



the society of children's book
writers & illustrators

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SCBWI FRANCE
Association loi 1901
211 rue de la Croix Nivert,
75015 Paris, France

Email:
melissa@kidbookpros.com

Web site:
www.kidbookpros.com
www.scbwi.org

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author/illustrator

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Expression
to sandra@kidbookpros.com

Expression OnLine
to erzsi@kidbookpros.com

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Paddy Bouma/Doug Cushman,
Rhea and Bridget Strevens-Marzo
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ExpResSion

Onward and Upward

Happy New Year!

I hope you're ready for the incredible line-up of events SCBWI France has prepared for 2003. Our program kicks off early with our annual Show and Tell on 24 January.

Come spring, we're very excited to be welcoming Newbery-Award winner Richard Peck to Paris for a weekend workshop on writing novels for young adults. The workshop will focus on craft, with Richard sharing his "Ten Commandments of Writing" in exchange for some serious audience participation.

Picture books are in the spotlight later in the year when Dandi Daley Mackall, who has over 350 books to her credit, will lead a session on picture book writing.

Our Editors' Day, planned for Saturday, 11 October 2003, brings publishers together from both sides of the Atlantic to talk about what they look for in a manuscript. Speakers include: Victoria Arms, Editorial Director at Bloomsbury (USA), Louise Bolongaro,

Picture Book Editor at Macmillan (UK), Stephen Cole, Consultant Editor for Fiction at Simon and Schuster (UK) and Emma Dryden, Editorial Director at McElderry books, Simon and Schuster (USA). Don't miss this opportunity to meet four high-profile editors at a single event!

And we've a host of one-off evenings scheduled across the year featuring the writing and illustration talents of Adrian Johnson and Nick Abadzis, among others.

If you have any questions about SCBWI France or would like more information about our planned events, do check our web site at www.kidbookpros.com or drop me a line at melissa@kidbookpros.com

Got any time left for writing and illustrating?

Melissa Buron
President/Advisor



Illustration Bridget Strevens-Marzo

Bonne Année!

J'espère que vous êtes prêts pour les événements exceptionnels que vous a réservés SCBWI France en 2003. Le programme débutera très tôt avec notre annuel Show and Tell qui se tiendra le 24 Janvier.

Avec l'arrivée du printemps, nous aurons la joie d'accueillir Richard Peck, gagnant du prix Newbery, qui animera un groupe de travail sur l'écriture de romans pour jeunes adultes pendant weekend à Paris. Richard partagera sa vision du métier et en échange d'une participation "assidue" vous livrera ses "10 commandements en écriture."

Notre "Editor's Day," prévu 11 Octobre 2003, sera l'occasion de réunir des éditeurs de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique pour parler de leur façon d'évaluer un manuscrit. Vous aurez le plaisir de voir entre autre, Victoria Arms, Editorial Director chez Bloomsbury (USA), Louise Bolongaro, picture book editor chez Macmillan (UK), Stephen Cole, consultant editor en fiction chez Simon and Schuster (UK) et Emma Dryden, Editorial

Director chez McElderry books, Simon and Schuster (USA). Ne manquez pas cette opportunité de rencontrer ces personnes de renom au cours du même événement.

Nous aurons aussi tout au long de l'année de nombreuses soirées prévues en compagnie de talentueux écrivains et illustrateurs tels que Adrian Johnson et Nick Abadzis et encore beaucoup d'autres.

Si vous avez des questions concernant SCBWI France ou désirez simplement plus d'informations sur notre programme, consultez notre site web www.kidbookpros.com ou contactez moi par mail à : melissa@kidbookpros.com.

Alors, à vos crayons...

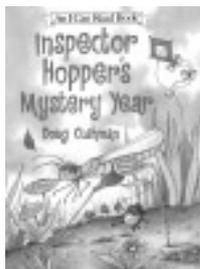
Melissa Buron
President/Advisor

Bravo !

Welcome to our new "Bravo!" section where we are pleased to present the covers of books being published all over the world by local members in 2003. If you publish a book, story, article or drawing or have other good news you'd like to share during 2003, please send an email to Erzsi Deak at erzsi@kidbookpros.com for Expression OnLine.



