

July 2024

JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 23 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



Middle-Grade Series Sold

Newbery Honor and New York Times best-selling author (HEART OF A SAMURAI) Margi Preus's first two books in a delightful young middle-grade series, THE SHREW DETECTIVE, about Minerva, a woodland creature who solves mysteries in the animal world, to Howard Reeves at Abrams by

Stephen Fraser at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world English).

THE SECRET HOUSE Sold

Author of the Rhymer series and Bram Stoker finalist Gregory Frost's *THE SECRET HOUSE*, set during Tyler's presidency, about a cursed White House and the enslaved staff who risk all to stop the mysterious evil, to Christopher Payne at JournalStone, for publication in January 2025, by Marie Lamba at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world).



Young-Adult Novel Sold

Contributing Editor of the YA anthology *WE MOSTLY COME OUT AT NIGHT* (Running Press) Rob Costello's debut YA novel *AN UGLY WORLD FOR BEAUTIFUL BOYS*, a queer coming-of-age story about a deep betrayal between secret lovers and the dangerous collision course that changes both their lives forever, to Steve Berman at Lethe Press, for publication in April 2025, by Marie Lamba at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world English).

Author Spotlight: Donna Lambo-Weidner

Donna Lambo-Weidner has sailed the seven seas with swashbuckling pirates, crossed blades with sword-wielding knights, and circumnavigated the moon in a cardboard box...all before the age of eight. Now that she's earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, lived on two continents, and raised four kids (humans, not goats), Donna writes books for children based on her actual life experiences: dog-sledding in the Arctic is one example. She lives in Northern California with her husband and an all too rambunctious Labrador Retriever. Find her online at <https://www.donnalamboweidner.com> and on Instagram @donna.weidner.



Q: Congratulations on your debut picture book, *THERE ARE NO DRAGONS IN THIS BOOK* (North-South). How does it feel to have your first book published? Did you always want to be a writer?

A: I think I'm still re-entering earth's atmosphere after having been shot over the moon fueled by this experience. I'm not one of those writers who wrote their first book in second grade. It took decades to find that calling. Only when my family moved to Munich and my kids were in upper school was I able to find time to write more than our annual holiday letter. A friend and I signed up for a class titled "Every Life is a Story," led

by Dorothea Pattee. "Dee" had been a journalist in the U.S. before moving to Munich in 1968 with her family. She, with her experience, wisdom, and kind-hearted critiques, is 100% responsible for putting me on this path. It's been a bumpy road, scattered with potholes and slippery-sloped mountains, yet well worth the effort.

Q: Your publisher, North-South, has offices in both New York and Zurich, Switzerland. What does having simultaneous editions in English and German mean for your first book?

A: It means a great deal. I have German roots. My mother met my father while he was stationed with the U.S. Air Force in Germany. I was born there, but grew up in New York. I returned to finish university and later lived there again for twenty years, raising our family. The idea for *THERE ARE NO DRAGONS IN THIS BOOK* sparked on a retreat in the German Alps. I guess you could say, on some level, that the book was destined to be published in German first, then a few months later in English, in...wait for it...the year of the dragon. The illustrator, Carla Haslbauer, is German as well.

Q: You've already had a publishing event in Europe with your book's illustrator present. What was that like?

A: When I heard that Carla was nominated for the Serafina Illustrator's Award for Young Talent, I knew I wanted to be at the Frankfurt Book Fair on award night. Something inside me felt she would win. Every time I thought about it, I'd burst into tears. I took that as a sign. Thankfully, there were plenty of tissues on hand when her name was announced as the winner.

Q: What is your creative process? Any advice for publishing hopefuls? And what are you working on next?

