

# Children's Book Guild News



the  
children's  
Book Guild

of Washington, D.C.  
Since 1945

## Monthly News

Authors • Illustrators • Children's Literature Specialists

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### About Me



#### Monthly News

The Children's Book Guild of Washington, DC is a professional organization of authors, illustrators and children's literature specialists promoting high standards in children's literature since 1945. Visit us at <http://www.childrensbookguild.org/>

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Sunday, November 20, 2011

December 2011 News

## PERFECTION: WHO NEEDS IT?



On December 8, illustrator Paul O. Zelinsky will speak to the Children's Book Guild of Washington, D.C., about how his obsessive personality, in addition to driving other people crazy, has helped him approach his goal: to achieve the ideal fit between pictures and words. He will confess to a tendency to seek out clever ways to do stupid things, and discuss how his collaboration with an even more obsessive paper engineer led to the most elaborate movable book mechanism ever published.

Zelinsky has illustrated approximately 30 books for children, from *Hansel and Gretel* to *The Wheels on the Bus*, has written some of them, and has been awarded numerous honors, including the Caldecott Medal for *Rapunzel* (1998) and three Caldecott Honors.

Date: Thursday, December 8

Time: 11:15–Social Hour; Noon–Luncheon

Place: [Pier 7 Restaurant at the Channel Inn](#)

650 Water Street, SW, Washington, DC

Menu: All choices \$25.00

Regular: Medallions of New York Sirloin

Alternate: Filet of Sole Veronique

Vegetarian: Fresh Fruit Platter with Cottage Cheese

Dessert: Assorted Sherbet

Special Order: Steamed or Grilled Veggies, Fresh Fruit Plate for Dessert

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Kathryn Erskine on Gathering the Facts

Member News

## KATHRYN ERSKINE AND THE ABSOLUTE VALUE OF RESEARCH

by Catherine Reef

According to Kathryn Erskine, a believable story is a well-researched one. Speaking to the Children's Book Guild on November 17, the author of the National Book Award winner *Mockingbird* and other novels credited thorough research for the authenticity she brings to her writing.

Erskine took her audience on a virtual tour of the sources she visited while researching *Mockingbird*, which features a main character with Asperger's syndrome. Erskine, who has a daughter with Asperger's, drew on her own experience, of course, but she also consulted books, websites and listservs, and she interviewed teachers, parents and adults with Asperger's. What was more, the Kluge Children's Rehabilitation Center, in Charlottesville, Va., where Erskine lives, was a particularly helpful resource. And even if only a "fabulous five percent" of the vast information she gathered made it into her book, the remaining 95 percent was hardly wasted, Erskine said, because it enriched the novel's setting and characters.

Travel is another fact-gathering essential for Erskine. While researching her most recent book, *The Absolute Value of Mike*, for example, she visited rural Pennsylvania, where the story is set. While traveling she stops in at local museums, historical societies and even places of worship. For her novel *Quaking*, she attended meetings of the Religious Society of Friends. "Sitting in the meeting house I could feel exactly like my character," she said.

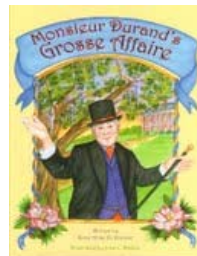
Erskine finds computer technology invaluable in her research. Neither a linear thinker nor an outliner, she uses the research section of the program Story Mill to organize her data. In addition, she can find online such obscure but necessary aids as old television schedules, and she sometimes consults eBay to see a picture of an item from the past--she mentioned an old Flintstones glass--so that she can describe it accurately.

Memory is another invaluable tool for a writer. "For all the writing I do, I tap my own experience," Erskine noted. To fuel her memory she reads books, listens to music and consumes the food of the place or time she wishes to recall. She was delighted one day to come upon a package of Red Bush tea while shopping, and to recognize it as a beverage she and her family enjoyed during her childhood years in South Africa. Drinking this tea while writing *Ibhubesi: The Lion* brought to mind details of the setting.

Once all the research and writing is done, there's nothing so helpful as an expert's opinion. Having completed *Mockingbird*, Erskine gave the manuscript to her daughter, who was 12 at the time. She wanted to know if she had captured what it is like to have Asperger's syndrome. After finishing the book, her daughter commented, "Yup, that's pretty much it. What's for dinner?"

