

# Children's Book Guild News



CHILDREN'S  
BOOK GUILD  
of WASHINGTON, DC

## Monthly News

Authors • Illustrators • Children's Literature Specialists

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Friday, November 27, 2020

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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 <https://childrensbookguild.org/>

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## December 2020

### SEASON'S GREETINGS!



Dear Guild members,

The holidays are officially upon us, and I'd like to take a moment to review some recent items and share news of what's ahead.

Our November program featured young adult author Ibi Zoboi and poet and prison-reform activist Yusef Salaam in a discussion with Guild member Deborah Taylor. I was unable to attend, but I've heard from several members that it was fantastic—both enriching and informative. In addition to discussing their recent joint book

project, *Punching the Air*, these authors shared a video recounting the actual events and personal experience that inspired their collaboration on this powerful novel in verse. If you were unable to attend the program (or even if you did!) I highly recommend that you check out their video [here](#), and read Val Patterson's summary in this newsletter. A special thanks to Karen Leggett for stepping in to welcome everyone and share announcements, as well as to Deb for leading such a stimulating conversation.

The Guild raised \$325 in small donations for our November organization working for racial justice in children's literacy and education, [The Brown Bookshelf](#), which promotes "the myriad Black voices writing for young readers." Thank you to all who donated.

In this newsletter, you'll learn how to get involved in a new book donation project, Look at My Books, spearheaded by incoming Guild member [Caroline Brewer](#). Caroline is working with Karen Leggett, Kem Sawyer and Megan Waters from [Turning the Page](#) to provide an

opportunity for Guild members to donate books to children in the DC community, right to their homes.

Our holiday virtual gathering, to be held on December 17, at 7 p.m., will allow time for Guild members to reconnect, share news, raise a glass to the closing of 2020 (finally!) and celebrate the promise of a new year. Be on the lookout for an email to register for this event, as well as a sign-up email for those with news to share.

The January program will feature author/illustrator Juana Martinez-Neal. The meeting will be held at 1 p.m. on January 21, 2021. More information on that will be coming your way soon.

Before closing, I'd like to share a family vignette. Recently at the dinner table, my adult son mentioned a road sign he passed on the highway that read, "One small ask: wear a mask." As someone who supports and adheres to the safety imperative, he went on to say, "Actually, it's not a small ask, and we need to recognize this, so we can always remember and be grateful for the importance of human connection, the kind where we don't use words, but our facial expressions, our eyes, our mouths. And honor what we are giving up in order to be safe for one another."

On that note, I'm wishing you all peace and health and joy this holiday season. And the remembrance of all we share.

**Karen Deans**

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**A WINTER TRADITION CONTINUES: THE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CENTRE AT FROSTBURG STATE UNIVERSITY TO HOLD ITS ANNUAL STORYBOOK HOLIDAY**



Once a year, the City of Frostburg, MD, is transformed into a holiday winter wonderland, as local organizations come together to present Frostburg's Storybook Holiday, a festive, community celebration of children's literature. This year, planners are putting a magical twist on the original Storybook Holiday with "Storybook Holiday Express," including both in-person and virtual activities, such as TO-

GO craft/STEM bags, virtual Elf Olympics, a virtual reading from author Caralyn Buehner and the decorating of Main Street--don't miss the new "Deck-the-Meters"! TO-GO craft/STEM bags can be picked up via drive-thru at Mountain Ridge High School (bus lot closest to Sheetz) on Saturday, December 5, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and Sunday, December 6, from 1 to 3 p.m. More information and activities can be found at: [www.frostburg.edu/clc/storybookholiday](http://www.frostburg.edu/clc/storybookholiday).

***PUNCHING THE AIR: A NOVEL OF HOPE IN DIFFICULT TIMES***  
by Valerie O. Patterson

Guild member Deborah Taylor, winner of the 2015 Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award, led the discussion with guest speakers Ibi Zoboi and Dr. Yusef Salaam, authors of the *New York Times* bestselling book *Punching the Air*, at the Guild meeting on November 19, 2020. *Punching the Air*, published in September 2020, is a novel based on the real-life experience of Salaam, a member of the Exonerated Five, men who as teens were wrongly convicted of the 1989 rape of a white female jogger in Central Park. Zoboi is the award-winning author of the young adult novel *American Street*, a finalist for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 2017, and editor of *Black Enough: Stories of Being Young and Black in America* (2019). Yusef Salaam is a poet, prison reform activist and recipient of an honorary doctorate in 2014 as well as a Lifetime Achievement Award from President Barack Obama in 2016.

