

January 2024

JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 23 Years!

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2024! We're proud to announce that 2024 marks JDLA's 23rd year! Here are some highlights from the agency's last quarter of 2023; interviews with an author and an editor; and a discussion with some of our authors regarding book promotion. Thanks for reading!

Recent Highlights



Middle-Grade Graphic Novel Sold

Della Farrell at Holiday House has acquired Gabbie Benda's debut MG graphic novel, *SERENDIPITY*. When a carnival machine gives an overextended middle-schooler an ominous fortune, she decides that bad luck is to blame for her problems, rather than her own choices, and makes humorous attempts to reverse her luck. Tori Sharp at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency

represented the deal for World rights; publication is scheduled for Spring 2026.

Board Books Sold

Joy Nelkin Wieder's (THE PASSOVER MOUSE) two Jewish holiday board books sold to Meredith Mundy at Abrams by Stephen Fraser at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (World). THE HANNUKAH BOOK OF NUMBERS will be published in Fall 2025; the untitled second book will be published in Fall 2026.



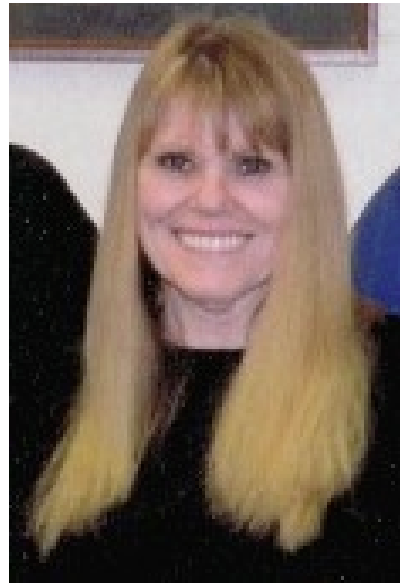
Dark Contemporary Young Adult Novel Sold

Denene Millner at Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster has acquired LACED IN GOLD by Charity Alyse, author of OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS, a dark contemporary YA about Jabari, a Black teenage boy who is offered his recently deceased cousin's place at an elite prep school. When Jabari realizes his cousin's death might have not been accidental, he must prove it by competing in the school's underground fight club and pushing his wits, self-control, and willpower to his limits. Publication is planned for

Spring 2025; Zabé Ellor at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency brokered the deal for World rights.

Author Spotlight: Lindsay Harrison

Nine-time *New York Times* bestselling author Lindsay Harrison moved to Los Angeles in 1970 after graduating from Iowa State University with a bachelor's degree in Telecommunicative Arts. She worked in the Universal Studios steno pool and as a personal assistant for Neil Diamond before becoming a script writer in 1983, a career that included one feature film, nine TV movies, and several episodic television scripts. Her career as a ghostwriter began in 1999, when psychic Sylvia Browne asked her to write a book with her. After ghostwriting fourteen books with Sylvia Browne, Lindsay went on to ghostwrite fifteen memoirs for such fascinating subjects as movie stars Tippi Hedren and George Chakiris and daytime television icon Eric Braeden.



Q: How did you get started as a ghostwriter?

A: All the credit for that goes to psychic Sylvia Browne. I'd had a phone reading with her, and oddly, we made friends during the reading and agreed to meet for dinner next time she was in Los Angeles. So there we were at dinner a few weeks later when, out of nowhere, she said, "Let's write a book." I'd been writing scripts for seventeen years, and I told her I didn't know a thing about writing books and had never even thought about it. Sylvia was a big deal, so I told her to find herself a big-deal writer and promised I'd be the first in line to buy that book. Her immediate response, in typical Sylvia Browne fashion, was, and I quote, "Well, I'm psychic, and you're it, so f*** you." And that was the poetic launch of my literary career. Our first book, "The Other Side and Back," ended up being #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and we wrote a total of fourteen books together, so she obviously knew something I didn't. I'll always be grateful to her for refusing to take my "no" for an answer.

