

October 2026



The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 25 Years!

Welcome to our fall issue! We're delighted to share a few recent deals, interviews with client Jason Peterson and publisher Tracy Mack, and an Agents Up Close feature. Thanks for reading!

Recent Highlights



Picture Book Sold

German author Louis Victor's debut picture book **THE YELLOW HORSE & THE BLUE HORSE**, about two horses who face a bullying bull together with cheesecake, to Claudia Zoe Bedrick at Enchanted Lion Books by Executive Agent Stephen Fraser at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency for world rights. Publication is slated for Fall 2027.

Five-Book YA Deal

A five-book deal for K. A. Riley's previously self-published YA dystopian trilogy, **RECRUITMENT**, **RENDER**, and **REBELLION**, about a young woman with a telepathic connection to a raven who is recruited into a shadowy military organization, plus two new untitled novels, to Meg Gibbons at Sourcebooks Fire. Publication of the first book is planned for Fall 2026. Zabe Ellor at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency brokered the deal for world rights.



Middle-Grade Novel Sold

Author of **THE FRIENDSHIP EXPERIMENT** (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), **SURVIVOR GIRL** (Clarion), and the Luciana and Kira Girl of the Year titles (American Girl), Erin Teagan's middle-grade novel **THE**



PINKY PACT, pitched as NEVER HAVE I EVER for tweens, about a sixth-grader who makes a pinky pact with her best friends to ask her longtime crush to the Halloween Karaoke Party, but as one mortifying scheme after another backfires, she risks losing much more than her chance at romance, including the friendships she's trying to hold

onto and the place she's always had in her rapidly changing family, to Wendy Loggia at Delacorte Press, for publication in Spring 2028, by Marie Lamba at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world).

Author Spotlight: Jason Peterson

Jason is the author of two picture books, BLUES WITH A BUTTER KNIFE and the forthcoming THE A'CHANGIN' LIFE OF BOB DYLAN, both from Calkins

Creek/Astra. Jason writes for Performer Magazine, The

Onion, and American Songwriter. He's an active member of SCBWI and has a Master's degree in English. He lives in Louisiana.



Q: You have now sold two picture books, your first one coming out next year. What does it feel like to be a soon-to-be children's book author?

A: It's difficult to put that feeling into words (which is hard to admit as a writer!). Being a published author has been a dream since I was a kid writing stories and poems, and I've seen a lot of ups and downs and close calls in publishing that have led to this moment. So, it's the

realization of that dream and a lot of hard work over the years. It has been a joy to pursue this passion my whole life, and it's been a relief realizing that - at the end of the day - writing the words is still what brings that joy.

Q: Your first picture book is about blues musician CeDell Davis. How did you learn about him and find his amazing life story?

A: I first heard CeDell's incredible music when his *When Lightnin' Struck the Pine* album came out in the early 2000s, and I learned a little about him and his unique playing style then. It wasn't until later, though, that I came across Louis Guida's *Blues Back Home* documentary about his life and tried to track down everything he'd recorded and really dove deep into his life story and music. During the Covid lockdown times, I was also getting back into playing and recording music, and research was a welcome distraction/obsession. It became even more special when I got to speak with musicians who'd played with him and people who knew him - and then tried to write about him in a way that would honor his life and music.

Q: You have written about music for several periodicals and are a musician yourself. How does that inform your writing?

A: There's an apocryphal quote that "writing about music is like dancing about architecture," and I think about that a lot as I'm writing. It's a challenge, but it's a fun challenge. Whether it's interviewing musicians or writing music criticism or creating music-focused fiction, I'm trying to approach it in a non-cliché way and come up with evocative ways to describe sounds and the feelings they create. I don't always succeed, but being a musician does help, I think. At least, I tell myself that when I have my head in my hands trying to think of yet another synonym for "mellifluous."

Q: Does living in south Louisiana influence your writing as well?

A: South Louisiana has such a rich cultural texture - I think it's impossible to live here and not have it influence you. I've been living here for close to fifteen years after being born and raised in the Chicagoland area and then living and working all over the country, and there is something special about this place from a storytelling

perspective. The folklore tradition is incredibly strong in Cajun culture, and that has filtered down in the way people here continue to tell stories and jokes and keep their traditions alive. My most recent middle-grade manuscript definitely drew on my experiences in moving here in direct ways, but I'm sure there are more subtle ways living here has influenced my approach to telling stories. There's probably a gumbo metaphor I could make about it, but that just makes me want to have some gumbo.

