



Society of Children's Book
Writers & Illustrators EASTERN PA
CHAPTER

WELCOME WINTER!

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*Snowflakes by
Laura Brown*

RA'S MESSAGE

By Marilyn Hershey

This is always a bittersweet time of year. Anticipating a new year and remembering the past. Ever since I started writing my middle grade novel my new years resolution has centered on the book.

Three years ago I said, hell or high water I was finishing the book. Neither hell, high water, or finishing the book happened, so two years ago I said the same thing. Last year I had the same resolution. This year, the book is finished but I need to revise, tweak, and polish so the manuscript is ready to send to editors.

It's tough when life is flying past and we don't accomplish what we've set out to do. I know if it weren't for our SCBWI chapter, centuries would pass before my novel was ready to submit.

The Fall Philly was a good push for me. Laurie Halse Anderson gave a great inspirational presentation that got me out of the routine of filling my day with anything other than writing.

If it weren't for my writing friends, it would be easy to slip back into my bad habits of wasting time.

As 2007 was in its final minutes and 2008 at the starting gate, the news was running a ticker across the bottom of the television screen with personal greetings and resolutions from across the country.

One resolution caught my eye. An illustrator from California announced to the world that this year she was "getting her illustrations out there for publishers to see." I don't know if she is a children's illustrator and I was too groggy to catch her name; but that took guts. It's a good challenge for all of us.

Make a resolution about what you are working on, whether it's a manuscript or

CONCRETE OCEAN

By Beth Burrell

Back and forth, up and down, he roars.
Younger boys' eyes track his motion:
Will he fall?
Will he fly?
He is lost in his half-pipe world,
not seeing them, not seeing me.

Aware only that he must move,
Defying gravity and my better judgment.
To work the surface like a surfer
works the wave.
Propelled forward by an iron will and
a slab of wood on wheels.

That was five years ago.
Two broken bones and many stitches
later, a passion flourishes
Not to be thwarted by blood or a
mother's tremor,
By winter rain or learning his
Spanish.

Why stop?
The world is one big concrete ocean
Beckoning, waiting to be skated.

I pause from my book
To observe this feat, that trick.
Months of watching later,
And I don't flinch.
I cheer.
Because that's what a mother does.

illustration. Then find someone to tell; your writer's group, an SCBWI friend, or your family. They can hold you accountable and next year, when its time to make resolutions you will feel good about 2008 and excited about making new resolutions for 2009.

OH, TO BE SIX AGAIN: GETTING REAL IN WRITING FOR KIDS

By Patricia Thomas

One of the neatest aspects of our Eastern PA SCBWI conferences is not only the food for thought garnered on the spot, but the fact that it often leads to other amazing mental breakthroughs. So it was with this year's Fall Philly.

For me, one magic remark came from Diane Ochiltree, who pointed out some of the kid attitudes that we need to keep in mind in writing for and about them. Among other things, she noted that "kids aren't sentimental."

Now, there's a truism about kidhood that we don't often consider. Kids don't make judgments or get attached to things for the same sentimental reasons adults do. A child will love his "blankey" and cling to it--but he will do so because he finds comfort and security in it; not because it was the very first, special blanket Grandma gave to him.

Moreover, kids live life in the moment. What is important in the moment will be the factor most likely to inspire and motivate them. Promises of what will happen next week...or tomorrow...or even in about an hour, for goodness sake, don't hold much water most of the time. Well...that is except for threats of "wait till your father gets home," but that falls within the realm of negative impact, which is, so to speak, a horse of a different color.

As I mulled over this insight and the idea that kids simply evaluate circumstances differently, another light bulb suddenly switched on in my head. I remembered a joke making the rounds of the Internet. It concerns a husband who asked his wife what she'd like to have for her birthday. "I'd like to be six again," she told him. So on the morning of her birthday, her caring hubby fixed her a big bowl of Lucky Charms for breakfast. Then he took her to a Six Flags theme park, where they rode every ride: the Death Slide, the Wall of Fear, the Screaming Monster Roller Coaster—everything! For dinner, he took her to a MacDonald's where he ordered her a Happy Meal with extra fries and a super-size shake. Then it was off to a movie, popcorn, soda, and Ju-Ju babies. When she finally wobbled home and collapsed into bed, her husband leaned over and lovingly asked, "Well, Dear, what was it like being six again?" Her eyes slowly opened. "I meant my dress size," she gasped.

