

Children's Book Guild News



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Wednesday, March 1, 2023

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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 <https://childrensbookguild.org/>

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March 2023

SPEAKER SERIES LIVE: MARCH

On March 16th, the Guild will be back in person at Busboys & Poets on K Street. The first part of the March gathering will be our annual business meeting for members only. After business, our speaker will be the Guild's own Terry Catasús Jennings!



Terry is a Cuban-American writer who immigrated to the United States after her father was jailed in Cuba by Fidel Castro's government. Her most recent book is *The Little House of Hope*, a Junior Library Guild Selection illustrated by Pura Belpré medalist Raúl Colón. The book is semi-autobiographical, portraying Terry's own immigrant experience, and showing how a helping hand in a new land can make a life-saving difference for a family. Terry's *Definitely Dominguita* series was named SLJ, Kirkus, and Parents Latina Best Books of 2021. Her biography in verse, *Pauli Murray, The Life of a Pioneering Feminist and Civil Rights Activist* was published in February of last year.

Terry labels herself a "late bloomer" in her writing career—but in her remarks to us on March 16th, she'll be encouraging us not to pigeon-hole those we write about! Her talk is titled "Throwing Away the Labels and Understanding Our Characters' Histories."

Time: 12 noon (11:30 am "social hour")

Place: Busboys & Poets, 450 K Street, NW

Menu:

- Falafel sandwich (vegetarian/vegan) with house-made hummus, cucumbers, lettuce, tomato and onion on whole-wheat pita, served with tahini sauce (vegan without tahini sauce)
- Honey-roasted turkey sandwich with Havarti cheese, chipotle mayo, lettuce, tomato and onion on white bread
- Grilled-chicken panini with chipotle mayo, caramelized onions, pepper jack, lettuce and tomato on ciabatta
- Avocado panini with roasted red peppers and vegan mozzarella on multigrain bread

All served with a salad of baby greens and house-made kettle chips.

All choices \$26, payments online via PayPal (no day-of-event or mail-in payments).

RSVP BY MARCH 13

Register Here

KNOW A SCHOOL THAT NEEDS MONEY FOR BOOKS? THE GUILD'S GOT IT!

The Guild is awarding \$500 grants this year to schools to purchase books for their libraries, media centers, or classrooms. Non-profit organizations that serve children are also eligible. Please help us identify recipients for the 2023 awards! Think about schools you've visited or where you've worked. Ask your friends and neighbors. We're looking for schools or communities in need—and staff members (librarians, media specialists, teachers, or principals) who could help facilitate the book selection. Send us the name of the school and the name of a contact there. All ideas and nominations welcome!

Please send your nominations to Guild member Kem Sawyer at kemsawyer@gmail.com

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...

The Pursuit of Equity: Two creators tell Mamie Till-Mobley's story

by Sue Fliess

Our February Children's Book Guild Speaker Series Program featured author Angela Joy (*Black is a Rainbow Color*) and paper cut artist Janelle Washington in conversation with Guild member Deborah Taylor. Angela and Janelle are the author and illustrator of *Choosing Brave*, the story of how Mamie Till-Mobley channeled her grief over her son Emmett Till's death into a call for action for the civil rights movement.

Angela explained that watching a podcast about Mamie Till-Mobley opened her eyes to the moments before and after Emmett's death, and that's when she decided to write Mamie's story. She and Janelle's editor, Connie Hsu at Roaring Brook, thought Janelle's paper cut and silhouette art would be a perfect fit for telling Mamie's story. Janelle's art could share the truth of what happened gently, without frightening readers. She hoped to strike a balance between somber and hopeful. Both author and illustrator did vast amounts of research to get the story right. Angela prepared by reading Mamie's biography, *Death of Innocence*, and picking out moments that were relevant and safe for the picture book audience. Her goal was to humanize Mamie and Emmett, so they became not just symbols but real people who lived and breathed.