YAN YAN LE PREMIER PANDA NOIR ET BLANC
Written and illustrated by Jeanne B. de Sainte Marie
Editions du Bastberg, France 2003



INSPECTOR HOPPER'S MYSTERY YEAR
Written and illustrated by Doug Cushman
HarperCollins, USA
March 2003



KISS KISS!
By Margaret Wild
Illustrated by Bridget Strevens-Marzo
Little Hare UK, Australia, New Zealand,
May 2003



MY GOODNIGHT BOOK
Written and illustrated by Mary Morgan
Dutton, USA
Spring 2003

IT'S ST. PATRICK'S DAY!

Written and illustrated by Mary Morgan
Scholastic, USA
Spring 2003



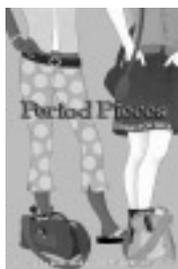
EASTER MICE!
By Bethany Roberts
Illustrated by Doug Cushman
Clarion, USA
April 2003



UNE CHAMBRE RIEN QUE POUR MOI
Written and illustrated by Susan Perez
Ecole des Loisirs, France 2002

FAIT-MOI UNE PETITE PLACE

Written and illustrated by Susan Perez
Lito, France
Spring 2003



PERIOD PIECES: STORIES FOR GIRLS
Selected by Erzsi Deak & Kristin Embry Litchman
Cover by Amy Ryan
HarperCollins, USA,
February 2003



SPELLBOUND
By Janet McDonald
Farrar Straus & Giroux
(*Frances Foster Books*), USA 2001
Editions Thierry Magnier, France 2003



CHILL WIND
By Janet McDonald
Farrar Straus & Giroux
(*Frances Foster Books*), USA 2002

Le livre que j'aurais aimé écrire

JACK GANTOS

The book I wish I had written is titled: *In Youth is Pleasure*, by the now deceased British writer, Denton Welch. It is an entirely realized book, full of rich descriptive passages and desires that manage to saturate the young character, Orvil Pym, as he drifts through the brocade of the

English countryside. Like all rights-of-passage books, the main character is turbulently involved in both defining himself and inventing himself as he vacillates between his extraordinary powers of description – which are laden with fantastic detail – and breathless moments of reality.

It is a short book which melts away all too quickly. Each time I read it I dash outside and take a walk because the power of the book is so transforming it has the ability to rejuvenate the cliché.

"In Youth is Pleasure" is published by Daedalus books. Jack Gantos is the award-winning author

of the Rotten Ralph picture books, the Jack Henry series and the Joey Pigza novels. His latest book is the memoir "Hole in my Life," available from Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Jack will be speaking in Paris in Spring 2004. For further details please contact Melissa at melissa@kidbookpros.com.

Straight from the Editor

STEPHEN COLE AT SIMON AND SCHUSTER (UK)

Stephen is currently a Consultant Editor for the children's fiction list at Simon & Schuster UK. Previously he was Senior Editor for the whole list.

Expression: Please tell us a little about your background as both editor and writer.

SC: I started off editing BBC preschool magazines, working my way up until I was Group Editor for the department. After four years I elected to become Project Editor for Science Fiction titles at BBC Worldwide, which was basically handling more *Doctor Who* products than can be good for anyone's sanity. I briefly went back to working with a younger age group, first at BBC Worldwide and then as Managing Editor at Ladybird. From there I went freelance as a writer-editor specializing in tie-ins, writing for everything from the Charlie's Angels movie to Thunderbirds, Mr. Bean, Dr. Who, various bits of series fiction, etc. – before the lure of helping grow a list of original fiction titles at Simon & Schuster lured me back to office life in April 2001.

Expression: What is your all-time favorite book? Why?

SC: Probably *Marianne Dreams* by Katherine Storr because of its bewitching central idea. It's scary, layered, and delivered with an elegant simplicity that belies the complexity of some of the themes explored.

Expression: What book are you proudest of having worked on and why?

