

Spring 2020

SCBWI MONTANA

Updates and Events

Illustrator News

*Author Interview:
Constance Van Hoven*

Stay Connected

Hello all you Montana Kidlit Creatives! As I assemble this newsletter, I am shaking my head at how different our world has become since the last newsletter went out. I'm sure, like me, you are trying to adjust to the new normal (which continues to change daily). What hasn't changed is our passion for creating children's books and our desire to come together and support each other.

In this issue, our Regional Advisor, Precious McKenzie, shares the new directives regarding COVID-19, as well as changes to our upcoming events in light of those mandates. Erika Wilson, our regional Illustrator Coordinator, shares exciting news for illustrators. Joann Howeth, our Assistant Regional Advisor, presents a very interesting interview with author Constance Van Hoven. I'll wrap things up by offering suggestions on ways we can stay connected during this time of social isolation.

COVID-19 Update and Regional Events

Precious McKenzie

Montana Regional Advisor

I hope everyone is safe and well. The situation with COVID-19 is serious and challenging. With this on our minds, your regional team has re-evaluated our May Retreat in Ennis, Montana.

SCBWI and your regional team are following recommendations by the CDC in order to keep everyone safe.

We've cancelled the face to face Ennis Retreat and all registered participants received a full refund for their registration fees.



The good news is that our guest faculty member, Talia Benamy of Philomel Books, was eager to take our retreat online! So we've reworked the retreat, making it an online Zoom event with three sessions. You may register for all three sessions or pick one or two that fits your needs best. Each session is \$15 for SCBWI members. All attendees will be able to submit a manuscript to Talia after the event.

Here's the schedule for our "Virtual" Zoom Retreat:

Be Bold! Sessions

Saturday, May 16, 2020

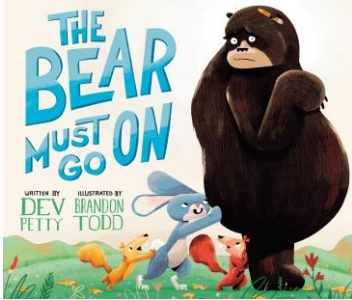
10am EST Session 1: Welcome and "Creating Characters" Presentation (1 hour and fifteen minutes, including Q &A)

11:30 am EST Session 2: Perfecting Your Pitch: The Power of An Awesome Query Letter (1 hour and 15 minutes, including Q &A)

1pm EST Session 3: Best Practices for Authors, Q and A session, Closing Remarks (1 hour and 30 minutes)

To register, visit: <https://montana.scbwi.org/events/be-bold-scbwi-montanas-virtual-writing-retreat/>

montana-ic@scbwi.org



As for our other regional events, such as hobnobs and critique groups, the regional team is adhering to Governor Bullock's directives. We have cancelled all face to face meetings through April 10, 2020. See <https://dphhs.mt.gov/aboutus/news/2020/closureextensions>. It is expected that restrictions will be in place longer. Please continue to follow the CDC's recommendations, including hand-washing, staying home, and practicing social distancing.

You may keep track of the status of our regional events and upcoming webinars on our Facebook page. SCBWI Headquarters is also updating their website to include all of the webinars offered in the organization. You will find the list here <https://www.scbwi.org/regional-webinars/>.

Please note that it may take a little longer to receive email responses from your regional team as we are, like many of you, juggling day jobs and now homeschooling. These are challenging times and we thank you for your patience.

Stay safe, everyone.

Precious



Illustrator's Corner

Erika Wilson

Illustrator Coordinator

Hi everyone!

I hope you are all doing ok in our strange new "normal" of social distancing and quarantine. I hope you are finding some peace and comfort from your artwork and writing these days. I for one, am extra thankful to be working on illustrations for another book right now because it is a great mental escape! Keep writing; keep drawing/painting/imagining new worlds, and use your talents as therapy right now, if you can!

I am thrilled to report on our Illustrator Webinar that we hosted last month. It was a huge success! We had Christy Ewers of The CAT Agency, and we had over ONE HUNDRED attendees! Christy was fantastic; she was extremely kind and helpful, and she is giving priority to submissions from attendees, so make sure to submit to her if you attended! To those of you who didn't attend the webinar, but are still looking for an agent--you can submit to her too! Her instructions are on her website which is catagencyinc.com.

I am missing our monthly Meet-Ups and HobNobs greatly, but I am hopeful that our collective efforts in distancing will turn the tide on the Coronavirus and get us back on track with our regular activities before too long. Hang in there, everyone!

And be creative, if you can :)

Erika



Author Interview: Constance Van Hoven

By Joann Howeth

Assistant Regional Advisor, Montana

For our spring newsletter, I had the pleasure of interviewing Constance Van Hoven - author of, *“Hello, Minnesota!”*, *“The Twelve Days of Christmas in Minnesota,”* and to be released in August of this year, *“Rare and Blue: Finding Nature’s Treasures.”* Connie is also the winner of the 2016 McKnight Artist Fellowship for Writers Loft Award in Children’s Literature (Younger Children).

Connie, tell us a little about yourself:

- You were born and raised in Minnesota, so I bet you’re a Vikings fan. Or perhaps you’re a Twins fan?

I’m a forever Twins fan. My dad shared his love of baseball with me. We read the newspaper sports page together every day over breakfast and we went to lots of games where he taught me how to keep a scorecard and to count pitches.

- Tell us about your family:

My husband, Greg, and I have three grown children, seven grandchildren, and an 8-year-old Lab who thinks she’s still a 2-year-old.

- I understand you were a buyer for toy stores. That sounds like fun! Can you tell us more about that?