There you have it. That's the danger of imposing adult concepts on a child's world...of not truly crafting a story from a child's own perspective.

To an adult, six is a dress size. To a kid, to be six is outrageous fun.

We all know the importance of "thinking like a child" in writing for children. We know all about needing to present a problem for a child character to solve and then let him/her solve it. The part that may require a deeper mental jump backward into one's own childhood psyche is making sure that the problem itself will be truly important to your child protagonist.

Does the problem, for instance, involve staying clean to go for a visit to Grandma's house because after all, Grandma had given the child this lovely dress, which she'd spent hours making. Well, guess what. That child doesn't really comprehend the extent to which that the dress is important because Grandma made it--even if Grandma collapsed of exhaustion in the process. The child may be motivated to keep the dress clean, but mainly because she'll be in trouble if she gets it dirty (the old negative impact thing). After which--once she deals with the scolding/lecture/time out/disappointed looks from Grandma--it won't matter much. That dress is important to the adults involved—not to the child.

Recognition of this sort of weakness had turned on much the same sort of light bulb for me in editing manuscripts from a number of my Institute of Children's



ARTWORK BY JIME GRABOWSKI

GETTING REAL CONT'D

Literature students. Initially, I'd had a hard time trying to pinpoint why certain plotlines were jarring me so much. At a first read-through, it seemed the proper elements were there: a problem for the protagonist, a certain difficulty in finding an answer, then ultimately the solution. But somehow, it just wasn't working. Then I realized that the problem in the plotline wasn't really something that was likely to be *truly important* to the child.

For instance, a common theme is Mama leaving an older child to watch a younger sibling. The mischievous (or ornery) sibling gets into trouble. The older child has to find a way to clean up the mess or bring the younger one back in line—possibly even doing it (as kid-plotting law requires) without adult help. So what's wrong with this picture?

Logically...nothing. *Except, it's not really a problem of importance to the child protagonist.* Thus the motivation (i.e. need) to solve it is not terribly strong either. And without strong motivation, you've lost the force that drives a plot to a successful conclusion. If your protagonist has nothing much to gain by seeing that little brother/sister toes the line, what's the point of worrying if bratty little kid screws things up? Why get overly anxious about making it right again?

In plotting, as far as the child protagonist is concerned, it's basically no skin off his/her nose if little brother/sister makes a mess. That's a *parent's* problem.

Because so many of us who write for children are mothers (or grandmothers) it's hard not to let the mommy viewpoint creep in. I should probably try to be more gender-correct and specify parents (as in mothers and fathers) but in truth, men do not seem to have as much difficulty with this issue as women do...just as men do not seem to have the same sort of mental reservations about getting their characters in trouble that women do. But that's a story for another day.

However, even as I was congratulating myself about the startling insight, I was struck by another thought. On the reverse side of this "don't overestimate the importance of a situation" coin is the part that says "don't underestimate either." There's no discounting the fact that what is important to a child does not always seem significant to an adult.

The fact that one's arch rival has acquired a puppy of exactly the breed desired by your main

character—or even dared to claim that breed as his own favorite can be devastating. Is it a big deal that the snottiest girl in class got exactly the prom dress your character had been saving for? You can bet it's a very big deal. Does it matter that your child character has been told he must be the orange dragon in the school play when his favorite color is green? It matters terribly if the miserable bratty kid next door is going to get to be the green one.

Ultimately, what those of us who write for children owe to our child readers is a true reflection of *their* world...stories moved and motivated by the criteria of *their* world...nothing more; nothing less.

Hey...otherwise, we might as well just write for adults.

FOOTBALL SEASON

by Kelly R. Fineman

UNIFORM,
HELMET,
SHOULDER PADS,
CLEATS.
ALL THE PEOPLE
IN THEIR SEATS.
HUDDLE,
LINE UP,
TOUCHDOWN PASS!
FOOTBALL SEASON'S
HERE AT LAST.