SC: Probably *Strange Boy* by Paul Magrs, which was the first book I acquired at Simon & Schuster. It's the largely autobiographical account of a ten year old boy growing up in the North East of England and knowing he's not like everyone else. He's convinced he has super powers,

when, actually, he's just becoming aware of being gay. It's beautifully written magic realism on the council estates of Newton Aycliffe for children of all ages. It also garnered loads of press interest with debates about banning it making the front page of a Scottish national newspaper, breakfast TV, radio stations etc. And great writers like Patrick Gale, Melvin Burgess and David Almond all endorsed it. So it clearly got people talking and raised a lot of issues as well as being an entertaining and artistic piece of work.

Expression: How would you describe the children's publishing program at Simon and Schuster?

SC: Comprehensive would be one word for it! The department produces almost 150 titles per year. A lot of these are UK repackages of material from our US parent company, but there's still an awful lot of home-originated material. The breadth of publishing is remarkable, including major licenses, fiction and non-fiction for younger and older readers from around the world. S&S Children's is quite small, with a handful of core editorial staff but it thinks big! We actively source new properties and fiction manuscripts, which are discussed, with the team at editorial meetings before being presented to a wider audience at the weekly publishing meetings. Making the books a success is really a complete team effort, which is as it should be.

Expression: What about the fiction publishing program? Do you have a specific brief?

SC: No specific brief except to present the best books for a diverse readership. Diversity and strength of characterization are the two keys in what we're looking for. We like the central character to be transfigured by his experiences, to have grown somehow so that events have not just passed by at the story's conclusion – they've swept the hero/ine along for the ride, and ideally the reader too. Obviously part of the brief is to continue to grow the successful authors we have acquired, which means working on follow-up books with authors like Karen Wallace (shortlisted for the Guardian Prize), best-selling new author Valerie Mendes (whose *Girl in the Attic* was a huge success this

summer as part of the WH Smiths Fresh Talent promotion), Paul Magrs and others.

The schedule is currently one YA novel and one junior fiction title per month – a significant growth from the two titles published in S&S's first full year of operation in the UK three years ago. This allows a great deal of variety and means that when we're poring over the US list and reading their galleys and selecting a number of upcoming cutting-edge titles, we can plan our own UK homegrown titles around that brought-in segment of the list to achieve a good balance.

Expression: What are you looking for? What grabs *your* attention in a book?

SC: Original storyline, well-written and accessible prose, sympathetic characters and situations that matter.

Expression: Anything you are definitely not looking for?

SC: Anything that says "Move over Harry Potter . . ." in the cover letter.

Expression: What say, if any, does your sales/marketing department have in the look or type of book you produce?

SC: It's very much a group process. As with most publishers, the editorial team presents a proposal at the publishing meeting and then as a team we discuss the best way to publish it. As part of that publishing meeting discussion it is important to assess what the true market is for a book and how to reach it and the sales and marketing team will be most focused on this side of the business. The editor can think it's the best idea in the world, but if that doesn't translate into sales, it's a waste of everyone's time, and publishing is obviously, first and foremost, a business. Luckily, S&S USA has a very wide portfolio – there are some projects that are more commercial and profitable and others where it is more about pushing the envelope.

Expression: How linked are you with Simon and Schuster in the USA? Are you looking for the same kinds of books? Do you expect most titles you publish in the UK to be picked up by the US?

SC: The links are strong; the S&S team

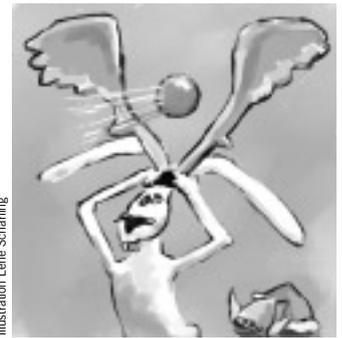


Illustration Lene Schiering

are regularly updated with how upcoming titles are progressing, there is a department that coordinates US/UK activities and members of the Children's team make regular trips to the NY office. Senior editors and publishers from S&S US also make the trip over here to ensure good communication – it's vital as often the UK hops on the back of US runs, and a significant part of the S&S UK brief is to effectively open up American material to a UK market. I don't think both sides are always looking for the same books; some of ours are "too British" for them, and we've had to turn down many good books that just weren't right for our list, which are often sold on to other UK publishers. Happily many S&S UK picture books and fiction titles have been taken up by the parent company, so it's very much a two-way street.

Stephen Cole will be speaking in Paris on 11 October at "Editors' Day." Contact Melissa for details melissa@kidbookpros.com.



