



## Summer Newsletter • June 2020

### Happy Summer Fellow Kid-Lit Creators!

I hope you are all staying well in this crazy time. There's nothing like living through history to fuel creative juices. In this latest edition of the Montana Regional SCBWI Newsletter you'll find announcements about regional events and an interview with local author, Jean Petersen.

Stay safe, and stay connected everyone.

Tiffany Spire – Newsletter Coordinator

### Updates and Regional Events

Precious McKenzie - Regional Advisor,  
Montana

I hope everyone is safe and well.

### COVID-19 Update

Based on directives from SCBWI Headquarters, regions will not be planning large face to face events for the fall. So, no fall writing retreat for us. But SCBWI Montana, like most chapters around the world, is offering virtual critique groups (email me if you want to join one), promoting other regional webinars, and offering a few of our own webinars.

### Announcements

Don't forget, you can keep track 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/>.

And, if you are a current SCBWI Montana member, we'd like to share your good news. If you had a kid-lit book published between 2018-2020, email me your brief bio, a two sentence blurb about your book, and an image of your book's cover. We want to share your good news on social media (Facebook and Instagram). We have a lot of talented folks in Montana and it is time to celebrate you! Stay safe!

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*Talia Benamy • Philomel Books*

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*Sara Megibow • KT Literary*

## Event Recap

In May, Talia Benamy, of Philomel Books, gave a wonderful virtual retreat. She taught three webinars on craft and the business of publishing. We had record-breaking attendance—115 attendees from all over the United States, Canada, Australia, and Peru!

Our other regional event was a Zoom webinar on June 17 with agent Sara Megibow.

Sara Megibow is a literary agent with KT Literary. She represents New York Times bestsellers authors including Margaret Rogerson, Casey McQuiston, Roni Loren, Jason M. Hough and Jaleigh Johnson. She specializes in launching debut authors and working on long-term career development and profit strategy with them. She is a graduate of Northwestern University with degrees in Women's Studies, Gender Studies and American History. Always LGBTQ+ Friendly!

In this webinar, Sara gave attendees an overview of publishing in 2020, followed by information on what attracts an agent's attention.

And, Sara will accept exclusive manuscript submissions from webinar attendees until July 31, 2020.

For more information or to register, visit <https://montana.scbwi.org/events/an-agents-perspective-a-webinar-with-sara-megibow/>



There is something delicious about writing the first words of a story. You never quite know where they'll take you.

*-Beatrix Potter*



## Interview with Jean Petersen

By Joann Howeth, ARA

For our summer newsletter, I tracked down Jean Petersen - author of picture books *Moose Shoes* and the recently released *Kind Soup* which was awarded the Best Christian Children's Fiction book of 2019 with Best Indie Book Awards. *Kind Soup* is also Story Monsters Approved 2019 Book Award winner for best 'Making a Difference' children's book.

In collaboration with Chef Barrie Boulds, Jean is also the author of the super cool "The Big Sky Bounty Cookbook - Local Ingredients and Rustic Recipes" that features distinctly western recipes like Rattlesnake Cakes with roasted red pepper remoulade and Wojape (Chokecherry) Soup.

Jean has been a freelance writer and weekly columnist for 15 years with Western Ag Reporter covering a variety of topics in addition to her children's column called "Life on the Ranch with Banjo." She is also a freelance writer for *Distinctly Montana* magazine, *Yellowstone Valley Woman*, and *Raised in the West Magazine*.

*I know you're a graduate of Colorado State University and that you majored in journalism; was a freelance career what you envisioned for yourself?*

Thank you for this opportunity to share. Yes, I always dreamed about writing for magazines, newspapers, and was hopeful for a book, but I also found a love for agriculture while at CSU, and this developed an area where I'm passionate about writing. 'They' always say, write about what you love, and I like to add on, what you're curious about or what peaks your interest, and this is true.

I have been very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to write within so many venues, and it's exciting to team a love for writing with what always peaks your interest to seek out the answers to the questions, learn and share what's discovered.

