

BORDERLINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Midsouth Region

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SCBWI-Midsouth
Regional Advisor:
Tracy Barrett

Illustrator
Coordinator:
Alison Lyne

Assistant Regional
Advisor/Editor:
Patricia Wiles

How “Tweet” It Is: Authors Enhance their Online Presence with Twitter

by *Patricia Wiles*

For authors eager to network with others in the children's book industry, a little tweet can go a long way.

Twitter is a popular social network service similar to instant messaging. The difference, however, is that users are limited to short posts, or “tweets.” Users may choose to protect their updates or allow them to be visible to all “Twitterers.” They can follow Twitterers with the same interests, and may be followed by others. Tweets often include links to Web pages, with requests to “re-tweet,” or pass along the link in a message of your own.

“It's instant blogging,” said Alan Gratz, author of *Samurai Shortstop* and the Horatio Wilkes mysteries (Dial). “Most of the fun of Twitter is saying what you're doing right at that

moment, or what you've just done, and the short format — just 140 characters — forces you to say things without much commentary. It's rather addictive.”

Tweets are based on the question, “What are you doing?” Ask writers what they're doing on Twitter, and they'll most likely say they're tweeting because it helps them market themselves and their work.

Twitterers can follow and receive tweets from publishers and their imprints, editors and agents. Booksellers tweet about new releases and initiate conversations about genres, books, or trends in the industry. SCBWI-Midsouth member Juli Heaton follows some of her “dream editors and agents” on Twitter.

“I can see what authors are doing promotion-wise and sometimes get a glimpse at what editors are thinking,” she said.

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You can also follow your favorite authors.

“I know what Meg Cabot watched on TV last night,” Heaton said. “[It’s] kinda cool.”

Twitter’s sound-bite structure and the option to tweet via text messaging may appeal to those who find blogging too time-consuming. Tera Lynn Childs, author of *Oh. My. Gods.* and *Goddess Boot Camp* (Dutton), said, “Twittering [is] so much easier ... and it’s a quick way to get a must-share off your chest. Plus, I can text a tweet from anywhere.”

Tweets fly fast through cyberspace, allowing news to spread quickly. Lauren Baratz-Logsted, author of the Sisters Eight series (Houghton Mifflin), discovered this when her reply to a tweet created a chorus of chirps for her upcoming Young Adult novel, *Crazy Beautiful* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, September 2009).

“A year ago I joined Twitter at another writer’s urging and then did absolutely nothing with it,” Baratz-Logsted said. “When I finally went back a few weeks ago, one of the first things I saw was a YA blogger asking if any authors had read Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*. I had and I responded. Turned out she was looking for a quote for an anniversary blog. Before I knew it, buzz was spreading like fire through the YA blogosphere ... about my forthcoming YA. ...

“I’ve had 12 books published before, and I’ve never seen anything like the attention this book is getting pre-pub ... It’s all because I was at the right place at the right time to answer a simple question,” she said.

Some authors like communicating with readers via Twitter, and use it in conjunction with social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook.

“I tweet for the same reason I have a Facebook page – networking,” Gratz said. “When I don’t have a new book on the shelf, social networking sites allow me to remind readers I’m still out there, and when I do have a new book on the shelf, my foregoing non-sales communications make my not-so-subtle solicitations for their financial support much more friendly.”

As with any Internet posting, authors should be

If you Twitter, you can follow the authors quoted in this story:

Juli Heaton: <http://twitter.com/juliheaton>

Alan Gratz: http://twitter.com/Alan_Gratz

Tera Lynn Childs: <http://twitter.com/teralynnchilds>

Lauren Baratz-Logsted:
<http://twitter.com/LaurenBaratzL>

Teri Brown: <http://twitter.com/teribrownwrites>

mindful of their personal safety as well as the tone, content, and wording of their tweets. Don’t include too much personal information, and don’t release “hate-tweets” or negative comments about individual editors, agents, or publishers. Determine how you want to use Twitter and how much of yourself you’re willing to reveal before you create an account.