Illustration Paddy Bourne

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Meet the agent/illustrators' representative: Rosemary Canter

Rosemary Canter is head of the Children's Department at PFD, one of Europe's leading literary and talent agencies. She is based in London where Bridget Strevens-Marzo interviewed her in September 2002.

Expression: What led you to work in the field of children's books? Can you give us a brief outline of your career?

RC: I fell into children's books by accident, and stayed by enchantment. I was working in publishing as an editor, and acquired skills enabling me to put together illustrated books. On the strength of this I found a job with Macmillan Children's Books and I was hooked.

I spent the first 17 years of my career as an editor in a variety of publishing houses, including Penguin, Hutchinson and Reed, editing adult and children's works. One of the most exciting ventures I was involved in was setting up the Teens list for Methuen – one of the first paperback lists for teenagers. That was in 1987. In 1989 I left Reed and became an agent, with a brief to develop a list of children's writers and illustrators for PFD. I can't imagine ever wanting to leave.

Expression: Some agents like to have a creative role in the relationship between their authors, illustrators and editors, while others prefer to deal with the business of publishing. How do you see your role?

RC: I enjoy the many facets of being an agent. I like to help writers develop saleable material for publishers, but not get further involved in the editorial process. I think it is my job to be a businesswoman, to get the best possible deals and contracts for my clients and to help with

legal advice, where necessary. But giving strategic advice on careers, and making suggestions on individual projects is also an essential part of what I do.

Expression: Can you describe what strategies you use for submitting your artists' and authors' work to publishers?

RC: There are lots of answers! We



Illustration Paddy Bourne

have a brilliant web site which we keep updated and which we advertise; I talk to publishers a lot about my clients, new ideas etc. I arrange for writers and illustrators to meet editors or designers I think will like their work; of course, I send out material all the time, whether particular texts or projects, or general material on spec. The short answer is, whatever method is the best solution at the time.

Expression: What kinds of books do you think travel best? Which books don't? Do you encourage your artists and writers to adapt to the "global marketplace"?

RC: There are several kinds of books that travel well. There's fantasy, which crosses cultural boundaries more easily than other genres, and the experience of being a teenager clearly also rings bells across nations. It's pleasing that funny books on this

subject appeal so widely. Picture books also work well in many countries again, the experiences of young children have universal similarities. Where there is often a gulf, is the literature for children between picture books and older childhood, the time where children are just growing up into their individuality out of the home, spending time in school, learning how their own society works.

This seems to be an intensely local experience, so it is much harder for books for, say, seven year olds to travel.

I don't encourage writers or illustrators to consider the "global marketplace." I think it is much more important that they produce work rooted in the world they know. If it is good enough, it will work in the home market, and if its concerns are deep and wide, then it will travel too.

Expression: Would you advise every professionally-minded children's book creator to be represented by an agent?

RC: What a good question! Almost all creative people need professional advice, I think, because they don't have the time or contacts to understand all the different facets that make up the marketplace. Nor do they have the expertise to deal with contracts and bigger problems that may arise when companies change hands or go bankrupt. Most people simply don't want to deal with these subjects. But on a quieter level I think some people can deal competently with contracts as well as their creative work.

Expression: Do you have to actually like all your clients' work to be able to represent it successfully?

RC: I'm enthusiastic about my clients' work, or I would not have taken them on in the first place. But,

of course, work can vary. The essential element is that I like and respect their work overall, and then selling it is not a problem.

Expression: Are you still looking for new talent? Can you give any advice for an author or illustrator looking for an agent to represent them?

RC: I am always, always, looking for new talent. Finding it is one of the most seductive aspects of a fascinating job. I'd like to give one piece of advice to writers looking for an agent: the letter you send is also a piece of writing.

Expression: Are there any trends or new developments in children's publishing at the moment that you would like to say a few words about?

RC: I've been working in the world of children's books for 24 years now, and I think this is the most exciting of times. Children's writers have a higher status now, perhaps higher than they have ever had, and the real possibility of earning a good living. Historical fiction and fantasy are, once again, hugely popular, and there is a glorious vitality about fiction overall. There have always been remarkably talented illustrators, and there is a mass of clever talent around. It's a wonderful time to be involved.