*And with that in mind, what aspects of shaping a freelance career do you find most satisfying?*

There are various facets for my freelance career that satisfy my drive to write. I'm very grateful for having the opportunity to share 'Life on the Ranch with Banjo' every week in Western Ag Reporter. This aspect of freelance writing has helped me develop a children's storyline about life on a ranch that showcases life lessons, humor, values, and many agricultural related topics within each article. Having the weekly consistency is hugely rewarding for my love of writing, and to hone the craft.

Magazine freelance writing is so gratifying as well, because I love the diversity of the

articles. The sky's the limit with freelance articles, it's the angle, the interest, the audience, the curiosity, the 'why', and getting the story. I love interviewing people, learning about their 'why', and what drives them personally, professionally or passionately so much so that it's created a newsworthy story.

When I hear about something new, from a local business to an agricultural innovation, I very typically think to myself, there's a story here, and someone else wants to know about it, too.

*Where were you born and raised?*

I was raised and grew up in Waco, Texas, but was born in Wichita, Kansas.

*How long have you lived in Montana?*

We've lived in the Red Lodge area for 18 years.

*What brought you to Montana?*

After our first son was born, we had the opportunity for my husband to further develop his custom home building business in Red Lodge, so we headed north from Steamboat Springs and have loved every moment of that decision to raise our family in Montana. I was an Executive Director of an Agricultural Non-Profit.

*Jean lives near the Beartooth Mountains on a small farm with dogs, cats, horses, a "pet" calf, ducks and chickens, and the odd mouse or two. Can you tell us a funny story that has happened recently with any one of those creatures?*

There's never a dull moment on our farm, the stories are endless and give me great writing fuel for my weekly children's column, to say the least.

A funny story is about good ol' Beatrice, our son's bottle calf. We used to take her camping with us every weekend. She is a true adventure seeking bovine. We created a tarp bed lined with old bed sheets in the back of my Expedition, and she'd happily load up for her camping escapade.

She loved to look out the back windows on her new journeys into the mountains. When we'd stop for fuel, I'd pop the back glass and she'd look outside at everyone who drove by and would share an occasional 'moo' when fellow cows pulled up beside us in trailers.

She'd sit by the campfire, wander along the trails, find some shade around the camper and cool off by the creek. She was also known to take a relaxing nap beneath the hammock where 'her boy' stayed. We have so many camping 'tails', of her adventures, often misadventures, with us in the mountains.

*I'm guessing (from looking at your Jean's Cuisine page in Raised in the West Magazine to the photos on your website that show you happily engaged in the kitchen) that cooking is one of your passions, yes? Would you describe yourself as a gourmet?*

I truly enjoy being in the kitchen. It's a place where the heart of our family is, and I try to continually create, plan, and discover new options for our meals and to share. I love to bake, too.

As for a gourmet, I'm a rustic gourmet at best, but that's what was such an extraordinary experience as I wrote *The Big Sky Bounty Cookbook* with Chef Barrie Boulds. She was the one who shared realistic methods to create gourmet meals that were over-the-top delicious, while also using ingredients that are readily available and easy steps to recreate.

*I read in an interview in MPR that you know how to debone a rattlesnake!*

"Yes. I learned how to skin it—and then I put it in a Dutch oven and cooked it like you would a roast. We did that, then deboned the meat and it flaked apart. It was quite the process of little bones, like fish bones."

*And you don't really like snakes, true?*

I am terrified of snakes, but pulled up my big girl boots, and did what I had to do. It was really a very interesting process, and I learned a lot, but I am still truly terrified of snakes . . . all of them poisonous or non.

*I have sneaky suspicion you can cook over an open fire just as well as on the stove in your home. You're the person everyone wants on a camping trip!*

When we camp, my husband does all the cooking. He smokes meat and always uses a Dutch oven. His ribs, cornbread, and biscuits and gravy are awesome!