Q: What are you working on next?

A: I mentioned the Louisiana-set middle-grade manuscript above, and I have another middle-grade work-in-progress that draws on my Chicago background (including an opening action set-piece at the giant Navy Pier Ferris wheel that is hopefully heart-stopping!). I always have a picture book idea or draft that I'm tinkering with or researching or working to get in submission-ready shape, and I still like to keep an iron or two in the fire with songwriting and music-writing. So, there's always something to look forward to in putting words on the page.

Publisher Spotlight:

Tracy Mack

Tracy Mack is the Vice President and Publisher at Scholastic Press, her professional home for over thirty years. She edits picture books, middle-grade fiction, and graphic novels and is dedicated to discovering new talent, nurturing creatives over time, and building careers. Beloved creators in her stable include

Pam Muñoz Ryan, Brian Selznick, Christina Soontornvat, Betty C. Tang, Aida Salazar, Anne Clare LeZotte, C.C. Harrington, Ann E. Burg, Ross Burach, Joanna Cacao, Barbara Kerley, and Molly Mendoza.



Books she's edited have been #1 *New York Times* bestsellers and have been recognized with Newbery, Caldecott, Pura Belpré, Coretta Scott King, Schneider, Sibert, Kirkus Prize, Boston Globe Horn Book, and National Book Award medals and/or honors. Outside of work, Tracy is a devoted yogini and loves long dinner conversation, her close-knit community, and hiking and swimming in the Adirondacks with her family.

Q: What kinds of things do you look for in a manuscript?

A: An opening line or scene that compels me immediately. Vivid characterizations and voice; taut, confident prose; a thoughtfully imagined and constructed plot; and above all, a clear emotional center. Characters and emotions reign supreme for me.

Q: You have edited verse novels such as Ann Burg's *ALL THE BROKEN PIECES*. Why do you think verse speaks to young readers in a compelling way?

A: Poetry and verse novels are, by their nature, economical and emotionally direct. Every word carries weight. They are also easy to absorb, with lots of white space. That creates a kind of quiet (even if the poem itself is not quiet), in which language and emotion resonate more deeply. The best verse novels have musicality, and I think we all respond on a visceral level to music.

Q: What are some of the books you are most proud of in your career?

A: So many! Here are some that rise to the top, though I'm sure I am leaving out titles I'll later recall and wish I'd included.

Picture books: *The Very Impatient Caterpillar* and *How NOT to Make a Jelly Sandwich* by Ross Burach, *Maybe Tomorrow?* by Charlotte Agell and Ana Martínez González, *The Little Red Fort* by Brenda Maier and Sonia Sánchez, *Chicken Little: The Real and Totally True Tale* by Sam Wedelich, *To Change a Planet* by Christina Soontornvat and Rahele Jomepour-Bell, *When Marian Sang* by Pam Muñoz Ryan and Brian Selznick, *The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins* by Barbara Kerley and Brian Selznick, *The Extraordinary Mark Twain (According to Susy)*

by Barbara Keley and Edwin Fotheringham, *Why Am I Me?* by Paige Britt, Selina Alko, and Sean Qualls, *Grumpy Bird* by Jeremey Tankard, *You Forgot Your Skirt*, *Amelia Bloomer*, by Shana Corey and Chesley MacLaren, *Black Cat* by Christopher Myers, *What a Truly Cool World* by Julius Lester and Joe Cepeda. (Forthcoming): *Wild Inside* by Barbara Kerley and Molly Mendoza, *The Little Gardener* by Hanna Cha.

Fiction: *Esperanza Rising*, *Echo*, and *The Dreamer* by Pam Muñoz Ryan, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* and *Wonderstruck* by Brian Selznick, *All the Broken Pieces* by Ann E. Burg, *The Lost Track of Time* by Paige Britt, *Learning to Swim* by Ann Turner, *I, Freddy*, by Dietlof Reiche, *Show Me a Sign* by Anna Clare LeZotte, *Wildoak* by C.C. Harrington, *Ultraviolet* by Aida Salazar. I was the original editor on Scholastic's Dear America series, and some beloved titles from that are *West to Land of Plenty* by Jim Murphy, *My Secret War* by Mary Pope Osborne, and *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly* by Joyce Hansen.