WHY ILLUSTRATORS CAN'T GET WORK

Submitted by Linda Brewster Rodgers (from an illustrator forum)

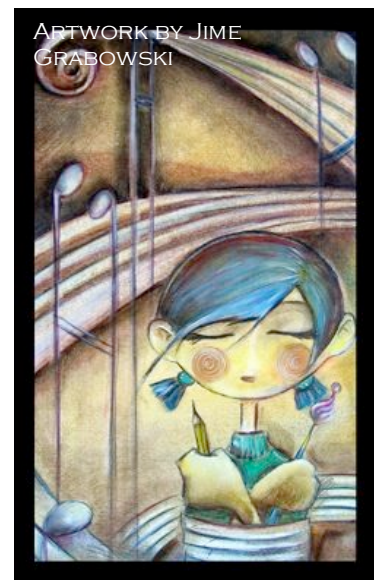
Your work is out of style.
 The market is drying up.
 The economy is drying up.
 There's a new crop of art school graduates who will do the work for peanuts.
 Any idiot with Photoshop thinks he/she's an illustrator
 You are getting too old.
 You are too young.
 Stock photography.
 You need to do more promotion.
 You've oversaturated your clients with promotion materials.
 You should have bought a mailing list.
 You bought the wrong mailing list.
 You shouldn't have bought a mailing list, nobody looks at hard-copy samples anymore.
 Your website is down.
 Your website sucks.
 Your website is too slick, nobody thinks they can afford you.
 You need a rep.
 Your rep hates you.
 You hate your rep.
 You need a different rep.
 You need an agent not a rep.
 You should have placed an ad in a directory.
 You placed an ad in the wrong directory.
 Your ad placement in the directory is terrible.
 You haven't found your niche market yet.
 Licensing is where it's at these days.
 All the New York artists are getting the jobs.
 Everyone is having a slump except for Whatshisname and we all LOATHE him!

HI CHICKADEE!



Artwork & poem by Mary Paladin

Hi Chickadee-dee-dee!
 Can you see me-me-me?
 Please sing your song I love,
 Before you fly above.



HIGHLIGHTS FOUNDERS WORKSHOP

BY LINDA BREWSTER RODGERS

Three members of the Chester County Children's Writers group (and SCBWI-EPA members, too) headed for Honesdale, PA on October 25, for a four day Founders Workshop. Jane Resides, Ellen Ramsey, and Linda Brewster Rodgers were on the way to explore writing for children's magazines.

Honesdale, the home of Highlights Magazine and Boyds Mills Press, gives workshops throughout the year on a variety of topics. Arriving at the home office of *Highlights Magazine for Children*, we were given a tour and met the key editors of the magazine. We then drove to the campus, which includes a main house, where all the workshops were held, and 20 beautiful rustic cabins perfect for writing. The house was the home of Dr. Garry Myers and Caroline Myers, founders of *Highlights* in 1946. The warm and friendly atmosphere put us all at ease and the food was better than any five-star restaurant.

The thirteen workshop participants came from California, Utah, Florida, Texas, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. Friendships quickly developed as we studied children's magazines, shared our writing, and socialized.

The workshops were lead by **Marileta Robinson**, Senior Editor of *Highlights*, and **Paula Marrow**, former editor at *Cobblestone* and *Cricket* Magazines. The sessions covered analyzing magazines for content, visual appeal, types of articles, style, games, and activities. Marileta and Paula covered all aspects of writing magazines stories, not just for *Highlights* or *Cobblestone*. It was pointed out that writing for magazines has side benefits. Many magazine stories get picked up by book publishers and previously published books get rewritten for magazine stories. Marileta and Paula made a great team and were truly interested in helping by critiquing our work and answering all questions.

The weekend ended with pictures and a commitment to get writing. One member of the group set up a website so we can critique each other's work. Goodbyes were extended to Marileta and Paula and the wonderful staff that fed us.

A list of workshops and retreats can be found at www.highlightsfoundation.org and a great resource for writers is www.highlightskids.com. Explore both sites for contest and writing ideas.



Workshop Leaders Marileta Robinson & Paula Marrow
photo by Linda Brewster Rodgers



IF YOU'RE ATTENDING THE ALA'S
MIDWINTER CONVENTION STOP BY
THE SCWBIEPA BOOTH!