You can check out the PFD web site at www.pfd.co.uk/childrens for details of submission policies for children's authors and illustrators. Rosemary Canter will be speaking at the SCBWI Spain conference in July 2003. For details contact Lawrence Schimel scbwispain@hotmail.com.

OCEANS APART, UNITED BY STORY SCBWI SPAIN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CONFERENCE Madrid, 4-6 July 2003

Speakers include:

Rosemary Brosnan (Editor, HarperCollins Children's Books USA)
Rosemary Canter (Children's Book Agent, PFD, UK)
David Fickling (Publisher, David Fickling Books, Random House UK)
Arthur A. Levine (Publisher, Arthur A. Levine Books, Scholastic USA)
and many others!

To receive more information, please contact:
scbwispain@hotmail.com



Illustration Doug Cushman

Meet the Writer: Richard Peck

PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR OF OVER 25 NOVELS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Several of Richard Peck's novels have appeared on the American Library Association's list of "Best Books for Young Adults," and five have been made into television movies. In 2001, he won the Newbery Medal for "A Year Down Yonder," and in 2002, he was awarded the National Humanities Medal. He has written fiction, non-fiction, articles, and autobiographies. His next novel, set at the time of the American Civil War, is due out in the USA in September 2003.

Expression: Which book or writer do you feel has most influenced your own writing and why?

RP: Mark Twain, in general, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, particularly. Early on, I needed to know a writer could come from my mid-American setting. Later, I

realized that the first real American novel was, in fact, a YA. I'm still writing in homage to Twain; see Granddad Fuller in *Fair Weather*.

Expression: Which living writers of children's books do you particularly respect today?

RP: Jerry Spinelli (*Stargirl*), Will Hobbs (*Downriver*), Graham Salisbury (*Blue Skin of the Sea, Island Boyz, Lord of the Deep* – the 2002 Boston Globe/Hornbook award winner.)

Expression: Of all the books you have written, which are you the proudest of?

RP: *Remembering the Good Times* because I had to dig deeper for it, even apart from the necessary research. I "think" it's the best shape and has the most successful of my characters, Polly Prior.

Expression: What do you think is the hardest part of writing for children and/or teenagers today?

RP: Encouraging maturity for a generation who are in no hurry. Finding the rare adolescent who has the reading ability, attention span and vocabulary to decode a book. Learning to live without the support and encouragement of secondary classroom

teachers who have returned to the literature anthology textbook.

Expression: In terms of your writing craft, what would you consider your own strengths and weaknesses?

RP: I will leave an exploration of my weaknesses to my critics. As to strengths, I write with the most pleasure dialogue and conversation. I believe a novel is conversation overheard. For that reason I would eschew third-person.

Expression: Could you talk a little about your own writing process? Do you show your books to anyone before you show them to your editor?

RP: Come to the workshop and hear. (But, no, I wouldn't dream of showing anybody, including my editor, work-in-progress. Writing isn't committee work.)

Expression: If you could write the Richard Peck entry in "The Best-Ever Guide to Children's Literature," what would you want it to say?

RP: "A teacher who never stopped teaching; he just went on and on, trying to turn life into lesson plans."

Expression: What are you working on now?

RP: A novel with a mystery at its heart, set during the Civil War. It is called *Birds of Passage* and will be published in September 2003.

Expression: If you were allowed to shout out a single line of wisdom to writers beginning their careers today, what would it be?

RP: "Nobody but a reader ever became a writer. You have to read a thousand books before you can write one."

Richard Peck will be running a weekend writing workshop in Paris, 1 and 2 March. For further details contact Melissa at melissa@kidbookpros.com.



Illustration: Doug Cushman



Illustration: Bridget Stevens-Marzo

Please Release Me !

BY ALISTAIR SCOTT

Two weeks ago I found a book lying on an empty café table. Forgotten? No, it had been left deliberately. Inside the book was a label with a reference number and the request to "Read and Release!"

I had discovered a new phenomenon "releasing books into the wild," which is based around the web site www.bookcrossing.com. Their theory is that books are better circulating than lying unread on bookshelves.

How does it work? You enroll with Bookcrossing (it's free) and register any books you want to release. Each book gets a unique reference number. When someone finds your book, they read it, release it and log its travels on-line.