Zoboi introduced *Punching the Air* by showing an eight-minute video that gave context to the events surrounding the wrongful conviction of the five teen boys for a heinous crime despite a lack of physical evidence linking them to the crime. (The video can be viewed along with other information on the book at <https://books.harpercollins.com/childrens/punching-the-air/>.) In the fictional account, Salaam's story is told through the eyes of Amal, who is wrongly sent to prison, where he uses art to find his voice. Amal speaks to injustices in the criminal justice system that continue to exist today in a society that too often sees "black as ugly and white as good." The story was published when the United States had a "front-row seat to oppression."

In describing their collaboration, Zoboi said it was an "ideological collaboration." She wrote the narrative around Salaam's poems, including "I Stand Accused," which he had read to the court before he was sentenced. Salaam said he remembered his mother telling him that the system needed him to participate and that he had to refuse. He allowed his mind to be free even though his body was in prison.

Taylor asked about Zoboi working on the book when she was neither male nor ever in prison. Salaam responded that the book needed a woman and mother to bring the story to life, just as his own mother had supported him when he was accused, falsely convicted and imprisoned.

The book explores the value society places on white bodies but not black bodies. It also depicts the impact of gentrification. Despite growing up in segregated and violent New York City, Zoboi and Salaam also grew up with love underneath everything. With gentrification, the

violence is not against bodies; rather, the tearing down of old houses and landmarks is a type of “violence” that “violates a sense of place.”

Taylor noted how strongly the idea that the power of creativity and art can save the lives of young people comes across in the book. Zoboi said there was a reason for that. Amal is an artist and poet because Salaam is, and Salaam's own illustrations adorn the pages of *Punching the Air*.

Asked about getting the book into the hands of teens, Zoboi answered that HarperCollins donated 5,000 paperback copies specifically for incarcerated teens. A teacher's guide is provided on the HarperCollins site. Both Zoboi and Salaam are gratified by how well the book has been received so far, which means it will get into the hands of many more readers. As to the future, Zoboi said they are pitching a graphic novel together. In addition, Salaam has an autobiography coming out entitled *Better, Not Bitter*. Zoboi's new picture book on Kwanzaa will be published in 2021.

In closing, Taylor asked Zoboi and Salaam what they want people to take away from *Punching the Air*. Salaam answered that he wants young people of color to know that “they can be their own hope.” In fact, the name they gave Amal means hope. “Now is the time to live,” Salaam said, just like Amal, and just as he did. How can we be the change in the world based on what we are experiencing? Be the “light and the mirror.” Being a “catalyst for change feels better than hate. Be able to say, I changed one person for the good.”

## LOOK AT MY BOOKS CAMPAIGN

by Karen Leggett



Caroline Brewer likes to [compare books to snowflakes](#). Caroline is a children's author, literacy activist, public relations professional and brand-new member of the Children's Book Guild.

Like a single snowflake, “having one book fall into our lives every now and then doesn't change anything,” she says. “But

if we get a blizzard of books into our lives, then it's going to make a huge difference.” The goal of Caroline's Look at My Books Campaign is to give children a blizzard's worth of books, in their homes, in Washington, D.C.

Guild members are asked to support this campaign by donating books—their own as well as slightly used or new books—to be given to families in [Turning the Page](#) schools. The goal is to offer as many diverse protagonists and stories as possible in our donations. Megan Waters at Turning the Page has compiled the list that follows of the ages and interests of children in 31 families. Please consider donating two to four (or more) books matching these age levels and interests. The books will be organized in gift bags for each family.

You may donate books from now through January 9. There will be several members' homes and Turning the Page/Carpe Librum stores where you can take your books and have a contactless drop off. The addresses will be sent in an email within the next few days—watch carefully for it!

Pre K: sports, adventure, fairytales, school, cars, animals

First grade: fairytales, animals, adventure

Second grade: animals, cars, adventure, mystery

Third grade: adventure, history, mystery, animals

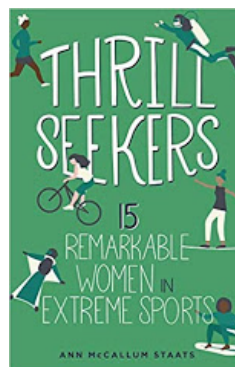
Fourth grade: sports, science, adventure, mystery

Fifth grade: sports, animals, history, chapter books, adventure

There are younger children as well in the families of the seventh and eighth graders. And, very frequently, parents wrote “anything!” when asked for their children’s book interests. The parents are eager to build their home libraries, and the Guild has an opportunity to help. If you have questions or comments, write to karenleggett50@gmail.com.

## MEMBER NEWS

JOAN CARRIS is now blogging on her new website and invites everyone to read her first entries: <https://www.joancarrisbooks.com/blog>.



ANN MCCALLUM STAATS's latest book, *Thrill Seekers: 15 Remarkable Women in Extreme Sports*, tells the stories of trailbreakers and adventure dynamos who are leading the way in their fields. Follow wingsuit flyer and model Roberta Mancino, Formula racer Sneha Sharma, Olympians and others as they motivate and inspire young people. Featuring personal interviews with each subject, the book will be released March 2, 2021.