January 11 – 14, 2008 Pennsylvania
Convention Center, Philadelphia, PA

NEXT PENN & INK DEADLINE:

MARCH 15, 2008

Submissions:
cheriwidzowski@msn.com

FALL PHILLY CONFERENCE

By Cheri Widzowski

Photos provided by Linda Brewster Rodgers

The sold-out 2007 Fall Philly conference, themed "Steps to a Knockout Punch", opened with a delightful talk by author **Dianne Ochiltree** on "*Giving Your Picture Book Manuscript PUNCH!*". Dianne used examples from a variety of picture books to show attendees effective techniques for improving their picture book manuscripts. Among other tips, Dianne suggested writers analyze current best-selling and award-winning picture books to get a feel for what editors are buying. She even suggested typing these books into Word and then re-analyze them as manuscripts. How does your manuscript compare? Dianne pointed out that editors are putting out shorter PBs every year so writers need to tell their stories in as few words as possible to make their manuscripts more marketable. Once a writer gets an idea for a PB, he/she should find a way to make it different from other books. What about the topic interests *you* as the writer? The writer's mission, to find a niche and fill it, requires market research so one doesn't waste time writing a book that's already published.

Dianne also reminded writers to avoid sentimentality, which is an adult emotion, and to train themselves to 'think like a kid'. Another tip: choose a story that only *you* can tell. PBs, like other stories, need a well-defined beginning, middle, and end, sympathetic characters, a setting and plot. It is important to avoid being preachy, teachy, or didactic – let your young readers figure out the message themselves. Dianne closed her presentation by reading "Lull-a-bye, Little One," her very charming bedtime story. Dianne said that she knew from her market research that a bedtime story would be a very tough sell, but she loved the story and kept sending it out, enduring 5 years of rejections by nearly every publishing house in the country. Finally, an editor (the "right editor at the right place at the right time") loved the story as much as Dianne did and the book was born. She pointed out that you have to really *love* your story and advised attendees: "don't ever lose your heart, even if you have to be hard-headed."

Dianne was followed by agent **Stephen Barbara** in his presentation, "*Seven Habits of Highly Effective Writers*", which focused on how writers can become more successful. Stephen pointed out that to achieve the success you want, you have 2 options: a) influence the world or b)



work on yourself. His talk, using examples from writers as varied as Laurie Halse Anderson and J.K. Rowling, emphasized how writers can do the latter by following a sequence of 7 elements:

- 1) Be close to books and be an impassioned reader (as opposed to, "I don't have time to read")
- 2) Be a student of other great writers, not with resentment, but with curiosity
- 3) Be keyed in to stories to that matter to people; be a passionate storyteller
- 4) Be a disciplined practitioner of your craft (a commonality between geniuses in all fields is repetition)
- 5) Understand that everything can be improved (best writers are fanatical revisors)
- 6) Treat your writing as a career.
- 7) Seek wise counsel (this is where his role as agent comes in).



Fall Philly cont'd



Author **Joyce Moyer Hoststetter** moved things right along with her talk on successfully writing historical fiction. Joyce encouraged those interested in writing in this genre to follow 5 essential STEPS (**S**tory **T**ime **E**xperts **P**lace **S**ources). Using examples from her book, *Blue*, Joyce showed how doing extensive background research is critical to creating a good nonfiction story. Joyce shared that *Blue* began as an assignment from well-known nonfiction editor Carolyn Yoder and that the idea for her book originated with a call to her local historical society in Hickory NC. The plot for *Blue* came from research Joyce did as well as details she observed in period photos that she found. Joyce urged writers to not be lazy or intimidated by the research process, instead to look at it as a fun and interesting undertaking.

Joyce was creative in her use of primary sources which are items created at the time your story takes place (photos, memoirs, government documents, songs, almanacs, newspapers – the ads can give tons of information). Joyce promised, “if you dig, the story will come.” Another tip Joyce gave was to become familiar with the word choices of the time period you’re writing about – for example, *britches*, conveys a time period very different from *slacks*. Also, in writing nonfiction or historical fiction, the use of contemporaneous figures or events can enrich your story (Joyce used details from Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Fever 1793* to make her point). Joyce pointed out that using experts is important to confirm facts you’ve gathered elsewhere and that an expert can be anyone who knows more about your subject than you do. She cautioned to be wary of websites, though they can be a great place to start.

To make your writing more authentic, Joyce emphasized the importance of accurately

incorporating setting (“show the place”) and urged writers to slip in sensory elements. Include local landmarks, regional foods, plants, and other local features. For example, mimosa trees, along with blackberries, morning glories, and kudzu are plants common to the southern U.S.