At first glance, authors may not be happy with this idea. It will affect sales, won't it? Yes. Paradoxically, it could improve them. The chances of someone finding your book shortly before going to buy it – so not buying – are infinitesimal. There will always be far more "buyers" than "finders." Then think about the wider implications. The more people read your book, the more people are going to want to read other books of yours.

And what a great idea for children! Anything that gets children reading has got to be a good thing. So, keep your eyes open for released books. And why not join Bookcrossing to start releasing even more ?



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The view from my desk

VICTORIA ARMS AT BLOOMSBURY USA

Victoria Arms is the Editorial Director of Bloomsbury USA. She is responsible for creating the US list, overseeing manuscript acquisition and art direction. "Expression" interviewed her in October 2002.

Expression: Please tell us a little about your background. You come from a children's book household. Did you ever consider working in another field?

VA: I was briefly a chef, but missed the book world too much. Perhaps someday I will be able to combine food and children's books.

Expression: What is your all-time favorite book?

VA: I have many favorites, but no one all-time favorite. *Time and Again* by Jack Finney (adult) is at the top of my list. I love *Wind in the Willows*, *The Trumpet of the Swans*, Marjorie Flack's books about Angus, *Frog and Toad*, *Fox in Love* (and the other Fox stories). Too many favorites to list. I love them because they are beautiful, emotional and funny.

Expression: What book are you proudest of having worked on?

VA: I am proud of *The Cod's Tale* – we took an adult bestseller and created a totally new book for children from it.

Expression: How would you describe the children's publishing program at Bloomsbury?

VA: We are open-minded and always looking for something unusual, child-

centered and, if possible, either funny or meaningful, or both.

Expression: How linked is Bloomsbury UK to Bloomsbury USA?

VA: We work very closely with our UK office, publishing most books simultaneously. There will be some that don't overlap, but ideally most will.



Illustration: Lene Scharling

Expression: Are you aware of any major differences between the UK market for children's books and the US market?

VA: In the UK the structure of mass market and institutional publishing is very different, so we tend to try for books that are mostly going to sell in the retail market – library is a bonus. In the USA institutional sales are a much bigger deal.

Expression: What are the biggest challenges you face/have faced in building a new list in an already established and competitive market?

VA: We don't want to steal other houses' authors, so often we must build new authors' and artists' careers from the ground up, without being able to rely on established names in the US market.

Expression: Are there any books on your current list that you would consider quintessentially "Bloomsbury"? If there is a difference between a

Bloomsbury USA and a Bloomsbury UK book, what is it?

VA: I think "Five Little Fiends" is quintessentially Bloomsbury – quirky, warm, with a great message but not "messagey" per se. The design will be slightly different between US and UK books, because the aesthetic is different in the different markets, but there won't be a difference in the kind of books we do.

Expression: What can you tell us about the Bloomsbury USA publishing program?

VA: We are publishing about 40 hardcovers a year, and in 2004 will start a paperback line. We publish for all ages, 0 to 18, and beyond.

Expression: What are you looking for in a novel or picture book?

VA: I look for the unusual, the funny and the emotionally strong stuff and, of course, great writing and talented artists who are consistent and easy to work with.

Expression: Anything you are definitely not looking for?

VA: We don't do much non-fiction because of the UK retail-oriented market, and board books can be very tough unless totally unique or with a licensed character. Series are okay, but the first book should be really special and each book strong enough to stand on its own.

Expression: What would you consider the role of the editor in the publishing process?

VA: The editor is crucial in positioning the book within the sales structure of a publishing house, to participate not just in the words of the manuscript, but in the overall book production, design, and sales.

Expression: Are you aware of any trends in publishing at the moment? How do you feel about them?

VA: There seems to be a trend for older YA's to fall into the adult market. This can be a good thing if it really serves those true young adults (aged between 16 and 22) who tend to ignore traditional YA books, and only go for "real" adult books. There is also a lot of computer art out there, which is not so good.

Expression: What say, if any, does your sales/marketing department have in the look or type of book you produce?

VA: I work very closely with sales and marketing, particularly on jackets and concept books, but the editing and art choices are strictly editorial. I try to listen to all opinions.

