

April 2022

JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 21 Years!

Welcome to our Spring issue! Our year has really started with a bang – book deals, audio deals, film and tv deals, auctions, and so much more. We're proud to highlight some of our exciting projects below. Thanks for reading!

Recent Highlights



Debut Middle-Grade Book Deal

Debut author Maria Tureaud's middle-grade paranormal adventure, *THE LAST HOPE IN HOPETOWN*, about twelve-year-old Sophie and her 300-year-old best vampire friend who must break into a secret government facility in search of a cure for the weird illness turning vampires rogue in order to save their families from becoming part of a mutated vampire army, sold to Liz Kossnar at Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, by Amy Giuffrida at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency. Publication is slated for Fall 2022.

A New Picture Book by Alexandra Hinrichs

THE LOBSTER LADY is a delightful new picture book by Alexandra Hinrichs, whose work includes THERESE MAKES A TAPESTRY (Getty), THE TRAVELING CAMERA (Getty), as well as the forthcoming I AM MADE OF MOUNTAINS (Charlesbridge) and THE POCKET BOOK (Cameron Kids). At 101, Virginia Oliver, or "The Lobster Lady," is the oldest person hauling lobster in Maine and possibly the world. This picture-book biography celebrates Virginia's coastal life, past and present. THE LOBSTER LADY was sold to Julie Bliven at Charlesbridge by Senior Literary Agent Stephen Fraser at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency. It will be illustrated by Jamie Hogan. Publication is planned for Summer 2023.



Television Deal for Chris Ingram

Son of DJ Dan Ingram of WABC "Musicradio 77" Chris Ingram's HEY, KEMOSABE! THE DAYS AND NIGHTS OF A RADIO IDYLL has sold to Dante Ross at Modern Folklore Production Company, by Stephen Moore at The Paul Kohner Agency in association with Jennifer De Chiara at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency. HEY, KEMOSABE! THE DAYS AND NIGHTS OF A RADIO IDYLL blends memoir and fiction to tell the story of Chris Ingram's father and the other legendary on-air personalities at New York's WABC "Musicradio 77," the most listened to radio station in the 1960s and 1970s; a front-row seat to a magical era in music and radio, the soundtrack to a turbulent era, from the arrival of The Beatles and

the Top 40 format to the King, Kennedy, and Lennon assassinations, to the rise of disco and FM radio, which ultimately spelled the end for WABC.

Agent Spotlight: Zabé Ellor

Literary agent and bestselling author of *MAY THE BEST MAN WIN* (Roaring Brook), Zabé Ellor (he/him) holds a BA in English Literature and Biology from Cornell University. When not writing, he can be found running, hiking, playing video games, and exploring Los Angeles. His upcoming releases are the adult fantasy novel *SILK FIRE* (Solaris) and the YA rom-com *ACTING THE PART* (HarperTeen). Find him online at www.zrellorbooks.com



Q: What inspired you to become a literary agent?

A: Working with authors has always been my passion. It's incredibly rewarding to see a project come together after a client pours in their heart and soul. I love being able to advise and guide my clients through the complicated world of publishing. Nothing feels better than helping bring new books into the world.

Q: What does a day in your working life look like?

A: When you're a literary agent, every day is a little different and you need to be willing to adapt on the fly. A typical day for me begins with checking my email and taking care of any urgent client needs. Around midday, I'll dive into my query box and see if there's anything new, and in the afternoon, I'll work on client edits and contracts. After my plate is cleared, I'll work on my own writing.

Q: What is it like being a writer as well as an agent, and how does that help you be a better agent?

A: Being a writer myself helps me empathize with and understand my clients' needs. The publishing industry can be stressful and hard to understand, and having a writers' perspective lets me better anticipate which questions authors will ask during different stages in the publishing process. Balancing the work takes a careful act, but it's worth it to help bring so many wonderful new books into the world.

Q: What are some of your upcoming projects?

A: I'm looking forward to the upcoming release of *HELL FOLLOWED WITH US* by my client Andrew Joseph White. This queer post-apocalyptic YA horror novel is out in June, and the unforgettable voice of this novel blew me away. My second novel, the adult epic fantasy *SILK FIRE*, comes out in July—if you enjoy magical worlds, intricate politics, and vengeance, check it out!



Author Spotlight: Jackie Azúa Kramer

Jackie is an award-winning, internationally translated children's book author. Her picture books include *THE GREEN UMBRELLA*, 2017 Bank Street College Best Children's Books of the Year; *IF YOU WANT TO FALL ASLEEP*; *THE BOY AND THE GORILLA*, which received three starred reviews, a 2021 Bank Street College Best Children's Books of the Year, and a 2021 SCBWI Crystal Kite Award; *I WISH YOU KNEW*, a 2021 Parents' Magazine Raising the Future

Book Club Pick; *MILES WON'T SMILE*; and *DOROTHY AND HERBERT: AN ORDINARY COUPLE AND THEIR EXTRAORDINARY COLLECTION OF ART*, a Junior Library Guild Selection. Her upcoming picture books releasing between 2022-2023 are *WE ARE ONE*; *MANOLO AND THE UNICORN*; *ZUMBA!*, a sing-along book; and *CARINA'S EMPANADAS*. Visit her at: www.jackieazuakramer.com

Q: You have sold an impressive 13 books since you signed with our agency. Is this the way you saw your writing career developing?

A: Actually, yes! I remember my first meeting with my agent and sharing that I hoped to publish one book a year. I believed I had something to say, and hoped others agreed and could see themselves in my stories. I believed if I worked hard and sustained my creativity, good things would follow. The secret sauce is having an agent (Stephen Fraser) who listens and understands your goals for your career.