Joyce pointed out that it is an editor’s job to be suspicious so you should document your research well – it is the writer’s job to inspire confidence. Keep track of your research and find a system that works for you. Some useful tools are notecards, highlighters, sticky notes, photocopies, weblinks – just make sure you have adequate references for the materials you use; Joyce suggests preparing a bibliography as you go. Follow Joyce’s STEPS and you, too, can write knockout historical fiction!



The 2007 Fall Philly Keynote speaker, **Laurie Halse Anderson**, began by warning attendees that she was “cranky and menopausal” and not to fall asleep. She put joking aside to thank the previous leaders/founders of our chapter, Laura Wren, Susan Campbell Bartoletti, and Lisa Rowe Fraustino, then introduced her talk as “....and the *Secret Word that Changes Everything*”. The intrigued audience paid close attention as Laurie, who was in training for a marathon, used running as a metaphor for writing. She also encouraged writers to participate in exercise or meditation/prayer to help make them more productive writers. Laurie announced that her journey into writing began almost exactly 15 years ago as her youngest child headed off to school. On that day, she made a commitment to being a writer and gave herself 5 years to be published. Laurie described herself as a “SCBWI

Fall Philly cont'd

poster child" as she attended conferences, learned the craft of writing and the business of publishing. In 1996 her first book, a picture book, was published but sold only 3500 copies, but she decided to not give up. Running was the same for Laurie – it wasn't easy, in fact she hated it – but as she looks back, her real writing began along with the running. At first she ran in fits and starts and her writing suffered, but after having what Laurie calls a "hospital bed moment", she decided to transform her life and reclaim not only her health, but her writing life as well. Since then Laurie has met with much success with a number of highly regarded novels (*Fever 1793*, *Speak*, *Catalyst*, *Prom*). But with success came conflicts and Laurie was soon overwhelmed. That's when she learned the "Secret Word" – NO. Laurie found that being able to say "NO" to the many demands being made upon her was a powerful tool that let her reclaim her life. She describes "NO" as a magic word that transforms into "YES" when applied carefully. Focusing on just three things (1) family & friends 2) writing 3) running) allows Laurie to write better and to be more joy-filled than ever. After sharing these personal details of her life, Laurie continued by giving attendees tips for being successful novel writers. Like races that are won one step at a time, novels are written one word at a time. The goal, Laurie says, is to write/run for the rest of our lives, not just prepare for a particular race. The key is showing up for the page every day and to keep writing. Laurie sets up running and writing goals for each day and urged attendees to do the same.

In conclusion, Laurie shared her tips for time management, critical for being a productive writer (but added, "I don't always follow all of my advice – that would be boring"):

- Estimate how many hours/week you create and how many you'd like to write
- Keep a "time diary": record hours or minutes you spend on different activities
- How many hours/week did you watch TV or movies?
- How much time did you spend on email or the Internet?
- How many hours did you spend reading books?
- Calculate a ratio (writing:reading:screwing around) to see where your discretionary times goes; decide how you want to spend your time & calculate a target ratio
- Laurie's suggested ratio is 10 hours writing and 5 hours reading for each hour of TV/Internet
- Try to reach your target ratio by scheduling writing and reading time and sticking to it for 3 weeks
- Discuss your changes with your significant others & give yourself a "bubble" when no one else is allowed to bother you
- After 3 weeks, figure out what worked & what didn't & brainstorm

Laurie left us with what could be scary thoughts: we have control of our time and lives; to be an artist/writer, unlock & examine the pain and discover new joy.



MORE FALL PHILLY PHOTOS!



WINTER'S TREES



By Carole Mohr

Their leaves gone,
 They stand proudly bare,
 Showing off their shapely
 bones.

From Cynthia Dragish: Writers Symposium (<http://com4.runboard.com/bwriterssymposium>) has officially opened and great information is pouring in! Writers are invited to join in on the information exchange & to check out postings, participate in writing games, and post some questions of their own (including writing events or freelance jobs). Hope to see you there!

SILENCE, STONES, AND STEPHEN KING

By Catherine McCafferty

I finally did it. On a Saturday morning, I packed my car with two days worth of food and clothes, and a box full of a young adult manuscript that had been stalled by months of distraction. I went away to a place where there was absolutely nothing else to do but think and write.

And I did both.