The thing that surprised Angela most in her research was learning that

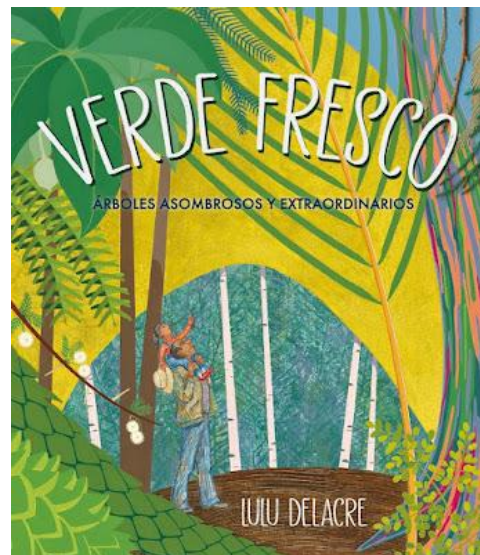
Mamie had already overcome so much adversity in her life, before facing her son's tragedy. Angela's challenge was deciding what to include and what to leave out.

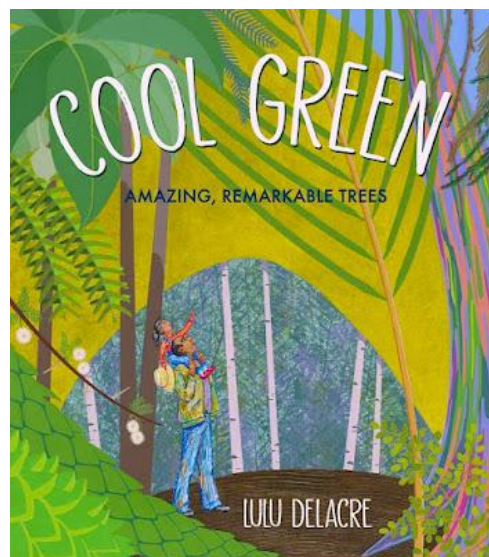
Janelle made the choice to use the color red throughout the book to emphasize bravery, love, and passion. The color follows Mamie and underscores her pain and determination. Both creators wanted the reader to understand that Mamie never took the easy way out; a line that anchors the book is that Mamie did "the harder thing." Mamie found love amidst all of the pain, and both author and illustrator wanted to show readers those tender relationships in the book.

As for what's next, Janelle has some gallery shows coming up at major DC museums, and Angela has a book coming out in the fall, illustrated by Jacqueline Alcantara, about the legendary and iconic musician Prince, called *Ordinary Days: The Seeds, Sound, and City That Grew Prince Rogers Nelson*.

MEMBER NEWS

Lulu Delacre is thrilled to announce the upcoming release of *Cool Green: Amazing, Remarkable Trees* and *Verde fresco: Árboles asombrosos y extraordinarios*. Proud to have written both versions, Lulu hopes that *Verde fresco* reaches as many people as *Cool Green*. This ode to trees seen through the eyes of a Latino landscaper will be out on March 28th. To celebrate the release Lulu is offering a chance to win a [free virtual school visit!](#) Upcoming launch events include a [Bilingual Storytime](#) at The Carle on April 1st. In addition Lulu is honored to have two of her works displayed as part of The Carle's [Recent Acquisitions Exhibit](#). Lulu also wants to share that last summer she relocated from Maryland to DC, where she is delighted to be living less than a block away from Politics & Prose on Connecticut Avenue.





Deborah Bodin Cohen has accepted a new position as an acquiring editor at Behrman House/Apples and Honey Press. After years of writing books as an author and selling books as a bookstore owner, Debbie looks forward to immersing herself in the editorial side of the book industry. Debbie will primarily work from her Rockville home but will travel twice each month to Behrman House's New Jersey office. She has begun the process of selling the Story House bookstore to new owners and looks forward to sharing more details when the sale is finalized.