*Since you are a contributor to so many magazines that naturally impose deadlines, do you have a typical writing day?*

Depending on the article I'm writing, I stage my self-imposed deadlines out, so I have time to sit on the story once it's written, and then go back over it to edit before I submit. I don't know if I have a typical writing day, because I have so many other irons in the fire, but when I have the scheduled free writing time . . . I cozy up with my coffee, research and let the story flow.

*For these different publications, are your articles assigned topics or do you get to suggest writing about an interest?*

Some of the articles are assigned - when the editor shares the theme they're working with and the stories they have out there that they'd like to have featured, and some are queried, where I pitched the idea from the angle worthy toward the publication. I would say it truly is a 50/50 for the publications I've had the opportunity to write for.

*What is your favorite part of a new project?*

I love the research, questions, and investigating all the who's, what's, where's, why's, and when's, and then I absolutely love meeting new people, learning new things, and traveling to new places.

*Do you have any other hobbies and more importantly, the time to pursue them?*

Yes, I love to be outdoors. I love walking, hiking, and camping, attempting painting, gardening, fishing, and Pinteresting, along

with reading and just being with our family and critters.

*What kind of vacations do you like to take?*

I like any vacations where our family can experience something new. Some of our best vacations have been an hour away, and the longer treks, give us all 'remember whens' and laughter along the way. I don't mind a southern warm beach and clear blue water either, or the crashing waves against a western coast line as I take in all the scents of the sea.

*I see that you are an Author-Owner of This House of Books in Billings. This is an intriguing concept to me - can you explain what this means and how the bookstore works?*

I am proud to be an Author-Owner of This House of Books, and signed up to participate in a portion of this local independent cooperative as a means to share in the vested interest and vision of the collective group of talented authors and professionals who joined together to create this unique bookstore.

*You have four children – what are their ages and how have you all fared during the COVID shutdown of the schools?*

Our children are 16, 15, 12 and 8, and we navigated well through the Covid shutdown. Somedays our sails were aligned well, and we were headed on a great journey and others we were holding on by the strands of our floatation devices, but we made it through. It was a blessing to be together, good times and not so good time, but the most important was that we were together.

*From the photos posted on your website, it looks like you are also a teacher – have you gone into the schools to conduct cooking classes?*

Yes, I am fortunate to teach at our high school, and I do love to come into schools and prepare a cooking class for a presentation. Prior to my cookbook being released I was invited into our junior high, and I offered a cooking class based off the natural resources and themes of the cookbook, once a week.

This was an amazing experience! I loved my time in the kitchen with these students. It was my way of showcasing the skills and abilities of all types of cooks from beginners to advanced, and that the cookbook was applicable to all skills and ages.

This class was offered every Wednesday for a semester, and it was packed full of enthusiastic and talented young cooks. It was so much fun!

*Finally, just for fun –*

*Sweet or salty? Salty*

*Live theater or the circus? Theater*

*Gold or silver? Silver*

*Favorite childhood movie? Mary Poppins*

*Thank you, Jean. It's been so interesting learning about you and your writing life.*

*I highly recommend that everyone check out **Jean's website** -*

***<https://www.jeanpetersen.com/>***

*where she posts great photos and blogs about food, faith, creativity, writing, nature, and much much more.*

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## **Illustrators' Corner**

**By Erika Wilson - Illustrator Coordinator**

**Hi everyone!**

**I hope everyone's summers are off to a good start! It was a crazy spring, and I hope you were able to get some art therapy in to help cope with the stress from COVID19.**

**After seeing author Precious McKenzie's and illustrator Jennifer Ard's collaboration for the Western Heritage Center's call for art for their exhibit in response to COVID19, I thought it would be fun to try a collaborative exercise among our Montana illustrators and authors!**

**[Details of our Two Step Program](#) can be found on the [Facebook Page](#). It will be a good opportunity for us to practice stretching our writing and illustrating creativity, and it might even spark some book ideas!**

**I am still hopeful that we can start up our in-person Meet-Ups soon, but in the meantime keep on drawing and working on your artwork so we can share again soon!**

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**Also, a big thank you to Jackie Beyer for donating her graphic design skills to make our newsletter look so spiffy!**