

# GUILD QUARTERLY

## SPRING 2024

The Children's Book Guild of Washington, DC



A learning and sharing community for  
DC-area children's literature professionals since 1945

## From the Desk of Monica Valentine

Greetings Guild Members,

It's cherry blossom season here in Washington DC! The city is filled with visitors and the trees are still in bloom this week. I hope everyone has a chance to enjoy them and Cherry Blossom Festival events.



More than 50 Guild members gathered at Cleveland Park Library for the Guild's Annual Business Meeting on Saturday, March 16th. The meeting began with a thoughtful discussion about banned books led by Edie Ching. We will continue discussing ways that our organization can have an impact and advocate against book bans and censorship. Thanks to Terry Jennings for preparing a detailed Treasurer's report, which was accepted. The Guild has sufficient funds on hand to cover our experiences and a reasonable cushion. We discussed being intentional about how to use our resources with an eye to carrying out our mission, growing membership, increasing engagement and fiscal responsibility. Vice President Caroline Brewer reported on the Non-Fiction Award survey results. We received 54 responses to the survey with 88.9% of respondents not in favor of continuing the award in its traditional format. 98% of those respondents want the Guild to explore alternative options for the event. There have been several suggestions, which will be presented to membership for a vote.

We have robust programming planned for the remainder of the Guild year, including two of our regular Speaker Series events and a

professional development workshop at the Bethesda Writer's Center. Keep your eyes on your email and the Guild website for registration information.

We will be making important decisions about the future of the Guild in the coming months to include the frequency and format of our meetings, Non-Fiction Award alternatives, and electing new leadership. You will be hearing from the Executive Committee and the Nominating Committee about moving forward in these areas. We encourage all members to be engaged by attending upcoming meetings and participating in voting by electronic poll. Caroline and I are committed to making sure we hear from membership about decisions that affect the whole body.

Finally, Kem Sawyer reports that five local area schools have been selected this year to receive our Youth Literacy Grants! Each school will receive a \$300 gift certificate from First Book to make book selections. We have also collected 95 books (and counting), which the Do Kind Works summer program will distribute to children. Bravo to Kem for organizing these initiatives and to members who support them.

I look forward to seeing you all soon. Happy Spring!

## Hearts of Guild

### INTERVIEWS WITH OUR MEMBERS



***Jonathan Roth*** is an author-illustrator who lives in Rockville, Maryland. He has published a chapter book series, a graphic novel series, and soon his first picture book (also his first serious, non-fiction book, although it does have the word UNDERWEAR in a very large font on the cover). Though his books tend to take place on Mars and beyond, his favorite planet is still Earth!

***Tell us about your goals in the world of children's literature.***

I was pretty young when it hit me that creating books for kids was something I needed to do. It really felt like a calling. I then dove in hard and wrote in many genres, went to conferences, signed with an agent, parted with an agent, signed with another...and still it took 15+ years of really working at it to finally start seeing my books in the hands of young readers. And now that it's happening, I want it to keep happening!

***What do you love most about your work?***

I love the creative process—both writing and illustrating—though it can of course be as frustrating as it is fruitful. But I also love doing school visits. I'm an art teacher by day (25 years in Montgomery County Public Schools), but my own students are like family. So, when I visit schools unknown, and really connect with students, that feels special (it doesn't hurt that they treat you like a rock star, oh, yeah).

***Which of your projects/involvements have been most important to you, and why?***

I've been lucky to be involved with a number of book fests, but I've been particularly happy to be part of the Gaithersburg Book Festival. I began attending during their first year in 2010, and always love the intimate small park feel and the stellar creators they bring in. I'm going to present there for the fourth time myself this spring, hope to see you!

***What are you up to right now?***

I feel fortunate that my 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> books (since 2018) will come out this year, but those are also the last of my contracted books, so I'm in that free and terrifying space where I'm focusing on creating the next ones. I'm playing with various new projects, from picture books to graphic novels. I'm also spending way too many hours on all the business stuff (promo, lining up appearances, etc.) that are such a big part of being an author these days. Why didn't anyone warn me?!

***What aspects of being a Guild member have been most supportive to you and your work?***

I'm a newer member, so I feel like I'm just getting my feet wet. But it's an honor to belong, and I look forward to meeting as many members as I can. I love in-person meetups. My day job keeps me from luncheons (except maybe in the summer), but if the Guild has an event, I'll do my best to make it.

Learn more about Jonathan [here](#).





***Desaray Mnyandu*** is the author of *Imbila's Tale*, *99 Zulu Proverbs*, and *Sindi: A Zulu Cinderella*. She has a passion for world cultures that has led her to visit various countries around the world. She is committed to helping children explore the beauty of African cultures and understand the wisdom in African languages in a simple way. Desaray is also a Guild Recording Secretary, is married to her college sweetheart, lives near DC, and homeschools her four children.

***What do you love most about your work?***

I have always been an artist. I sketch, paint, sculpt and sew, but I also enjoy the predictability and straightforward nature of business and the sciences. Last year I closed my wedding rental business after eight years, which made lots of room to delve further into my creative side. I'm really enjoying how writing pushes me to explore the bounds of my creativity. Can I translate the characters and scenes in my imagination in a way that makes sense and engages children? It's an amazing challenge and I'm embracing it completely.

***Which of your projects/involvements have been most important to you, and why?***

My most recent book, *Sindi: A Zulu Cinderella*, is most important to me because I co-authored it with my eight-year-old daughter. She actually came up with the concept and was involved in every step of publishing *Sindi*. I saw her get frustrated with the writing/editing process, collaborate with our illustrator, get nervous for her first public reading, and I've shared her excitement for each review and award. It's so special because I was able to watch her bloom into an author.

***What are you up to right now?***

*Sindi* was just published in December, so I'm currently contacting schools and libraries and setting up author visits for the coming year. It's a bit hectic, but I am having an incredible time! I also have my own publishing company, Zulunomics. Up until now we've only published our own books, but I'm in the process of negotiating a contract with a new author. It's pretty exciting!

***What are your goals in the world of children's literature?***

As a homeschool mom, I'm constantly looking for ways to help my children learn while they're having fun, so they get what they need with what they want! Similarly, I want to write books that entertain and inform children about a wide range of topics within the African diaspora. My books so far have focused on Zulu culture, but I will be expanding my repertoire soon. I also want to explore writing for other ages. I find writing a middle grade novel to be a little intimidating, so I'd like to take on that challenge...not soon...but someday.

***What aspects of being a Guild member have been most supportive to you and your work?***

The other members are so friendly. I have to admit that coming into an organization with such accomplished people was intimidating. People like Karen Leggett and Edie Ching have been so welcoming and have made me feel like I belong. As a baby author, I have found the other members' encouragement and genuine interest in my work to be a great support. Additionally, the Guild meetings are quite informative. I've learned so much about other authors, the traditional publishing process, finding an agent, and more. That information, backed by the combined experiences of the members, has been invaluable.

Find out more about Desaray [here](#).

**THANK YOU FOR READING!**

If you have any suggestions for the GUILD QUARTERLY, please let us know. (Just click on our names.) You can click [here](#) to see previous issues of these missives and all prior newsletters.

*Jane Harrington & Kitson Jazyuka*

*The Children's Book Guild of Washington DC*

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