A: I wish I were a plotter, but, oh . . . what a pantsner I am! When an idea hits, I run with it. Just like I did with that line, I spit whatever comes onto the page and revise later. When I hit a wall, I switch gears, basically ping-ponging my way between middle-grade and picture-book projects. Three mornings a week, I meet with a group of writers online. We state our intention—research, revision, writing something new. We turn off our cameras, and two-and-a-half hours later we check back and share how we did. There's accountability. Come what may the rest of the day or week, I know I've accomplished something. There's the huge support factor as well—words of encouragement, heads bobbing "Oh. . . I hear you" when someone's standing at the precipice of the give-up abyss, or shared winces when files have been sucked into a black hole. . . a reminder to save, save, save. Read. That's advice I've taken to heart as well. . . books in your genre, books on craft, blogs, articles, anything of interest. Never stop learning. . . sign up for a class, workshops, webinars. Listen to lectures, go to a conference, join a critique group. Write. Draw. Write some more. Have patience. Lots of patience. And while you're working at having all that patience. . . live. Otherwise, you won't have much of a story to tell. Speaking of which, it's time for me to get back to my middle-grade work-in-progress. A precocious twelve-year-old pillaging her way across the high seas waits for no one.

Editor Spotlight: John Scognamiglio

John Scognamiglio is a graduate of New York University with a Bachelor of Arts in English. He started his career as a file clerk in the Contracts Department at Simon & Schuster in 1986 while still a college sophomore before becoming a contracts assistant. After that, he worked for the assistant managing editor before landing where he always wanted to be: Editorial. From 1989 to 1992 he worked as an assistant editor for S&S's mass-market division, Pocket Books. In February 1992, he joined Kensington Publishing as an editor and was promoted to Senior Editor in 1993. In 1998 he was promoted to Editorial Director of Fiction and in 2005 was promoted to Editor-in-Chief. In February



2017, it was announced that Kensington would be launching his own imprint, John Scognamiglio Books, in 2018. Among his authors are New York Times best-sellers Lisa Jackson, Joanne Fluke, Ellen Marie Wiseman, Alexandra Ivy, Leslie Meier, and Kevin O'Brien.

Q: How would you characterize your publishing home, Kensington Books?

A: Kensington is a great place to work, as evidenced by the fact that I've been here for 32 years! At Kensington, everyone works together as a team and everyone's books are important. There's no "star" system at Kensington like there are at some of the bigger houses, where if you're the editor who has the "big" books on the list or the most successes, your books are the ones that get the most attention. At Kensington, everyone's books matter.

Q: You have been in publishing for a number of years. What changes have you witnessed in the industry?

A: Publishing goes in cycles. When I started in publishing in 1986, mass-market was the go-to format and historical romance was what romance readers seemed to prefer. Then, as the years went on, paranormal romance became hot, then chick-lit (thanks to BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY), then historical fiction (anything with the Tudors), then paranormal again, then rom-coms. Readers like discovering something new and then, once they've had their fill of it (or the market becomes glutted because everyone is publishing that one type of book), they move on to something else. I've seen trade paperback become the preferred format, as well as the dawn/success of e-books. Mass-market, sadly, is dying as a format.

Q: We are so proud of our clients' books that you've published, which include the three gay novels by the late J. H. Trumble, two novels by Harmony Verna, and the celebrity memoir by Marion Ross. What draws you to a project?

A: I like to say it starts with the agent's submission letter. If an agent can hook me with their pitch, then I'm intrigued and I instantly want to start reading the manuscript.

Once I start reading the manuscript, I know within a few pages if I'm going to be hooked or not. It's sort of instinctual. I know the types of books that Kensington will do well with, but I also – I would like to think – know what a reader of commercial fiction is looking for since I'm also a huge fan of commercial fiction.

Q: You now have your own imprint. What is your criteria for books that you put your own name on?

A: My imprint is pretty much a place where I put debut authors. Books that I feel are really special. My goal when I sign an author up – whether for the Kensington list or my imprint – is the hope that it's going to be the start of a career, with many more books to come.

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

A: Writing is hard work, so don't get discouraged. The hardest part is the first draft, but once you have that first draft done, then you have something to work with and revise. If you write a page a day, every day, by the end of the year, you should have a complete manuscript. (I can't take credit for this last sentence. It was said by New York Times best-selling author James Clavell in an interview many years ago!)