Q: And now, here you are, twenty-three years, twenty-nine books, and nine *New York Times* bestsellers later. What makes ghostwriting such a good fit for you?

A: For one thing, after many years of getting showered and dressed and driving to an office, I consider it a luxury that I work at home and keep my own hours in my pajamas, sweats, or whatever. For another thing, I've always enjoyed writing. Or maybe it's more accurate to quote a writer friend of mine – "The only thing I hate more than writing is not writing." And then there's the fact that I'm a "behind the scenes" person by nature, so ghostwriting suits me perfectly. I couldn't be happier to stand in the shadows and let the author have the spotlight.

Q: What do you find rewarding about ghostwriting?

A: It always fascinates me that no matter who I'm writing for/with/about, once we get comfortable with each other and they start opening up to me, I have

the pleasure of finding out who's really "in there" and getting to focus on and share how human and relatable they are. I consider it part of my "job" to give the author as frank, honest, and intimate a book as possible, rather than just a very long-winded resumé, which obviously means I have to earn the author's trust and never betray it, whether there's a formal non-disclosure agreement between us or not. As far as I'm concerned, ghostwriting is a great lesson in discretion, and in listening without judgment. When an author tells me something deeply personal, I always ask if they want it in the book; if the answer is no, I never try to talk them into it, and it stays strictly between us. Of course, the more they trust me, the more they confide about themselves, and I love hearing them occasionally look back on and discover new insights into the lives they've lived. It feels like an honor to be part of that process. It also creates a uniquely close relationship between the two of us, even with the authors I've never met in person and probably never will. And speaking of the importance of listening, I had no idea how helpful scriptwriting would be for a career in ghostwriting, but learning to write a variety of characters in their distinct "voices" has made it much easier to write in the author's "voice"; it's so gratifying to hear one of my authors read passages as we go along and say, "This sounds exactly like me!" It's their book, after all, not mine.

Q: Is it awkward meeting a potential celebrity author for the first time?

A: I was lucky enough to have already known several of the celebrities I've written for. I'd been friends with Eric Braeden and Jeanne Cooper of "The Young and the Restless" for decades. I'd had several casual lunches with Oscar-winner George Chakiris, aka Bernardo in the original "West Side Story," before the subject of his memoir even came up. Todd Fisher, son of Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher and brother of Carrie Fisher, is married to my long-time friend Catherine Hickland. But then there was Tippi Hedren, star of Alfred Hitchcock's iconic "The Birds." I'd never met her, nor did I know anyone who had, so I had no idea what or who to expect when I drove to her home at Shambala, her wild animal preserve, for a meeting to see if we'd be a good fit to work on her memoir. It was amazing to get out of my car and find myself just several yards away from a few magnificent lions and tigers in their enclosures. But they were quickly upstaged by what seemed like about a thousand ravens that were flying and shrieking everywhere I looked as I walked to Tippi's front door. Let's see. Tippi Hedren's house, surrounded by ravens. It was too weird to be a coincidence, and I admit it, I immediately flashed back to Norma Desmond, the narcissistic silent movie star still clinging to her glory days in the classic film "Sunset Boulevard." If Tippi had surrounded herself with flocks of ravens like some demented Norma Desmond character, this was going to be a very short meeting. I rang the doorbell, and just as Tippi opened the door, a huge raven swooped down right between us. I couldn't resist nodding toward it and saying, "This is a little on-the-nose, don't you think?" I was so relieved when she laughed, invited me in, and explained that the ravens weren't at Shambala because she'd imported them, they were there to scavenge red meat from the wild cats' meals. I ended up staying for almost three hours that first day,

eagerly signing on to ghostwrite Tippi's memoir, and having a beautiful time writing with her and becoming friends with that funny, down-to-earth, fearless, extraordinary woman.

Q: What is your writing process?

