

April 2026

JDLA

Newsletter

The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency Celebrates 25 Years!

Welcome to our Spring newsletter! We're delighted to share some recent deals, along with some interviews we think you'll find inspiring. Thanks for reading!

Recent Highlights



Illustration Deal

Graphic novel creator Gabbie Benda will illustrate Rob Sanders' picture book, *A FAMILY OF READERS*, which celebrates the library as a vibrant community, to Eileen Robinson while she was at Charlesbridge, by Tori Sharp at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world).

Cultural Reference Guide Sold

Matt Browning's *THE BIG BANG THEORY CULTURAL REFERENCE GUIDE* to Rick Rinehart at Lyons Press, for the superfans of the hit TV show that ran for 12 seasons, by Stephen Fraser at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (North American).



Flash Fiction Collection Sold

Claire Polders's *WOMAN OF THE HOUR*, a flash fiction story collection, to Jessica Bell at Vine Leaves Press, in an exclusive submission, by Marie Lamba at The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency (world English).

Agent Spotlight: Katie Erickson

Katie Erickson joined The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency in 2024, after previously interning at the agency, and after over a decade working as a freelance illustrator for clients such as *Humpty Dumpty* magazine. She has a Master's Degree in Creative Writing and Illustration. When she's not reading, writing, or illustrating, she can be found playing board games or taking long walks with her family. She represents picture books, as well as middle-grade and young-adult literature, specifically focusing on author-illustrators.



Q: Your background is in illustration. Does that inform the kinds of picture books that you look for or represent as an agent?

A: Great question! My background in visual art absolutely informs the picture books that I look for and represent. I imagine, though, that what I'm looking for is not that dissimilar to other agents. I look for stories with plots that grab the reader, characters that we can believe in, and words that showcase a poetic beauty. I do take my search a step further as I consider the illustrations, too. How would this look as a book? What kind of artwork might play well with the story? How would the page turns work? Is it a story that would stand out in our current times? I am always seeking authors who also illustrate at a professional level, but it is not an easy thing to do. And authors who don't illustrate still need to write stories that work well visually for younger age markets. At the end of the day, I see my ability to speak both in words and images as a boon for my clients as we shape their stories together.

Q: Do you still do illustration professionally? If so, how do you balance that with agenting?

A: Balance is one of those hot topic questions, and I used to believe it meant an even split of time. But sometimes art requires more time and sometimes agenting and sometimes other things like family. I do still illustrate professionally, but have reduced my marketing efforts while I build up my agenting clients. I see that balance shifting back and forth throughout my career as I work to fill my list. This works well with the natural ebb and flow of the publishing world. Everything has seasons. I realized this as a JDLA intern. Some weeks contained a whirlwind of tasks to be completed, and some weeks were quiet. I don't see that changing, and quite frankly, I've determined that I wouldn't want it to! I love that this job is not monotonous.

Q: What have you learned about the publishing industry since you worked first as an editorial intern and now as an agent? Any things that surprised you?

A: One thing I have learned since beginning my internship was how many different types of skills you use in this career. It is not only reading books, but it's also managing, organizing, marketing, editing, connecting, and encouraging. Those are all mixed in with a little bit of risk-taking by publishing houses, editors, and agents as we all try to work together to create books that readers will fall in love with. Something that surprised me is that the community is both bigger than I imagined and more tight-knit at the same time.

Q: What kinds of trends are you seeing in the kinds of submissions that you're getting? Anything you would like to see more of?

A: Reading through queries is one of my favorite things in this career. I never

know what treasures I might uncover. That being said, I do often receive many manuscripts with themes about social emotional learning (SEL), and sometimes I have waves of submissions with strangely similar premises, such as a little mermaid retelling, hitting my inbox in the same week. The zeitgeist is fascinating. I would love to see more author-illustrator submissions (for all audiences), manuscripts that keep me up at night, and cozy stories for older audiences. Of course, I'd love to see something I've never read before, but I do have other very specific requests in my manuscript wishlist on the JDLA website. Overall, I long for stories that stay with me long after I finish reading them.