Expression: Will you look at illustration samples? If so, do you advise an illustrator to send new samples every six months, or so?

VA: I love looking at illustration samples. Sending new samples periodically is always a good idea – even a postcard is nice.

Expression: What are some of the common mistakes authors could AVOID making when submitting to you?

VA: Not sending an SASE, sending too many manuscripts at once . . .

Expression: Anything else you would like to add?

VA: Please forgive our slow response time – we are a small staff, and do try to really look at everything that comes in, but our priority is always our existing authors. Thanks!

Victoria Arms will be speaking at "Editors' Day," in Paris, 11 October, 2003. Contact Melissa at melissa@kidbookpros.com.



Illustration: Paddy Bourma

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the SCBWI France web site!
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gallery for children's book
writers and illustrators
Contact Alain Machu (alain@kidbookpros.com) for details and conditions. Please note that you must be a member of SCBWI (any chapter) to participate

Coming Out: The Changing Content of YA Books

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR ALEX SANCHEZ

Alex's first novel, "Rainbow Boys," (Simon & Schuster, USA) is a gay love story set in an American high school. It achieved critical and popular success, winning a number of prestigious awards, including selection as an ALA "Best Book for Young Adults." The sequel, "Rainbow High," will be released fall, 2003. A third book will form a trilogy.

Expression: How did you get started as a writer? Was it something you always wanted to do?

AS: Like many writers, I loved writing as a child. But as I grew up, I grew afraid of sharing who I was. In college I wrote a picture book for a children's lit class, but it wasn't anything truly personal. Not until grad school did I finally summon the courage to write a story with a gay character. The instructor's homophobia caused him to lash out at it. After that I didn't write for years. But the dream of writing stayed with me.

Expression: Who would you consider to be the greatest influence on your writing?

AS: Foremost was my mom, an artist who constantly encouraged my friends and me to access our creativity; my dad, who exemplified the ethic of persistent work; and Mrs. Holden, who read aloud *The Secret Garden* to our fourth grade class, inspiring me with a love of stories.

Expression: What was the inspiration for *Rainbow Boys*? Were you clear on the type of book you wanted to write from the beginning?

AS: Are you familiar with the concept of an "inner child?" I think my inspiration is a very loud and vocal "inner teenager."

Like many people, I knew I was gay by the age of thirteen, but I didn't have the courage to speak up then. It was only after I'd finished *Rainbow Boys* that I realized I'd written the book I desperately wanted and needed when I was a teen – one that would have told me: "You don't have to hate yourself for being gay. It's okay to be who you are."

Expression: The book was very well-received. Did that surprise you?

AS: Prior to publication, I was terrified of what people would say. The first review came from the *School Library Journal* stating: "There will no doubt be challenges to *Rainbow Boys*, much like the challenges of Judy Blume's *Forever* when it was published in the 1970's. But please, have the courage to make it available to those who will need it – it can open eyes and change lives."

Wow! I thought. My book? Change lives? Needless to say, that review was a tremendous relief. More than that, it validated the intent of my book.

Expression: Did you encounter the challenges the *School Library Journal* predicted? What form did they take and how did you handle them?

AS: I have heard of instances where *Rainbow Boys* has been challenged, kept behind the desk by at least one librarian, and even torn up at a prayer vigil! For an author it's troubling to hear such reports and difficult to get accurate information about the incidents. It helps to have a publisher and friends who believe in the book to remind you that controversy indicates the book is stirring feelings and ideas. That's what every author wants. I believe the greater problem authors face is the chilling effect on school libraries from repeated challenges to a wide variety of books over the past 25 years (since Judy Blume's *Forever*). Because of a very small but vocal group of individuals and organizations who wish to control teen access to information, some librarians now shy away from ordering any book that may prove controversial. Gay-themed books top the list. But on the bright side, most librarians are free-speech champions who want more good books for teens struggling with issues including sexuality. Thanks to those individuals, books such as *Rainbow Boys* continue to make their way onto school library shelves.

Expression: How have teens reacted to your book?

AS: I'd like to share with you one

typical email of the many I've received from teens – this one from a girl. "Dear Mr. Sanchez, I walked into [the bookstore] this morning, picked up your book, and didn't walk out until I had finished and it was dark outside ... I live in a really homophobic town and it was refreshing reading about characters dealing with that in high school, especially when things like that are happening to me in jr. high. Sex hardly ever gets addressed, especially homosexual issues, and yet we deal with homophobia every day. It was nice to know we're not alone."