A: I make work dates with the authors once or twice a week, in person if they live within reasonable driving distance or on the phone if they don't. (Phone, not Zoom, by the way. I know Zoom is very popular, but I find it to be invasive, annoying, and very distracting.) Whether it's in person or on the phone, I record the conversations (with the authors' permission, of course), transcribe the recordings, and write from the transcripts. I make lists of questions as we go along, and because I have no stones to throw when it comes to occasional confusion and memory lapses, I'm as thorough as possible when it comes to fact-checking – better me than the publisher's editor or legal department, after all.

Q: What advice would you offer someone who's considering a ghostwriting career?

A: When I was still new at this, I found myself dreading sitting down at my computer every morning, to the point where I'd come up with almost any excuse I could think of to put it off. (Another writer friend calls that "the shiny-object syndrome.") It took me a while to figure out that a big part of that dread was feeling overwhelmed by the realization that I'd signed on to write a whole book. Finally I managed to remind myself that I didn't have to write a whole book *that day*, and I eased into a much less intimidating goal – three pages a day would be good enough. Even that isn't always easy, but it's do-able, and it's realistic, and sometimes it even borders on enjoyable. I had no idea when this ghostwriting thing started that publishers don't read manuscripts until they've read a 30– 50-page book proposal to see if they're interested in the project. It took me four or five books to get the hang of writing book proposals. The first few took me forever, and I can't say I loved doing them. But like it or not, they're an unavoidable part of the job; so I would encourage any aspiring ghostwriter to learn to write them and write them well. I have a rule that may or may not appeal to everyone, but I say a quick "no, thanks" to ghostwriting for anyone I don't personally like, respect, or believe, or for someone whose book/memoir will be focused on a subject that's of absolutely no interest to me. It wouldn't be fair to me, to the author, or to the book itself for me to sign myself up for nothing but a long, tedious endurance test.

Editor Spotlight: Amy Novesky, Cameron Books

Q: Cameron Books began as a publisher of photography books in 1964, and started Cameron Kids in 2016. How is that reflected in the children's

book list? What makes your books unique?

A: Our books are highly visual and image-driven. That said, picture books by their nature are highly visual and image-driven, of course. But the quality of the images—illustrations, artwork, etc.—is super important to us. We spend quite a lot of time looking for just the right illustrator, new illustrators, artists (who are not illustrators) to make our books stand out. We take risks and push our aesthetic. And we have a fantastic art director in Melissa Nelson Greenberg, who designs all our books.



Q: You are also a picture book author. How does this inform your work as an editor?

A: I tend to write and acquire similar books. Books about art and artists; poets. And, as of late, horses. I write and I ride, and I have acquired my share of horse titles for our small list: On my desk is an advance of a book I edited called *A ROSE, A BRIDGE, AND A WILD BLACK HORSE*, a new edition of a story by Charlotte Zolotow, illustrated by Julie Morstad (who illustrated one of my books) and an advance of my newest book *IF YOU WANT TO RIDE A HORSE*, illustrated by Gael Abary—both pub in the spring, and I can't wait to see them, hopefully, side by side on a bookstore table: they look good together (a coincidence, I swear)!

Q: We are so proud of our clients' picture books that you published, *MANOLO & THE UNICORN* by Jackie Azua Kramer and *THE POCKET BOOK* by Alexandra Hinrichs. These are both very different stories. What do you look for in a good picture book text?

A: I am proud of those two books, too. Thank you for sharing them with me. What do I look for: I want to be moved. *MANOLO* made me cry when I first read it. And *POCKET BOOK* reminded me of being a young mother to my son, our daily walks, and the treasures and memories we found along the way, which also moved me. I want, too, to feel that the author's got this, that every word matters, and that I can trust in the story to deliver. That's rare, but you know it, or rather, feel it, when you feel it.

Q: Is there anything an author or illustrator can do to ensure the success of their book?