“I use Twitter because it’s an effective way to keep up with both friends and family, other authors and fans,” said Teri Brown, author of *Read My Lips* (Simon Pulse 2008). “I make sure to keep most of my messages writing related, though I admit to occasionally straying off topic.”

Writers should be warned: Twitter can be addictive. It’s fun to send and receive tweets. You’ll get tweets that provide links to interesting Web pages. If you’re not careful, Twitter can distract you from your work.

However, Twitter’s limitations provide good exercise for writers. The quest to master the art of brief prose — even in your e-mails — can be addictive. When it comes to writing about Twitter, even Michael Bourret, agent and vice president of

Dystel and Goderich Literary Management, can't resist turning the short phrase.

If you can spell out your thoughts in 140 characters, "It's almost like writing haiku," he said.

His tweet-length comment?

"Twitter is tops for social networking, news, learning about publishing, and fun, but use it carefully or you won't have any time for writing."

Patricia Wiles is the SCBWI-Midsouth Assistant Regional Advisor and editor of BorderLines. You can follow her on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/pdwiles>.

Editor's note: Midsouth Member Juli Heaton assisted with research for this report.

Midsouth Good News

Candie Moonshower's biography, *Vivian Vande Velde: Author of Fantasy Fiction*, debuted in February 2009 with Enslow Publishers. Her middle-grade novel, *The Legend of Zoey*, was named a 2009-2010 Volunteer State Book Award Nominee. Way to go, Candie!

A poem by Wanda Collins Johnson was selected by the Japan-America Society of Tennessee, Inc. for their online educational course, Things Japanese in Tennessee. You can read her haiku sequence at their website <http://www.jastn.com>. Congratulations, Wanda!

Words of Wisdom

"The cat sat on the mat' is not the beginning of a story, but 'the cat sat on the dog's mat' is."

—John Le Carré

Stand up and Tweet!



1. Go to <http://twitter.com>.
2. Sign up with a username and password. When your account is approved, your username will show up as part of your twitter URL, so choose your username carefully.
3. Once your account is active, you may choose to follow other twitterers' tweets, and other twitterers will request to follow your tweets. Don't know who to follow? Find a friend who twitters and see who she is following. Twitter has an application that can check your Gmail, Yahoo, or Hotmail contacts to locate people you know.
4. Click the "settings" tab to change your profile, add your Web site URL, and a photo that will appear beside your username in your tweets. You can also secure your tweets so they may only be viewed by your followers.
5. Search the Web for desktop applications that allow you to send and receive tweets without using your Internet browser. Information can be found at <http://twitter.com/downloads>.
6. Be mindful of your Internet reputation. Proper use of Twitter can help you make vital contacts. However, improper use of Twitter or any other social networking site can impede your progress. As in real life, manners count! For tips on proper etiquette when networking with editors and agents online, see www.guidetoliteraryagents.com. (Specifically, look for the Feb. 27 blog post, "Protocol when Contacting and Befriending Literary Agents on Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter.")

A Note from your Regional Advisor

It's no secret that these are tough times, and there's no reason publishing should be immune from the financial woes around us. What does this mean for those of us hoping to place a book with a publisher, or to get a foot in the door as an illustrator, or to sell a story to a magazine?

At the SCBWI conference in New York last month, SCBWI Executive Director Lin Oliver posed this question and more to a panel of agents in front of a crowd of around a thousand attendees. Michael Stearns of Firebrand Literary Agency (on the faculty of this fall's SCBWI-Midsouth conference), Alyssa Eisner-Henkin of Trident Media (former faculty at the Midsouth's critique retreat), Edward Necarsulmer IV of McIntosh & Otis, and Michael Bourret of Dystel & Goderich Literary Management were cautiously optimistic.