Graphic Novels: *The Tryout* series by Christina Soontornvat and Joanna Cacao and the *Parachute Kids* series by Betty C. Tang. (Forthcoming): *Esperanza Rising: The Graphic Novel* by Pam Muñoz Ryan and Andrés Vera Martínez, and *Signposts* by Ann Clare LeZotte and Claudia Dávila.

Q: What do you think is the biggest challenge to writers and illustrators these days?

A: Some concerns on my mind are self-censorship stemming from the impact of book banning and confusion around appropriate uses of AI in creative fields. In this complicated landscape, I worry about writers losing confidence in their own instincts and abilities.

Q: Any advice you can give to aspiring children's book creators?

A: - Cultivate a practice of writing at the same time each day, even if only for ten minutes. The poet Mary Oliver advised to treat your muse like your lover and make a date with them. If you show up as promised, they show up for you; if you stop showing up, so do they.

Commitment to your work, even on the days it feels like you are just slogging through, is essential.

- Embrace the process and write from a place of passion and purpose. Stay true to your voice and vision without focusing on market trends, which come and go, or putting too much pressure on publishing outcomes. Of course, writers want to publish, but the real joy needs to come in creating.

- Get quiet and see what arises. Allow your imagination to guide you. Robert Frost famously wrote, "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader."

- I personally find inspiration in nature and reading my favorite poets, who always remind me of the beauty, possibility, and healing power of language.

Agents Up Close

We asked some of our agents the following question: What is your one wish for the publishing industry?

Jennifer De Chiara, President, Senior Agent

It takes forever to hear back from editors, to receive author payments, to negotiate contracts, etc., so if I could change one thing about publishing, I'd make things happen more quickly.

Stephen Fraser, Executive Agent

I have been hearing from editors that middle-grade books are difficult to sell. It may partly be due to the rise of graphic novels, which have migrated to middle-grade readership, and also to the reduction of school and library budgets. Middle-grade used to be the evergreen area of publishing: you have the best, most fervent readers. And truly,



when you think about classic children's books, they are largely middle-grade: Harriet the Spy, Island of the Blue Dolphins, Johnny Tremain, Charlotte's Web, Alice in Wonderland, The Secret Garden, etc. I would wish for there to be a renaissance in middle-grade publishing, where the best, most original, most riveting books ever published are all middle-grade books that would re-establish middle-grade publishing as a certain, vibrant, strong, money-making area of publishing.

Marie Lamba, Senior Literary Agent

That the financial side of the industry would allow publishers and editors to view authors as long-term commitments, giving their titles, and their careers the time to grow and build a following instead of expecting a title to be a huge money-maker right out of the gate (often without providing the extra publicity funds to make that happen). How wonderful it would be to allow a title to stay in print longer, giving it a chance to be found, and to believe in an author enough to give them more book deals despite, say, lower sales on a prior title.

Many of my favorite authors did not start out as immediate household names. But their third or fourth title caught my attention (and eventually they had really strong sales). I became a fan, and read everything by them! I wonder how many writers, whose first books didn't have massive sales, were sadly stymied when they tried to find a home for their next title. So, yes, that would be my wish—that publishers would allow writers the time to grow their careers and that they'd support every title as much as they do their designated lead titles. What a difference that would make to authors and readers everywhere. Everyone, even publishers, would profit.

Zabé Ellor, Literary Agent

I would like the industry to make more long-term investments in authors' careers. Most authors find success only after publishing multiple books, but publishers these days tend to expect authors to sink or swim based on their debut alone. Investing in authors for multiple books would help more authors build lasting careers.

Tori Sharp, Literary Agent

I'd be so excited to see even more of a resurgence of epic fantasy in the middle-grade market. Fantasy is excellent for introducing kids to real-world issues and inspiring courage—and it creates lifelong readers. I hope that children's publishing will take chances on ever more sprawling middle-grade fantasy series and high-concept fantasy-adventure graphic novels.

Katie Erickson, Associate Literary Agent

If the world is my oyster and I get to change any one thing about publishing, I would grant agents and editors enough time to work on every book they choose with the guarantee that they will earn out. Oh, you don't have a genie? How about...I'd like all emails to receive a response. Most people are really good about this, but when an email is completely ignored, I am uncertain if the person even received it.

Jael Morrill, Associate Literary Agent

If I could change anything in the publishing industry, I would make sure there were more editors and administrative assistants to lighten their individual workloads and offer them more time to work with the projects they're most passionate about.

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

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