A: Creative success or financial success? That's a tough question as oftentimes the beautiful, artful, award-winning books are not the big sellers. How do you define success? I can speak to creative success: Be true to yourself. Go deep. Don't settle for good enough. Write the story only you, or in

the way only you, can write. Your story should move *you*. Don't submit it unless/until it does. And, hopefully, the big royalties will follow. ;)

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

A: Keep your day job? LOL. Write because you love to write. Work hard. Dig deep. Trust the process. Be patient. Be curious. Seek inspiration. Connect with others. Embody gratitude. Have fun.



Discussion on Book Promotion

In a very competitive market, self-promotion can be a useful thing in securing a book's success.

We asked several JDLA clients to tell us about one promotional tool they have used to help promote their books:

Matt Browning, author of THE DEFINITIVE GOLDEN GIRLS CULTURAL REFERENCE GUIDE (Lyons Press):

A: I think the most effective platform for me was podcasts, which are very popular these days. There are several Golden Girls podcasts, and I was invited to plug the book on a few of them ahead of its release. These appearances, coupled with the social media outreach that accompanied each podcast, really helped the book's audience find it and position me as a name in the juggernaut that is the Golden Girls fandom.



Alexandra Hinrichs, author of THE LOBSTER LADY (Charlesbridge), I AM MADE OF MOUNTAINS (Charlesbridge), and THE POCKET BOOK (Cameron Kids):

A: I think the biggest tool I use to promote my books is simply to try and connect with people in a genuine way, whether that's at a school visit, library event, bookstore signing, or over social media. That means that sometimes



what we talk about isn't necessarily my books at all, but simply life and overlapping interests or memories, or the enthusiasm behind telling stories. On social media, that translates to me posting pictures from outdoor adventures, or mundane everyday moments, writing-related or not-- the same things that inspire me to write and that I enjoy seeing other people posting about. And then when we are talking about a specific book, we know each other that much better.

Erin Teagan, author of *THE FRIENDSHIP EXPERIMENT* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), *SURVIVOR GIRL* (Clarion), and five *American Girl* novels:

A: Hosting giveaways can be an effective marketing tool that is both low-cost and low-effort. Since my books are a good fit for schools and libraries, my giveaways are mostly targeted to educators. Giving away a stack of books for a "retweet and follow" on social media has helped me introduce my books to more teachers and librarians and build connections. You can also use giveaways to encourage pre-orders, bring more attention to your school programs, or bolster your newsletter mailing list. You can give away author copies, swag, signed books, a pile of your recent reads, or even virtual Q&A sessions for classrooms. Giveaways are easy, flexible, and introvert-approved!



Carmella Van Vleet, author of the Christopher Award-winning middle-grade *ELIZA BING IS (NOT) A BIG, FAT QUITTER*; *ELIZA BING IS (NOT) A STAR*; and *NOTHING IS LITTLE* (Holiday House); and two non-fiction books:

A: I write children's books. And because I'm a former educator, one of my favorite things is to connect young readers to my stories in an interactive way at book events. When I wrote an activity book on ancient Egyptian projects, I'd bring a cloth-strip ball that we could toss around and a shoebox decorated like a temple that they could peek inside. In my latest middle-grade novel, *NOTHING IS LITTLE*, my main character joins the forensic science club at school.



So, I built a model “crime scene” for kids to solve. Adults and kids both seem to love checking it out and seeing if they can figure out who stole the piece of cake from the miniature kitchen. Since the interactions are about having fun instead of “selling,” I find everyone is relaxed, which makes for easier and more genuine connections.

Jackie Azua Kramer, author of THE BOY AND THE GORILLA (Candlewick), EMPANADAS FOR EVERYONE (Simon & Schuster), MANOLO AND THE UNICORN (Cameron Kids), and many more:

A: If I were to choose one of my favorite ways to get my books out there and connect with readers, it would be book festivals! Stacks of your books at your table with hundreds of passionate readers eager to engage with you and have their books signed. It’s magical, and reminds me again and again why I love what I do!



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

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