Stearns said that it's obvious that things are tighter, but he sees this trend as a course correction, with the market reacting to years of over-inflated advances and too many books being acquired and then not doing well in an overcrowded field. "The market's tough," he said, "but [editors] are still buying books."

Bourret agreed, saying, "Children's books are fairly healthy."

Necarsulmer concurred with Stearns about the cyclical nature of publishing and advised, "Don't write for the market, because that never works."

Eisner-Henkin too said that children's books are doing better than the market as a whole. "Everybody loves kids — sweet little things with rosy cheeks — and nobody wants to scrimp on them." She congratulated conference attendees on spending the money and taking the time to attend the conference, saying, "Treating yourself like a published author, even before you're published, is key."

They all agreed that you should write what you're passionate about and do the kinds of illustrations



Alison Davis Lyne

that you love. And more than ever, it's crucial to polish your work to a professional level before submitting it.

Lin noted in her remarks to the Regional Advisors that this year's conference was the second-largest of the ten ever held in New York. She speculated about the reasons and said she hoped that it was because people are realizing the necessity of investing in themselves and their work.

If you can't afford the time or the money to go to one of the big SCBWI events, take heart! The 2009 Midsouth conference has a stellar line-up of faculty. If you can't wait until September, consider the Editor's Day in Lexington in June. The Picture Book Boot Camp in February was the Midsouth's first-ever event with a waiting list, showing that our members (and those in other Regions — we had attendees from six states!) are already working hard on their craft. Hope to see you at one of these events! — *Tracy Barrett*

NaNoWriMo Roundup *by Candie Moonshower*

In the Winter 2008 issue* of *BorderLines*, I reported on the Midsouth NaNo Writer's Room, a group of Midsouth Writers who banded together last November to participate in the National Novel Writing Month (or NaNoWriMo). The purpose of NaNoWriMo's yearly event is to encourage writers around the world to write a 50,000-word novel in 30 days (and still make time here in the states for Thanksgiving turkey-gorging and Black Friday shopping, too).

Twelve of us participated in the local version, and that participation ran the gamut from making the commitment to write daily to the crazed determination on the part of some of us to cross over the 50,000-word mark. We all checked in with each other, sometimes daily, cheering on our successes and working through our fears. We all experienced the highs and lows of outrageous goal-setting and achieved more than we dreamed possible.

The first day of December found us exhausted, bleary-eyed, and elated. We all had managed to write quite a bit more than we would have otherwise, and in some cases, to do some soul-searching. To have made that commitment in November—and to have crossed the finish line—was an awesome feeling, especially in a month that has a major holiday, school vacations, family visiting from afar and housecleaning to be done in preparation for all that family togetherness. Our Midsouth NaNo room discussions ranged from how to motivate ourselves through the sagging middles to how long a coffeepot can actually go without a thorough scrubbing (days and days, apparently!).

I'm happy to report that six in our group finished their NaNoWriMo novels and achieved the coveted purple "Winner!" bar on their NaNo pages. Those participants are Shellie Braeuner, Beth Dotson Brown, Jody Casella, Shelly Cook, Doan Phuong Nguyen, and yours truly! But we don't view this as a "50% success rate" because all participants in the group succeeded in meeting some or all of their stated goals. The first annual Midsouth NaNo Room was 100% successful!

The Midsouth NaNo Room voted to remain open for the year and continue to cheer each other on as we work through our NaNo novels and writing issues. And now it's time for NaNoEdMo—National Novel Editing Month—which begins March 1, 2009. Several of us are participating. And we're ready!

For more information on NaNoEdMo, see <http://www.nanoedmo.net>. And to begin planning ahead for NaNoWriMo, visit <http://www.nanowrimo.org>.

**Editor's note: The Winter 2008 issue of BorderLines, and Candie's article, may be viewed at <http://www.scbwi-midsouth.org/newsletter.htm>. Click the link on the page that reads "Winter 2008 issue." You must have Adobe Reader to open the .pdf file. You can download Adobe Reader for free at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>.*

Featured Illustrators

Alison Davis Lyne (page 4) is the Midsouth's Illustrator Coordinator. Her latest book is Bo and the Roaring Pines (Pelican). Alison's Web site is www.lyneart.com.