Expression: There are a lot of edgy, honest books about sexuality available for teens today. What do you think made *Rainbow Boys* stand out for your publisher? Do you think it took a particularly "brave" editor to take on your book?

AS: I think what makes *Rainbow Boys* stand out is the friendship between the boys. They've broken through the pervasive gay teen feeling of "I'm the only one." Also important is the depiction of love between boys as something natural and in so many ways similar to heterosexual coming of age. Lastly, it's the story every gay child wants and needs to read – one with a happy, hopeful ending.

My editor, Kevin Lewis, brought a tremendously perceptive vision of the characters. He understood what the book was striving to achieve. And he made it even better. We focused a lot on connecting the characters' emotions to their sexuality. We wanted a story that would help readers look at feelings and come to emotional resolution, from a safe distance. Keeping the focus on the emotional narrative guided the writing.

Expression: You've just completed a sequel to *Rainbow Boys* and have a third book planned to complete the trilogy. Can you tell us a little about the two books to come?

AS: *Rainbow High* continues to follow the three boys through the second semester of senior year as they encounter struggles with HIV,



Simon & Schuster, ©2002

homophobia in school sports, and, of course, love. I'm not sure about the third book yet, except that it will be set during the summer after senior year. I hope it too will be as fun and inspiring.

"*Rainbow Boys*" will be available in paperback from June 2003. You can find out more about Alex and his forthcoming books by visiting his web site at www.AlexSanchez.com

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Rendez-Vous

JANUARY TO OCTOBER 2003

- 24 January** Show and Tell cocktail party in Paris. Bring a bottle and/or a snack AND your latest project to share! To reserve, please contact Melissa Buron at melissa@kidbookpros.com.
- 8-9 February** New York - SCBWI Mid-Winter Conference. Register at www.scbwi.org.
- 1-2 March** "The Ten Commandments of Writing" with Richard Peck in Paris. The workshop is geared to novel writers for children and young adults. Pre-registration is strongly suggested as places are limited. Contact Melissa Buron at melissa@kidbookpros.com.
- 6 March TDB** The annual "Famous Writers' and Illustrators' Dinner" in Paris for all those writers and illustrators who, if not already famous, want to be. Contact Melissa for details: melissa@kidbookpros.com.
- 18 March** Take an Editor to Dinner: Cricket Books editor, Carol Saller. Limited to 10, first-come, first-served. Contact Jeanne for details: jeanne@kidbookpros.com.
- 18-19 March** London International Book Fair. For details and registration www.libf.co.uk.
- 21-26 March** Salon du Livre de Paris at Porte de Versailles with Holland as this year's country of honor. Further details at www.salondulivreparis.com.
- 2-5 April** Bologna International Children's Book Fair. Register via the website: www.bookfair.bolognafiere.it.
- Summer TDB** Writing picture books with Dandi Daley Mackall
- 4-6 July** SCBWI International conference in Madrid, Spain. Lawrence Schimel: scbwispain@hotmail.com.
- 15-18 August** SCBWI Annual Conference in Los Angeles. Register at www.scbwi.org.
- 11 October** Editors' Day organized by SCBWI France with editors, Victoria Arms (Bloomsbury USA), Louise Bolongaro (Macmillan UK), Stephen Cole (Simon and Schuster UK), Emma Dryden (McElderry USA). Contact Melissa Buron at melissa@kidbookpros.com.

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Writers: Consider submissions on topics about the writing process, the writing craft, techniques of illustration, creativity, marketing your work, school visits, bilingualism. News of book sales, critique groups, experience with publishers is welcome.

Book Reviews: It is SCBWI policy to review only books on writing and illustrating, or books of criticism on children's literature.

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France web site and email list. Contact Melissa Buron for details at melissa@kidbookpros.com.

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NEWSLETTER STAFF

Sandra Guy, Editor
Ann Kordahl,
Assistant Editor and Advertising
Fabrice Buron, Translations
Lene Scharling, Art Director

Melissa Buron,
Directeur de la Publication



Illustration Lene Scharling

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