Editor Spotlight: Glenn Yeffeth

Glenn Yeffeth is CEO of BenBella Books. For 15 years, Glenn was a corporate strategist and marketer who ran companies in Chicago, London, and Dallas. In 2001, Glenn formed BenBella Books to combine his love for books with his passion for marketing. Now in its 25th year, BenBella publishes around 90 titles annually, has had over 80 national bestsellers, and is known for the quality of its marketing and author partnership. Glenn has an MBA in Marketing and Finance from the University of Chicago and a BA in

History from Oberlin College.

Q: How did you come to start your own publishing company? Is it true the name BenBella comes from your two children's names?

A: I came out of the management consulting world, and spent 15 years working in that field, including launching our Dallas office and overseeing our European operations. I learned a lot about business, but knew virtually nothing about publishing.

But I was ready for something new, and I'd always loved books. I hoped that I – along with the team I built – could figure it out, and, ultimately, we did. We got lucky in many ways at the beginning, which allowed us to survive as we developed the model that we have now – a deep focus on author service and strong marketing of our titles.

And, yes, BenBella is an amalgam of the names of my two children – Benjamin and Isabella.

Q: How has the publishing world changed since you began your company?

A: In many ways. When I started, ebooks were barely a thing, and then they exploded and for a while seemed like they were taking over the industry, until they settled down into just another format. A similar thing has been happening in the last few years with audio.

Q: What book/books are you most proud of publishing?

A: To just pick a few: *The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted and the Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss, and Long-Term Health* by Drs. T. Colin Campbell and Thomas M. Campbell.

It's hard not to pick this title, which really put us on the map. Published in 2005, it grew into the definitive science-based argument for a whole-foods, plant-based lifestyle – ultimately selling well over 2 million copies.

I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times by Mónica Guzmán.

Published in 2022, this surprise hit was the book we all needed, as the growing divisiveness in our country began destroying families and friendships.

The Cure for Alcoholism: The Medically Proven Way to Eliminate Alcohol Addiction by Roy Eskapa.

Originally published in 2010, with a new edition in 2018, this is a title that might never have been published if we didn't take it on. This book, which describes a peer-reviewed, science-based solution to serious alcohol addiction has gone on to help many thousands of people, and spawned at least two addiction memoirs, both published by us.

Q: What do you look for in books that you acquire?

A: Our titles are almost all non-fiction, and we look for a combination of platform, quality and originality of idea, and quality of execution. In the non-fiction space there are many titles on every topic, and so originality is difficult to find.

Platform can be a few things. It can be genuine, deep expertise recognized by your peers. It can be a large, organic, and engaged social media audience. Or it can be having the ability to get media/attention, which usually comes from existing fame, or being involved in something that captured the public interest.

Q: What advice would you give to writers who want to get published?

A: Well, obviously my answer reflects my answer to the previous question, and my thoughts are only relevant to non-fiction writers.

If you have a deep expertise in a field and are recognized in your area as a real authority, this is a great basis for writing a book that will get the attention of publishers.

If you don't have this level of recognition and authority in an area, building an audience via social media is another path to getting a publisher's attention, although you will still need to build a significant amount of expertise.

If you are a writer, without either of these, a route might be identifying someone with the characteristics above and write a book jointly with them. Many of these individuals don't have the time or skills to write a book on their own. If that book is successful, this could pave the way for solo books.

Author Spotlight: Alexandra Hinrichs

Alexandra Hinrichs's debut picture book, *THERESE MAKES A TAPESTY*, came out from Getty Publications in March 2016. She is also the author of *THE TRAVELING CAMERA* (Getty, 2021), *I AM MADE OF MOUNTAINS* (Charlesbridge, 2022), *LOBSTER LADY* (Charlesbridge, 2023), and *THE POCKET BOOK* (Abrams, 2023).