I'll back up here to say what I already know: a Good, Consistent Writer doesn't get stalled; a Dedicated, Persistent Writer writes through any difficulties; and the key is to just keep writing every day. Evidently, I'm not that Writer. A summer filled with busy, noisy workdays (Summer Reading Club at the library), back-to-back-to-back family events, an unexpected death in a close friend's family, upheaval at home, and the crushingly disappointing rejection of a middle-grade novel created a perfect storm of exhaustion. I barely eked out the free-writes we'd been doing for my monthly writing group, and the thought of going through my YA-in-progress to see where it had gone off track was more than I could manage.

I knew it was bad when I found myself envying a character on the cover of the Nancy Drew mystery, *The Password to Larkspur Lane*. The character was a rest-home invalid sitting near a row of larkspur, whispering a secret to Nancy. I wanted to be that person sitting in a larkspur garden.

Apparently, I wasn't the only one. In his September 21, 2007, essay in *Entertainment Weekly* (my level of summer reading), Stephen King wrote about his "Great Escape." He went to the Australian Outback for a month on an "entertainment fast," completely withdrawing from pop culture overload. He finished his essay with, "I liked the silence."

Those words stuck with me. I'm not Stephen King and I sure couldn't afford a month in Australia, but I could get away for a long weekend to a retreat center forty minutes away. It still took me a while to convince myself that I really needed to spend this time and money. But when I walked into the little apartment and set my book box down on the kitchen table, I felt

like I had made my escape, too. No one else was there. The kitchen windows looked out onto an open lawn, woods beyond, and a pond ringed with autumn colors. There was absolute silence. I stood there and stared. I had found my larkspur garden and it was mine for two days.

I'd recommend this escape to any writer—or writing group (there are larger buildings)—in the SCBWIEPA area. To that end, here are the details.

Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center
2495 Fox Gap Road
Bangor, PA 18013
610-588-1793

"Since 1942, Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center has been a place for rest and renewal . . . we are a Christian center with an ecumenical spirit and an inter-faith welcome." Here's how those words from their brochure translated for me.

From the first e-mail I sent saying that I was just looking for a private weekend of peace and quiet, the subject of religion was never raised. When I arrived, my apartment was open and I was on my own, as I wanted to be. I stopped in at the office only as I was leaving to pick up further information. For anyone wondering, a quick glance at Kirkridge's formal calendar of group programs makes it clear that it is on the progressive end of the Christian spectrum.

Accommodations were simple and clean. My apartment, with its endearing name of Undercroft, had a small eat-in kitchen area with full stove, refrigerator, and microwave; full bath with shower and tub; two beds, dresser, night table, and a comfy chair by the window. The cabinets were stocked with kitchenware down to emergency candles and a corkscrew(!). No TV, only a clock that might have had a radio, too (I didn't look that closely). I sat at the Formica table to eat and write and stare—and did plenty of all three. Had I been more energetic, I could have taken the canoe out on the pond. I opted for a walk along hiking trails, and through Kirkridge's nearby labyrinth.

Columcille
2155 Fox Gap Road
Bangor, PA 18013
610-588-1174

Retreat cont'd

A bonus for me was the adjacent megalith park (think Stonehenge) that I had visited several times before my stay at Kirkridge. Step through the massive stone Thor's Gate and you're in Columcille, "an outdoor sanctuary open to all as a sacred space for quiet meditation" (Columcille Map and Welcome flyer). Fantasy writers, prick up your ears. Paths through the park take you along standing stones with names such as Mannanan, The Fairie Ring, The MoonCatcher. Here, as in Kirkridge, the peace of the land provides a refuge from life's noise.

Nowhere did I feel this more than in the nondenominational St. Columba's Chapel (yes, I know that sounds like an oxymoron). The chapel is a small round stone building with a heavy wooden door that Tolkien (and Peter Jackson) probably would have liked. Slide back the metal bolt, then pull the door shut behind you, and you are in a space so profoundly quiet that I nearly cried the first time I went in it.

Between the silence of Kirkridge and Columcille, I came back rested and refocused—and my book-in-progress came back revised. If you'd like more information on either place, visit www.kirkridge.org or www.columcille.org.

Or better yet, visit both places yourself.

Speaking of Retreats....

CONGRATULATIONS!