Katherine Marsh's latest middle grade book, *The Lost Year*, inspired by her Ukrainian family history, came out in January. *The New York Times Book Review* featured it in a rave review and it's a Junior Library Guild April selection, was starred by *Booklist*, and *Kirkus* called it "a moving presentation of a long suppressed piece of history." Some further news Katherine wishes to share with the CBG community: "Now through the end of April I will Zoom for free into bookclubs for readers of all ages for 15 minutes of Q&A (subject to schedule). Also, for local DC-metro area schools only, I am halving my fees this spring and next fall with a minimum book buy of 50 copies of *The Lost Year*. My presentation introduces kids to Ukrainian and Soviet history—specifically the book's subject: the Holodomor or Ukrainian famine of 1932-33 that killed millions. I also discuss current events and media literacy/disinformation."

Children's Books / Soviet Stories

A Hunger for the Truth

Children fight to expose Stalin's lies about the Ukrainian famine of the early 1930s in two new historical novels.



Katherine Marsh's grandmother, Natuska, second from right, in Ukraine, circa 1925.

By ELENA GOROKHOVA

WHEN I WAS growing up in Leningrad in the 1960s, Aunt Polya, who ran my nursery school's kitchen, taught me an important lesson about my Soviet motherland. Every day, she loomed over us to make sure we ate every crumb of our paired buttered bread and drank every drop of our tepid milk. We chewed diligently, pretending our lunch was as delicious as she had promised, pretending we didn't know she was watching.

THE LOST YEAR

By Katherine Marsh
368 pp. Board book \$17.99
(Ages 10 and up)

WINTERKILL

By Marsha Ferchuk Skrypych
288 pp. Hardcover \$20.96
(Ages 9 to 12)

The pretending game was called vovnyo. My sister played it at school and my parents played it at work. Everyone pretended the watchers and the watched. The rules were simple: The watchers lied to us, we knew they were lying and they knew we knew they were lying, but they kept lying anyway and we pretended to believe them.

As a result, we lived in two realities: one happening in Pravda's pages, the other unfolding around our dining tables at home.

ELENA GOROKHOVA is the author of two memoirs — *A Mountain of Crumbs* and *“Banks, Tatars”* — and the novel *“A Train to Moscow”*.

In the official reality, there were best-ever harvests and grateful citizens thanking the Communist Party for their happy lives. In our lived reality, there were empty streets, crammed communal apartments and closed borders. Those who dared point out the overt signs of unsanctioned reality were deemed traitors. If these had been nursery school children, Aunt Polya would have promptly sent them to face the curtain.

So I didn't hear of Holodomor, the Ukrainian famine of the early 1930s, until I moved to the United States. Stalin's 1928 order of collectivization ended private ownership of land and hived small farmers



The cousins Nadya and Maria, Natuska's niece, holding bread in 1930s Ukraine.

into vast (and hugely unproductive) collective farms run by the state. Those who resisted surrendering their land or their grain were known as kulaks (prosperous peasants) and were killed or ended in hard labor camps, their families — millions of people, mostly Ukrainians — left to die of starvation.

Two new middle grade novels examine what it felt like for children to live through the dual realities of vovnyo and a deadly famine.

“The Lost Year,” by the Edgar Award-winning Katherine Marsh, is set in the alternating timelines of 2020 and 1923. During the first spring of the Covid-19 pandemic, 13-year-old Matthew is stuck in his house in Leonia, N.J., deprived of seeing his friends so as not to endanger the health of his 100-year-old great-grandmother, whom he and his family call GG. In the first pages of the novel, his mother takes away his Switch gaming device, and his only recourse is to help GG organize her boxes of memorabilia. What he finds in those boxes details the story of three 12- to 13-year-old

Ukrainian cousins during the famine the Soviet government refused to acknowledge. Nadya and Milla meet in Kyiv in 1923. Nadya, emaciated from hunger, is the daughter of a party apparatchik, while Milla, whose father is a party apparatchik, wholeheartedly believes the government's lies.

And why wouldn't she? Her life is comfortable, with plenty of food and chocolate. Nadya's horrific tale of suffering is Milla's first encounter with vovnyo, and causes her to doubt what her father preaches about Stalin's socialist paradise. The third cousin, Helen, who lives in Brooklyn, fights her own battle to expose the truth, questioning the very account of Stalin's collectivization put forth by The New York Times's then-Moscow bureau chief, Walter Duranty, who succumbed to Soviet propaganda just as Milla did before she met Nadya.