Alex has worked as a historical researcher at American Girl, a children's librarian, and a children's bookseller, among other things. She earned MAs in United States History and Library & Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and completed her undergraduate education at Colgate University, where she majored in History and French.

Alex grew up in Princeton, Massachusetts. She has also lived in France and Thailand. She now makes her home in Bangor, Maine with her spouse and their three sons. Formerly a reference librarian at the University of Maine's Fogler Library, she is now a children's book editor at Islandport Press.

Q: You have had a number of your picture books published. What are the particular challenges of writing a picture book text? And how does it vary working with different editors?

A: I think each project presents its own challenges. Sometimes it's finding the right structure or voice for a story, sometimes it's figuring out the ending and how it will bring the story to a satisfying oomph of a close, sometimes it's revising a rhyming nonfiction text (*I AM MADE OF MOUNTAINS* for the win on revision challenges!), and sometimes it's figuring out the hook or layer that will make it work in today's market. Different editors have different approaches as to how they like to communicate, but across the board, I have had wonderful editors who have each asked questions that unlocked possibilities and potential in my projects, who have encouraged play, and who have inspired me to want to push a manuscript further.

Q: You worked for years as a children's librarian. Did that inspire you to write books yourself?

A: Being a librarian certainly inspired me to want to keep writing, but I actually dreamed of writing children's books from a very young age. I have a school assignment I wrote out in neat cursive around age ten where I declared that I wanted to be a children's book author one day! For the record, I also still have an old rolodex card that I'd converted into a pretend library catalog card so I could play librarian as a kid, too. I knew what I wanted to do!

Q: Your picture book THE LOBSTER LADY was based on a real person. What was the experience like meeting Virginia Oliver, the subject of your story?

A: When I do school visits, students always ask me which of my books is my favorite, and I always answer truthfully that I don't have a favorite book, but that I have a favorite process. And that was making THE LOBSTER LADY, because getting to meet and come to know Virginia Oliver and her son Max was such a gift. They are wonderful humans, salt of the earth kind of people. Meeting Virginia, or Ginny, taught me to listen closely to what was said and what was said between the lines. What were the stories she lingered on, or the moments she skipped over? What were the memories she repeated on multiple occasions or laughed her way through? Her mother chasing her to bed is an example of a memory that she brought up during more than one visit. It clearly was a treasured one. More importantly, meeting her and Max showed me how friendships can grow from making a book. I still keep in touch and visit. I last saw her in June, right before her 105th birthday!

Q: You recently began working as a children's book editor at Maine's Islandport Press. Has this experience colored your feelings about being a writer, now working on the other side of the desk?

A: I certainly understand the wait times better now! It can be so frustrating as a writer to wait for submission responses, and even though I had an idea, I had no idea. I couldn't have fully comprehended the volume of submissions, the desire to give actual feedback, the dance of balancing an entire list and how lists speak to each other from season to season and year to year, and also doing so all while editing frontlist projects! It's a wildly frustrating job and an amazingly rewarding job, just as being an author or illustrator is. Another surprise has been how some of my favorite submission reading experiences have still been rejections in the end. But a couple have led to meaningful correspondence and conversations and the hope of finding the right project to work with a particular author someday. So I suppose there are champagne rejections for editors, too, where I find an author who wows me with their writing or storytelling ability in one way or another and I feel a spark of excitement and hope that we'll get to work together at some point.

Q: Any advice for aspiring picture book writers?

A: I think write the stories that bring you joy and celebrate every step. Every mentor text read, every workshop taken, every draft written, every query or submission sent, and even every rejection received. It all shows that you are working, you are learning, you are taking yourself and your craft seriously, and you are in good company. And speaking of good company, I will repeat what many writers and editors say: find a critique group! Find the people who want to deep dive into writing and gush over children's books the way you do. Writing can be lonely sometimes, and having friends to share the journey with? It makes all the difference. Those friends have been the most wonderful and unexpected outcome of my writing career. They have become family. I wish that for everyone!

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

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