Scroll down to read about Ann's adventures in extreme research!

## BRANCHING PATHS...

## AN OCCASIONAL SERIES ON HOW GUILD MEMBERS' WORK LEADS TO OPPORTUNITIES



### THE THRILLS AND CHILLS OF EXTREME RESEARCH

by *Ann McCallum Staats*

Skydiving? Dogsledding? Formula racing? Cave diving *inside* an iceberg?

When I set out to write *Thrill Seekers: 15 Remarkable Women in Extreme Sports*, I knew little about these various pursuits of passion outside the lines. What I did understand was that adventure sports are high-risk. Why do they? I had heard of some of them, but not all. Who knew that a wingsuit flyer could zip into a human-sized 'flying squirrel' suit to jump from a cliff and soar horizontally? What about highlining—balancing along a flexible cord thousands of feet above the ground? In some cases *without* a tether. I learned of ultrarunning, the pursuit of running 50, 100, even 200 miles or more in a race against time or other athletes. Wasn't running a 26-mile marathon superhuman enough?

The women I interviewed for *Thrill Seekers* are all extreme athletes, passionate about their sports, sure, but also tapping into something more. I decided to find out what that “more” was all about.

I'm average when it comes to athleticism. I'm not super coordinated, nor exceptionally strong. I grew up in Canada, so skiing was our thing, but I was never much into organized sports. I did used to run—still do—but at a snail's pace and only a couple of miles. Running is simple and safe. You lace up a pair of sneakers, plug in earbuds and go. In my case, I slow to a walk when I get to any sort of elevation. As I said: safe. Yet...

Inspired by the enthusiasm of the women I interviewed, I did some firsthand research. I began by trying scuba diving. It was pre-COVID and at a resort that offered a lesson package. I showed up, put on the gear and initially sat on the bottom of the swimming pool. Though it was only a couple of feet to the surface and easily reachable by standing up, this was perhaps the scariest part for me. It felt *wrong*. It took setting aside logic to take breath after breath underwater without panicking. It was happening, though, and so when we took it a step further and walked into the ocean from the beach, I had reached an understanding that breathing underwater was okay.

Under the surface of the ocean, the water was clear, but it wasn't like looking at the horizon on land. There was limited visible distance. It crossed my mind that a shark could easily come out of the murk at any time. No sharks appeared, thankfully, but we did see a stingray lying on the sandy bottom. I don't know if the divemaster shooed it away, but it suddenly rose up and winged its way off into deeper waters.

Okay, so scuba diving was checked off my list, albeit the beginner's version. Next, intrigued by the idea of high-stakes racing, I signed up to do a ride-along in a Formula racecar, another of the extreme sports I'd covered in my book. I stepped onto the Richmond Raceway, surrounded by revving engines. I could smell the oil and, I swear, the adrenaline. Once strapped into the seat of the racecar, the driver jockeyed from the pit to the track. He accelerated, and we were off at a breakneck speed. I



do recall raising both hands from the wheel to do a rollercoaster-esque no-hands wave—but only for a second.

Perhaps the best experience I tried, once again inspired by interviewing some truly amazing people, was skydiving. It was tandem, of course. Apparently, rules dictate that you must dive strapped securely to an expert for a minimum of 25 times before going at it alone. Fine by me!

Every part of this experience was a joy. From walking on the tarmac to the plane, from cramming inside that small bird to sitting on the edge of the gaping side door, each part was a novel and exciting moment. With the wind whipping past us, my instructor—his name was Cornelius—asked me if I was ready. Then, after a one, two, three, we dropped from the plane ... and kept dropping. At that point I had little awareness of the ground, only the sense of falling. Sometime during the freefall, we flipped over. When Cornelius deployed the parachute, floating downward gave me an awareness of profound beauty and peace. There was one moment of doubt—Cornelius loosened the straps on my legs and shoulders, though thankfully not too much.

Once earthbound again, I played over the experience. Yes, there had been an element of real risk. There were definitely things that could have gone wrong. Ultimately, though, what I felt was a heightened sense of being alive. Ah-ha, I thought, this is the “more” those extreme female athletes have tapped into. More joy. More life. More appreciation. It's a precious feeling.

(Click here to see Ann attempting an extreme sport: <https://www.youtube.com>).

(tree-branch image above from clipart.email)

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#### Virtual Programs at Politics and Prose

During the pandemic, Politics and Prose continues to host free events for children and adults--virtually. These can be viewed live, in real time, or afterward, as recordings. You can view P&P's events calendar and register for events at: <https://www.politics-prose.com/events>. (Advance registration is required to receive link.)

Posted by Monthly News at **6:58 AM** **0 comments** 

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