Marsh's novel, inspired by the struggles of her own Ukrainian grandmother's family, is a haunting story of survival in which children's anxieties — whether about fam-



Natuska with her own family, including Marsh's mother, in Brooklyn, circa 1935.

ine or Covid — are masterfully wrapped in layered prose. It is also an engrossing mystery that keeps me on the edge of my seat: Matthew finally uncovers that turns his lost year of isolation into a year of unforeseen epiphany.

“Winterkill,” the seventh historical novel by Marsha Ferchuk Skrypych, is the story of a Ukrainian family from the village of Felivka, near Kharkiv, narrated by 12-year-old Nyl, the oldest of three siblings. It is 1930 when a girl around his age named Alice and her father, both Canadian Ukrainians, come to the family's farm to assist with

Stalin's five-year plan, which quickly unravels the lives of Felivka's residents. “Shock workers” force the villagers into a kolkhoz, or collective farm, confiscating their crops and animals, and soon the famine sets in.

After Nyl's father dies and his mother is shot for trying to dig a few kernels of grain out of a frozen field, Nyl and his younger brother flee Felivka. On their way, they run into Alice and her father, who by now have realized they are only “useful fools” in Stalin's ruthless plan. The final section of the book is Nyl and Alice's nightmarish journey to a place that values “hard work and kindness.”

There isn't much kindness in this book. An unflinching look at the consequences of Stalin's brutality, “Winterkill” is filled with gun-wielding commissars, children blasted from hunger, and ravens hovering over open mass graves. “What would it take,” Nyl wonders, “for Stalin to realize that it was his policies, not his so-called kulaks, who were the enemy of the people?”

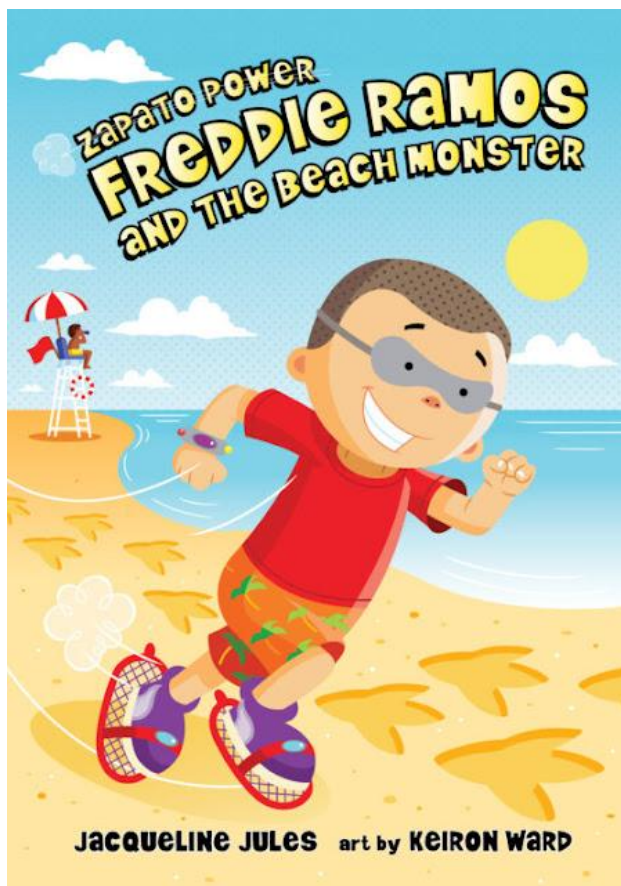
Skrypych handles difficult themes with intelligence and honesty, dedicating the book to the memory of Rhea Clyman, a Canadian reporter who fearlessly searched for truth in Stalin's Ukraine, and who makes a brief appearance in the novel, observing in 1932 that the Ukrainians “harvesting Ukrainians for extinction.”