Patricia Thomas' new book, *NATURE'S PAINTBOX: A SEASONAL GALLERY IN ART AND VERSE*, was released in October. Pat had a successful book launch in November, selling *Borders* right out of their stock plus most of my her personal supply. Pat credits this largely to "a whole bunch of wonderful writers in my critique group—one of whom is a PR guru. Another has a sister who's an accomplished artist—the perfect person to offer a free art lesson for kids who came to the event. Another whose artistic eye arranges gorgeous book displays. I'll tell you...anytime you're planning a book launch, these are the people to have beside you." Pat's book got good reviews from *Booklist* and *Kirkus*; *Booklist* has named it a "Lasting Connection" for 2007, and it will also be in 2008.

DON'T FORGET THE EASTERN PA SCBWI ANNUAL POCONOS RETREAT

April 11-13, 2008 at the Sterling Inn, South Sterling, PA

Registration Begins Soon – Don't Wait until it's Too Late!

See website (www.scbwiepa.org) for details!

OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS:

Illustrators' Day – Saturday May 31, 2008 at U Penn. Contact Linda Brewster Rodgers (lincad1@aol.com)

Meet the Editors – Tuesday, June 3, 2008 at Northampton CC, Bethlehem PA. Contact Paul Acampora (paul@paulacampora.com)

Fall Philly Conference – Sept. 27, 2008 at Whitford CC, Exton PA. Contact Cathy Giordiano (cathygio@epix.net)

ON-LINE CRITIQUE GROUPS

By Cathy Giordiano

After a fabulous week at the LA SCBWI last summer, I was charged with the love of writing. Skimming the Discussion Boards, I came across an interesting item: On-line critique group forming for YA and MG authors, seeking like-minded writers with the same level of determination and skills. Please send email, experience and writing sample.

I thought, Great concept, putting together advanced level writers. I was interested in an organization that would drive me to work harder, set deadlines, improve my craft. My previous critique group had fallen away – lives change direction, schedules get complicated – and I missed being part of a writing community. But three hours a month had never allowed us to cover more than 5 pages per person. This new group was going to be a challenge but worth a shot. The only worry, was I good enough?

My resume and sub were deemed sufficient, and I was given a “key to the city.” My name was added to the member list and I was allowed on the secure site. I figured out how to upload and download submissions for critiques. After realizing it wasn’t as hard as it looked, I introduced myself, read bios from the other members and got to work.

We began with seven members, submitting 20 pages every other week. At first, like anyone out of shape, it was exercise keeping up. But as my eyes became sharper, my brain more fluent, and my fingers more nimble, the work got easier.

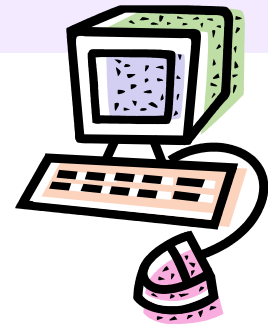
I learned from my own mistakes, and studied techniques in others, applying those lessons to my own manuscript. Everyone gained from this give and take process, as the writing improved over the months.

Along the way, we learned the power of MSWord to Track Changes (a command that allows you to make notes and changes on a document) and Compare and Merge (allows all the changes to be merged into one document) saving dramatic amounts of time.

On the message board, we discussed plot, opening lines, character development, work on query letters, synopsis, and titles, shared insight, websites, articles, conference notes, laughter and tears. Some members

have moved as careers take off and new writers join.

Our impersonal cyber group is anything but. We share our personal lives, open our delicate souls to each other, cheer for each success, whine about rejection, and often kick each other in the pants for motivation. The East Coasters have met at conferences in New York and Pennsylvania, but we have high hopes that our success in children’s publishing will bring us all together to celebrate.



Want to start your own on-line critique group? Check the SCBWI Discussion Boards under Critique Groups for ideas. Then:

1. Decide what genre you want to concentrate on.
2. Think about how much time you can dedicate to working with the group. You can submit, one a week, once a month, one member at a time, half the members, all the members.
3. Seek out members that will fit in your vision of a group. Advertise on writers’ message board or acquaintances from conferences.
4. Choose wisely. You are trusting these members to be honest and diligent.
5. Start a group on Yahoo or other server simply by clicking Start Group and add members.
6. Share the knowledge. Help each other improve through links, articles, conferences and contacts. Good karma for all.
7. Don’t give up. Not all writers may have your dedication or skill. Use honest dialogue to try to fix the situation. If a member still isn’t working out, replace the weak link.