Agent Spotlight: Jennifer De Chiara

Jennifer De Chiara is President of The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency, which she established in 2001 from the drop-leaf kitchen table of her studio apartment in Manhattan and impressively moved to an office on Park Avenue. Before forming the agency, she was a literary agent with two New York City agencies, worked in the editorial departments of Simon & Schuster and Random House, and was a writing consultant for several major New York City corporations. A New York City-based writer, she is a frequent guest judge for the Writer's Digest, WOW! WOMEN ON WRITING, and That First Line writing contests, among others, is a frequent guest lecturer on publishing and the craft of writing, and has taught writing workshops at universities and writers conferences throughout the country and beyond, which have included New York University's Summer Publishing Institute, the Penticton, Canada Writers Conference, the San Diego State University Writers Conference, Backspace, the International Women's Writing Guild, and the Learning Annex. The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency has gained industry prestige with a wide range of high-quality books for adults, teens, and children, including New York Times best-sellers;



Jennifer De Chiara with client Danny Aiello

starred book reviews; film, tv, and stage deals; foreign-language editions; a Newbery Honor book; an Edgar Award winner; a LAMBDA Award winner; and two PEN Awards. When Jennifer is not agenting or swimming, she's working on her screenplay, her picture book, and her novella, in that order. Okay, maybe she jumps around.

Our premier edition of this newsletter featured an interview with you. Now, 13 issues later, we are circling back to ask you some more questions:

Q: You have sold a lot of celebrity memoirs and adult nonfiction books. Do any of these books stand out to you, either for their success or for the pleasure of working on them? Are there any special memories that you can share?

A: Even though I represent both fiction and nonfiction for all ages and in all genres, I must admit that I have a soft spot for adult nonfiction, especially celebrity memoirs. As a former dancer/actress, I love stories about show business and the arts. As I was growing up, with stars in my eyes, the celebrity memoirs that I read fed me artistically and inspired me to keep going for my dreams. Now it's extremely fulfilling for me to help put books out into the world that might inspire others on their journeys.

Every book I've ever worked on is special to me, but there are a few that stand out, for various reasons. I negotiated a multi-book multi-million-dollar deal and the creation of her own imprint at Harper One for psychic Sylvia Browne; I did a book deal for client Tippi Hedren, who was a complete joy to work with (and who still leaves me starstruck); and I sold Danny Aiello's memoir to Simon & Schuster. I usually stay friends with all of my clients long after their book deals are done, but Danny and I had an amazing friendship from day one that lasted until he, sadly, passed away in 2019. *THE ELF ON THE SHELF* is a project that I found in the slush pile, believe it or not, and which has gone on to make millions. I predicted that this elf would be in everyone's home, just like Santa Claus, and you know what – I was right! Working with Cathy Scorsese on the holiday television special was such an honor and a joy, and seeing the Elf float at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade was a pinch-me moment. Dreams come true, every single day, so dream BIG, and don't give up!

Q: What qualities attract you in a nonfiction proposal? Can you gauge how popular a certain topic will be?

A: I have to care about the topic, first of all, and be excited to share this book with the world. But if the writer doesn't have a platform, it doesn't matter how much I love the proposed book – I won't be able to sell it. And, of course, the proposal needs to be well written, and the writing has to be stellar to attract my interest.

I can usually gauge how popular a book will be, but not always. If a topic is trendy, it might not still be trendy in a year or two, when the book comes out. And there are books that develop a cult following, and continue to make money for years, much to everyone's surprise

Q: Are there any books that you are looking forward to seeing in print?

A: I'm excited about a nonfiction book I sold recently to Rowman & Littlefield: ALCATRAZ: The Last Escape, by Ken Widner and Mike Lynch. It's an amazing story that reexamines the famous prison escape by Frank Morris and the Anglin brothers, written by the Anglin brothers' nephew. It finally answers one of America's most enduring mysteries. I'm also looking forward to a non-fiction book that will surely rock headlines; I can't say anything about it yet, but it has to do with a "me too" story. It's been an honor to work on this woman's story and finally give her a voice, and some justice.

Watch for our next newsletter, coming soon! You can access our previous newsletters here: [JDLA Newsletters](#).

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