“The Lost Year” and “Winterkill” couldn't be timelier today, when another Russian dictator has unleashed a war to exterminate Ukrainians and their culture, a war he cynically calls a “liberation.” Even though Aunt Polya of my nursery school is probably long dead, the old Russian vovnyo, regrettably, remains alive and well. □



Natuska and Masha at a dance performance in Yonkers, N.Y., circa 1941.

Jacqueline Jules is excited to announce that *Zapato Power #13: Freddie Ramos and the Beach Monster* will be released in April by Albert Whitman. In his thirteenth adventure, Freddie takes his first trip to the beach, where his superpowered shoes make him bounce on the sand. While Freddie's mom hangs out with her boyfriend, David, and gets to know his family, Freddie investigates the giant monster tracks that mysteriously appear on the beach. When David's sister and baby niece disappear, can Freddie find them before the monster does?



Michelle Y. Green is pleased to announce that, by unanimous vote, her story "Dog Tags" was chosen as the winner of the 2022 competition at *The Writer* magazine. She says of the story that it's "based on memories of my Dad, a Tuskegee Airman who fought in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. But, it also recounts his softer side—his love of family, tradition, and high expectations. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that Guild member, and esteemed writer, Katherine Paterson, was a judge for the final round!" It will be published in the April issue with an interview and several photos.

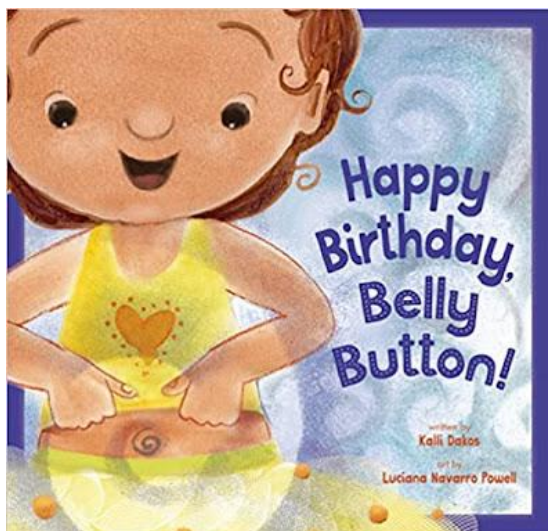


Kalli Dakos is excited to share the news of her picture book *Happy Birthday, Belly Button*. It is the story of an exuberant child who realizes that every part of the body, right down to the belly button, is now one year older and bigger on this amazing birthday. The active illustrations and warm art

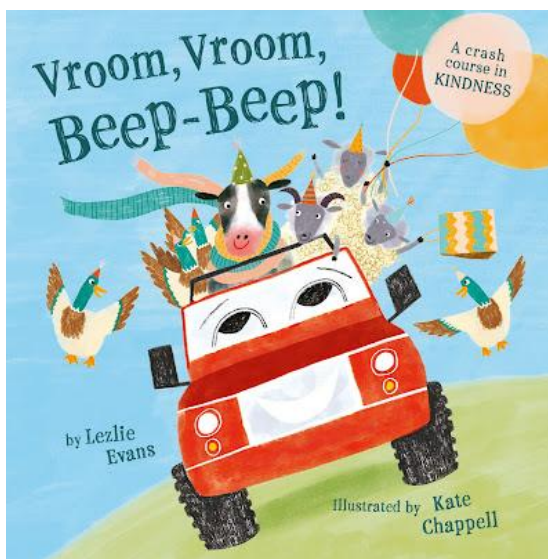
by Luciana Navarro Powell make this a great picture book to read with toddlers and preschoolers who love to celebrate their birthdays.