Q: Your first picture book, *THE GREEN UMBRELLA* (North-South), was published simultaneously in both English and German editions. What does it feel like to have your books read by children all around the world?

A: Amazing! I feel overjoyed when I'm told that my books have sold multiple foreign editions. To realize that kids thousands of miles away, from diverse cultures and languages, can see themselves or find something in common in my stories, is ultimately why I want to keep writing. It's a way of connecting with readers that reflects we are more alike than different.

Q: Your picture book *THE BOY AND THE GORILLA* (Candlewick) won SCBWI's Crystal Kite award. Were you surprised and what did that win feel like?

A: Yes, I was surprised. It was like winning the People's Choice Award, lol! New York has a tremendous treasure trove of great children's authors and illustrators. I'm moved that a story about loss and grief, hope and love, touched

so many people. The book with Cindy Derby's gorgeous illustrations and the fantastic team at Candlewick Press made the win possible. I thank every NY SCBWI member for their vote and love of the book.

Q: Diversity is such a big focus in children's book publishing these days. How important is it for you to write about your Latin roots?

A: In 2012, when I began writing, sadly, there was little mention of diversity or #WeNeedDiverseBooks. But as the cultural and social wave shifted in the kidlit world, so did the inspiration for my stories. I began to dig into my Latinx roots, and memories, and discovered many other layers in my storytelling. It truly has opened another world in my writing that I love researching and discussing with other Latinx creators. For example, *I WISH YOU KNEW* (Roaring Book Press, 2021) was inspired by my father's immigrant journey from Ecuador to the U.S. In *EMPANADAS FOR EVERYONE* (S&S BFYR, 2023), the story reflects my childhood memories of living in Queens, NY and the incredible diversity of neighborhoods and food. Recently, I wrote a story called *I AM SALSA* (HarperCollins/Quill Tree, TBA) that explores the Afro-Caribbean roots of salsa dance through the experience of a little girl and her family. I'm so excited to share these stories with young readers!

Q: What advice can you give aspiring picture book writers?

A: The first thing I'd recommend is to join SCBWI. SCBWI is a one-stop shop of valuable information and a way to connect with a worldwide community of creators, editors, and agents. Most important is to read, read, and read some more, current and new picture books. Read with a purpose—what did the author do well in terms of narrative arc, character development, tension, a satisfying resolution. What about style, pace, language, and word count? In addition, reading new books offers you a window into what is being published. The picture book world is wide open for fresh, imaginative, and well-executed stories.

Illustrator Spotlight: Renée Graef

Renée Graef is an award-winning illustrator who graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in art. She has illustrated over 80 books for children, including the KIRSTEN series in the AMERICAN GIRL collection and many of the MY FIRST LITTLE HOUSE books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Renée worked as a creative director for the Little House program at Harper Collins for five years and enjoyed traveling to the Laura Ingalls Wilder sites.

Renée has also illustrated classics such as *THE NUTCRACKER* and *MY FAVORITE THINGS*, as well as books about American icons Mount Rushmore and Paul Bunyan. She has worked on books/cookbooks for Lidia Bastianich (of PBS's *Lidia's Italy*). Renée's most recent alphabet books are on timekeeping and on lighthouses of the Great Lakes. Renée worked with the Getty Museum in Los

Angeles on THÉRÈSE MAKES A TAPESTRY, a historical fiction highlighting the weaving of tapestries during the 1670's in Paris.

Ms. Graef's accomplishments have been honored by the Society of Illustrators-Los Angeles and the State of Wisconsin's House of Representatives, among other groups, and her work has been exhibited in numerous solo shows. Renée splits her time between Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Los Angeles, California.



Q: You have published an impressive eighty books. How has publishing changed over the years?

A: MEET KIRSTEN (by Janet Shaw) was my first illustrated book. I feel fortunate to have worked with Pleasant Rowland in the formative days of Pleasant Company/American Girl. The excitement of going to New York to show my portfolio to art directors and editors was a wonderful experience. Now, of course, it is a matter of emailing jpegs or a website link.

Q: You have created several picture books with author Barbara Josse. Is there a benefit to working with the same author?

A: There are millions of advantages because Barbara is awesome, if not annoying. Well, maybe the annoying parts outnumber the advantages. Fortunately, she keeps me on my creative toes and the golden nuggets that come out of our collaboration make it all worthwhile. Working together is thoroughly entertaining and challenging at the same time. It's a good thing we are best friends. (The above answer was heavily edited by the talented and incredible Barbara Josse.)

Q: Where did you get your training as an artist?

A: I received a bachelor's degree in art from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My illustration career began at the University, where I was an in-house illustrator in publications for six years, drawing anything from cartoon jovial cows to precise pen-and-ink entomology charts (I still remember the insects-on-pins stuck to my drawing table for reference). My early diversity of styles reflect my current portfolio.

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

A: Maurice Sendak, Edward Gorey, Jessie Wilcox Smith, NC Wyeth, Christopher Van Allsburg, and Garth Williams were and are still among my favorite children's book illustrators.

Q: Any specific fine artists?

A: For overall artistry, Carl Larsson; for brushwork, John Singer Sargent; for craftsmanship, Alphonse Mucha; for tenderness, Mary Cassatt; for emotion, Kathe Kollwitz; and for sense-of-place, the landscapes of Grant Woods.

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

- A:**
1. Attend figure-drawing sessions to improve drawing skills.
 2. Join illustrator groups for mutual support and information on the ever-changing illustration field.
 3. Post on social media.
 4. Create as much as you can. Even if it is a scribble.
 5. Think of "six impossible things before breakfast" (seven, if there is time).

You can find more of Renee's work at www.graefillustration.com.



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

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