Going to work every day to order toys—what could be more fun? I was also involved in the catalog business for the stores. I did much of the copywriting, which I LOVED. I put my heart and soul into it! When customers began to say their kids read the catalog instead of a bedtime story, I knew I needed to take up writing seriously .



- Having lived most of your life in Minnesota – what brought you to Montana? And when?

Gorgeous scenery, outdoor activities, and oh yeah: GRANDCHILDREN! We officially became Montana residents in 2017.

- For your new book, you feature an interesting collection of blue creatures (I read the blurb on Amazon). What prompted your interest in blue species?

I saw a blue lobster on the wall in a museum in Maine many years ago. I was intrigued by how rare the bright blue coloration is in lobsters. And I began to wonder what else on the planet was rare and blue.

- And what kind of research did that entail?

I scoured the Internet, dug through books in the library, and kept my eyes open for interesting articles on things that were rare and blue, which serendipitously kept cropping up. After I had selected the items for the book, I reached out to biologists who specialized in the species I was investigating.

- Did you get to travel to specific locations?

A number of years ago after my husband had sold his business and I had left the toy stores, we did a fair amount of traveling around the U.S. Mostly driving from place to place. Wherever we went I was on the hunt for rare and blue species.

- Did you get to see each of the species you feature?

Some, but not all. Sighting a blue whale is still on my bucket list.

- How long have you been a member of SCBWI?

I had to look it up and was shocked to find out I've been a member for 31 years... Yikes, I think I might be a dinosaur!

- Do you think your affiliation has helped you in any particular way with your writing career – esp. getting published, finding an agent?

What a great question! While earning an MFA from Vermont College in Writing for Children really “up-ed” my game in terms of learning craft, meeting mentors, finding an agent, and getting published, SCBWI has always been a steady source of information, connection, and inspiration.

Interview continued

I still remember the first conference I went to and coming in 2nd place for the opportunity to work with a published author. The RA made a point of telling me that my submission was very strong and that it had been a close decision. Her comments gave me confidence and courage to keep going.

- Do you have a typical writing day?

I so wish I was a morning person, but I'm not... I spend most mornings working on business details or smaller writing projects and everyday life stuff. I find afternoons are my most productive time for actually writing. I also am able to write in the car on road trips (don't worry, my husband is at the wheel) or in a fishing boat. My husband likes to fish, and I enjoy being outside and working on stories!

- What is your favorite part of a new project?

Oh, those first alluring glimmers of a new story taking shape, when everything is fresh and soooo interesting... Taking notes of words and phrases, character and setting details, plot possibilities—it all seems so doable then!

- Your titles lean more toward non-fiction than otherwise – do you write fiction as well?

I do write some fiction (PB and MG) though it often leans towards informational fiction.

- What is the most rewarding aspect of writing children's lit for you?

Hearing that part of one of my books made a child laugh. And now, I hope with *RARE AND BLUE* that kids will find things in nature to wonder about and to care about.

- I love your definition of “chewy” words for children (see Connie's website). Do you have any “chewy” words of advice for your fellow writers?

My journey to publication was a long one, so part of my advice is to enjoy the ride as much as you can. And I love Fannie Flagg's words: “Don't give up before the miracle happens.”

Interview continued

Check out Connie's fun website, where she posts some beautiful photos and talks about her summers on her grandmother's farm with her brothers and sister.

<https://www.constancevanhoven.com/pages/about.html>

Finally, just for fun – here's the lightning round:

- What is the rarest bird you've ever seen?

Great Gray Owls aren't especially rare, but seeing large numbers of them gathered in one place is. In the winter of 2004/2005 an "irruption" of Great Gray Owls occurred in Minnesota and several other Midwestern states. Thousands of the Great Grays left their usual habitat in northern Canada and congregated much further south. One day in February, my sister and I drove several hours north of the Twin Cities to see the excitement for ourselves. In a short period of time we spotted 40 Great Gray Owls. We were giddy before the afternoon was over! I had never even seen one of the magnificent birds before, let alone 40!

- Favorite dessert:

My mom's cranberry cake with butter sauce and I'm not the least bit embarrassed to lick the plate.

- Do you remember where you were and what you were doing the morning of 9/11?

I was just pulling into the post office when I heard a report on the radio. I remember the stunned looks on everyone's faces inside and the eerie somberness. We lived very close to the MSP airport then, so subsequent days with no planes taking off or landing were eerie as well.

- Favorite book from 5th grade:

I had many favorite books, but honestly, my favorite thing to do in the summer was to bring one of our World Book Encyclopedia's outside and read it in the elm tree in the back yard.

- Favorite movie of all time:

E.T.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me, Connie. It's been great getting to know you a little better!

Thank you! I'm looking forward to getting to know MT SCBWI members better.

“I love to be alone.

*I never found the
companion that was
so companionable as
solitude.”*

*--Henry David
Thoreau, Walden*

Stay Connected

Tiffany Spire

Newsletter Coordinator

Writing is often a solitary career. Many creatives in our field are introverts and so they're naturally drawn to this line of work. But even introverts need to mingle on occasion. In this time of mandated social isolation, remember to stay connected with others, at least virtually. And be sure to check on your extrovert friends too.

If you haven't already, consider joining our Facebook page. You'll find updates on webinars to attend as well as links to articles that are great food for thought and discussions. And much more. Come say hi.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/scbwimontana>

Another place Montana kidlit writers have started connecting is on Instagram. Our new page is being run by our very own Sue Lawrence. Let's follow each other and stay in touch.

<https://www.instagram.com/scbwimontana/>

Stay well, Montana Kidlit Creators!

Tiffany