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/794716282>

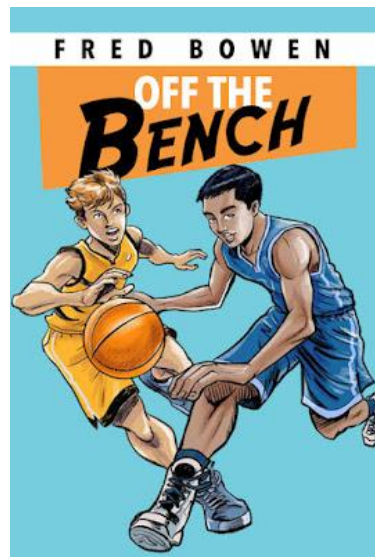
*My tummy is older
and so is my nose.
There's a lot more ME
from my head to my toes!*



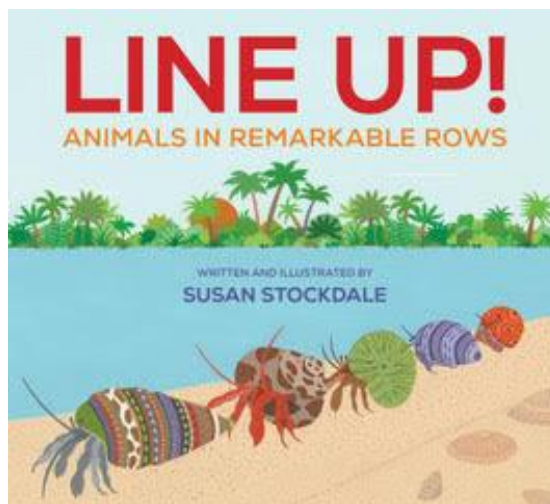
Lezlie Evans' latest book, *Vroom, Vroom, Beep-Beep! A Crash Course in Kindness*, hits store and library shelves on March 21st. It will be released in hard copy in the US and softcover in the UK and Australia. In this lively, rhyming romp a thoughtless little Jeep learns that the road is less rocky and the ride is much more fun when you're kind and considerate of others!



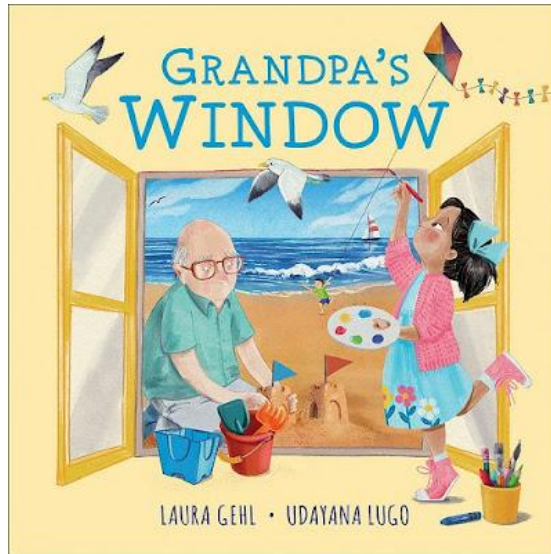
Fred Bowen will be appearing at Politics and Prose at 10:30am on Thursday March 23rd to celebrate the publication of his new book, *Off the Bench* (Peachtree Publishers).



Susan Stockdale will present her new book, *Line Up! Animals in Remarkable Rows*, at [Hooray for Books](#) in Alexandria, VA on Sunday, March 3rd at 1:30 pm.



Laura Gehl's new picture book, *Grandpa's Window*, releases on March 14th. *Kirkus* called it a "touching window into a child's mourning process" and said that this "powerful picture book shows children that they can feel both heartbreak and ongoing love simultaneously."



Guild member, environmentalist, and author Caroline Brewer, whose new picture book, *Say Their Names*, was recently showcased in *The Washington Post*, will give a keynote address on Thursday March 9th at 7pm at the Fifth Taking Nature Black Conference, hosted by Nature Forward (formerly the Audubon Naturalist Society). Caroline's talk will be delivered virtually and is titled "The Environment: A Love Story and A Reason to Say Their Names." It will unfold as a tapestry of poetry, song, children's book excerpts, and a call to action that has the power to heal, uplift, and save more of God's beautiful creatures. Guild members are invited to attend. Click here [for the conference schedule and registration information](#).



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