiction. Anyway that “novel” ended up being 74 pages long. I had a ways to go yet.

Q: Who are your favorite authors, and how have they influenced your writing?

A: Favorites are always so hard, because you know as soon as you compile the list, you'll think of someone else who should have been on it. Anyway...Shirley Jackson, Roger Zelazny, R.A. Lafferty, Philip K. Dick, Alfred Bester, Ursula K. Le Guin were definite influences in my misspent youth, maybe particularly Zelazny, who could balance absurdity and action in a unique way that really clicked; it's a combination I probably try reaching for all the time. But favorite authors right this minute? Charles Portis, Mick Herron, Alastair Reynolds, N.K. Jemisin, T.C. Boyle, Christopher Brookmyre, Martha Wells, Dennis Tafoya, George Saunders, Susanna Clarke, Andy Duncan. There are easily a dozen more I'm forgetting to include. By the time this thing goes public, that will be a different list, I'm sure.

Q: Do you have any advice for writers looking to break into today's Science Fiction and Fantasy market?

A: Read everybody. If you're writing a specific flavor of fantasy or SF, don't just read what came out last month in that narrow little groove (though you should be aware of what's being published), drill down, find out who that author read and read them and so forth—it'll provide you with a larger sense of the continuum of the fantasy genres. But also read way outside the genre, because some of the best fiction sprouts from authors fashioning something no one's tried yet. I've just finished a "supernatural western," and the reading for that involved a lot of early Elmore Leonard novels, because I wanted the flavor of that voice. Just reading somebody else's weird western wasn't going to get me there. But mostly, though, it is all about what Stephen King said—that writers have to do two things: write a lot, and read a lot. There is simply no shortcut around either of those endeavors. Nor should there be. Read early and often.

Illustrator Spotlight: Jiyeon Pak

Jiyeon Pak was born and raised in South Korea and moved to the U.S. ten years ago. She received an M.F.A. at Maryland Institute College of Art. She lives in Maryland.

Her books are MY GRANDPA'S CHAIR (Knopf, 2017), FINDING GRANDMA'S MEMORIES (Knopf, 2019), as well as seven picture books published in South Korea.



Q: You create both the text and the artwork for your books. How long does it take you to finish a picture book?



A: Every book is different. Some books take only 2-3 months from planning to finish. There are some manuscripts that have been on my desk for years.

It's hard to say which one is better. The books that were completed in a short amount of time usually tend to have freshness while the books that have been edited many times have

depth.

It's like fresh salad and well-aged cheese. (They're both good!)

Picture books are made with many people. Even if the book is finished by an author, it is discussed with an agent first, and then modified with an editor. After that, artwork is also refined based on an art director's and a book designer's opinions.

Usually to publish one picture book, it takes at least 2-3 years.

Q: You have published seven books in Korea. How is the book industry different in Korea from the United States?

A: The biggest difference is the agent system. In the U.S., authors usually find an agent first with finished manuscripts.

There is no agent system in South Korea for domestic authors. Instead, they have numerous competitions and picture book academies from which many authors debut. I was especially intrigued by picture book academies. I haven't participated in any of them. But I think making picture books and discussing them with people who pursue the same dream would be a great experience, especially for aspiring authors.

Q: Who are some of your influences as an artist? Any classic children's book illustrators? Any specific fine artists?

A: There are so many artists and illustrators that I admire. I could talk about them for days.

I especially like the way Leo Lionnini portrays philosophy in simple illustrations of picture books. Raymond Briggs' nostalgic illustrations have warmth like a big hug. I also like Roger Duvoisin's vintage style, especially his color palette. Maira Kalman is my favorite modern illustrator. Ordinary things become special through her art. I often look up David Hockney's work, which is always inspiring.

Q: Is there any advice you'd like to give aspiring children's book illustrators?

A: I might need more experience to give advice for future picture book makers. Nevertheless, if I can say one thing, I recommend to finish one book from

beginning to end, especially for the ones who do both write and create artworks.

It does take a lot of time to finish every artwork of a book. That's why most illustrators only do sketches with a few pieces of finished art.

But, once you complete all the illustrations, put in the text, and make it a finished book format with a gutter, it helps you to understand the flow of the book and find things that are desired.

I even encourage artists to make a cover, endpapers, and even a title page, which is definitely the best way to learn the logic of editing. It's a totally different feeling when you hold an actual book in your hands, not as images on a screen or artwork on paper. This takes a lot of time and effort, but it's definitely worth trying, especially if it's your first book.

You can find more of Jiyeon's work at www.hello-jiyeon.com.



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