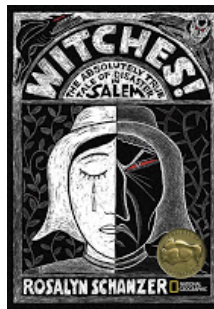
## MEMBER NEWS

Stephanie Tolan writes: "Ah, the joys of print-on-demand! The manuscript for my nonfiction book for adults, *Change Your Story, Change Your Life*, was rejected (often to the accompaniment of editorial raves!) by every single publisher of self-help/body-mind-spirit/human-development books in America. So I built a website for it (<http://www.storyhealer.com/>) and posted it there as a free, downloadable PDF. Given what editors said, I suspected that marketing people didn't know how to promote such a book by a 'children's writer.' When people who had found it online began to say they wanted a 'real book' to share with others, I went back to CreateSpace, through which I'd resurrected three of my most-wanted out-of-print books, and now there's both a real book and a Kindle: <https://wwwcreatespace.com/3635040>. I hated not having an editor (as my editors have always been a wonderful help), but I'm really glad to have a book at last. It is a brave new world...."



A new book illustrated by Joan Waites was released in early October. It's *Monsieur Durand's Grosse Affaire*, by Rose Anne St. Romain (Pelican Publishing). According to the publisher's description, "An extravagant man creates a legendary wedding. For one of the wealthiest men in Louisiana's Petit Paris, a regular affair wasn't enough for his daughters' double wedding. Based on a true story from 1800s St. Martinville, this tale reveals how one creative man used gold dust and 1 million spiders to stage an event still talked about more than 100 years later."

Katherine Paterson shares the news that her book *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* (Chronicle Books), so beautifully illustrated by Pamela Dalton, is on the New York Times Best Illustrated Books list for 2011.



Rosalyn Schanzer reports that she had an unusual month—and a whole lot of fun—back in October. Roz writes, "Because of my new book, *Witches! The Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem*, I (ahem) appeared in two newspaper articles and got to speak on 20 different radio shows all over the country. I also did a book talk at Politics and Prose on October 19, addressed 50 teachers at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston on the 22nd, talked and signed books at the infamous Witch House in Salem, Mass., on the 23rd, scared a bunch of fifth graders half to death at the Charles H. Taylor School in Mattapan, Mass., on the 24th and was then given a gourmet luncheon at the beautiful Boston Public Library on the same day. Of course the most exciting part of all was being awarded the Gold Medal from the Society of Illustrators for Best Illustrated Book of 2011. The award was presented in New York City on the rainy, windy evening of October 27 at the society's Original Art exhibition, and I was blown away to see that so many of my biggest all-time heroes had work in the show--what was I doing there? Later that night, a group of my fellow nonfiction authors from <http://www.inkthinktank.com/> threw a party in honor of the book and somehow even printed my dust-jacket witch on the icing of a real cake. Here's a link to an interview about the book: <http://www.beinkandescent.com/articles/728/witches>. And here's a link to a blog about my part in the Original Art Exhibition: <http://gotstorycountdown.wordpress.com/2011/11/01/a-gold-medal-for-witches/>. The next day I flew to Minneapolis to eat steak and more cake and to sign books at AASL. I also had a wonderful time doing an interview with the great Maria Salvadore for Reading Rockets, which you can find right here: <http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/schanzer/>. And if you aren't totally sick of hearing from me by now, I was delighted to dine with Jules Danielson during an interview at Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast: <http://blaine.org/sevenimpossiblethings/?p=2224>. I particularly loved doing these two pieces. So now it's back to Earth and the usual anonymity. The broomstick has landed, but what a ride!

Fun? Certainly! Informative? Probably! Ann McCallum will be doing a math cooking demo and book signing to promote her book *Eat Your Math Homework: Recipes for Hungry Minds*. The event will take place December 4 at the Clara Barton Community Center's Holiday Craft Show, from 1 to 5 p.m. The show is located at 7425 MacArthur Blvd., Cabin John, MD 20818.

Marc Nobleman recently returned from two weeks in Guam, where he visited 26 schools. Marc commented that children and teachers there were still talking about Kathryn Erskine's trip to Guam a few years ago. For pictures and a recap of Marc's adventure, go to: <http://noblemania.blogspot.com/2011/10/going-going-guam-part-2-of-3.html>.

Posted by Monthly News at 8:07 AM 0 comments 

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