Join our Listserv!

The Midsouth Kidbooks listserv is a free service that allows children's writers and illustrators in our region to connect. It's a great way to make friends, gain support, and hear the latest news about the world of writing and illustrating for children. To sign up, go to www.yahogroups.com and search for `midsouth_kidbooks`.

Midsouth Event: Lisa Wheeler's Picture Book Boot Camp

Text and photos by Genetta Adair

The SCBWI-Midsouth Picture Book Boot Camp on February 21st strengthened, trained, and inspired attendees to develop lean, muscular manuscripts. Lisa Wheeler instructed with humor and knowledge from her fourteen years of writing experience, often using one of her 25 published books as examples. With an easy-going approach and a fun-loving style, Lisa's Boot Campers laughed



often and took numerous notes on the Do's and Don'ts of Rhyme, Self-Editing, and Revision.

Lisa explained how she begins every writing

project with a brainstorming session on words.

With her book *Sailor Moo*, she created a word list for every word about cows and another on words about the ocean.

Then she looked for words that could intersect both lists. From that exercise, she noticed the words sea and cow which,



when used together, represent a nickname for the manatee. She had never thought of using a manatee in her manuscript before that, but it added a fun, new feature to her story. She advised her Boot Campers to make word lists for every story they write, whether it's a story in rhyme or prose.

Although Lisa claims to not have any musical talent, she admits that her books contain musical elements. "A picture book is meant to be read

aloud," Lisa said. "Even if it's not in rhyme, there's a cadence and flow in picture books." For that reason, Lisa said that internal rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, refrains, and repetitions are the spice of picture books. "Look for an opportunity to add fun wordplay," Lisa added.



Using fun as her main ingredient, Lisa stretched and exercised her Boot Campers to cut unnecessary word-calories and trim the fat from their stories. Look for strapping, strong manuscripts from this group in the near future!

Calendar

March 15: Deadline for applications to several SCBWI grants. For information: <http://scbwi.org/awards.htm>.

April 2-4: Annual Conference, Tennessee Mountain Writers, Oak Ridge, TN. For information: <http://www.tnwi.org/events.html>.

April 1-June 30: Mss. accepted for the Delacorte Yearling Contest for a First Middle-Grade Novel (formerly the Marguerite de Angeli Contest). For information:

www.randomhouse.com/kids/writingcontests.

April 8-10: Tennessee Library Association Meeting, Nashville. For information: <http://www.tnla.org/cde.cfm?event=155303>.

May 15-16: SCBWI Arkansas spring conference. For information: <http://www.arkansascbwi.org/conference.html>.



Tracy Barrett, Regional Advisor

SCBWI-Midsouth

P.O. Box 120061

Nashville, TN 37212

(615)297-1667

tracytbarrett@yahoo.com

**The Society of Children's Book
Writers and Illustrators**

Stephen Mooser, President

Lin Oliver, Executive Director

8271 Beverly Boulevard

Los Angeles, California 90048

Phone: 323-782-1010

Fax: 323-782-1892

Email: scbwi@scbwi.org

On the web: <http://scbwi.org>

**SCBWI-Midsouth Editor's Day
Featuring Liz Waniewski, editor at Dial Books**

8 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, June 27

Joseph-Beth Booksellers

Lexington Green Circle

Lexington, Kentucky

Cost: SCBWI members, \$55 (\$60 if received after May 16)

Nonmembers, \$65 (\$70 if received after May 16)

Don't miss this chance to learn from an editor about:

The submission process

The top ten reasons a manuscript is accepted or rejected

The need for a captivating query letter

Current industry trends

Registration form and information available at

www.scbwi-midsouth.org/events.htm