

# Write What Inspires You! Newsletter

December 2008  
Volume 1, Issue 1

Donna M. McDine  
Children's Author



Welcome to the debut issue of my FREE newsletter:

## Write What Inspires You!

As the last of the autumn leaves are falling from their trees, I've taken the time to reflect where my writing career has taken me in these two short years. When I look over my accomplishments (and of course the rejections) I can't help but acknowledge the helpful people I've come to know through my writing. The list is long, and you certainly know who you are. The wealth of knowledge they have been willing to share has brought me to where I am today. I thank you one and all! And, as "it takes a village to raise a child," it takes a large community of willing teachers to flourish one's writing career.

It is my intent to deliver to you on a monthly basis a combination of:

- ✓ Author, Illustrator, and Editor interviews
- ✓ Book Reviews
- ✓ An essay column entitled, Reflections or Dreams (which can be non-fiction or fiction)
- ✓ Proclaim Your Successes! Section, so we all can cheer one another on.

If you are interested, please feel free to submit your name for an interview, an essay and/or your successes to: [dmcidine@optonline.net](mailto:dmcidine@optonline.net)

The momentum continues to build at a rate I did not fully expect. Before this issue was even completed over 80 opt-in subscribers registered.

Please share this newsletter with your peers in the writing industry and encourage them to opt-in as a monthly subscriber @ <http://www.donnamcdine.com>

Wishing you all peace and happiness!

Here's to your inspiration and continued success!

*Donna M. McDine*

## AUTHOR INTERVIEW - MAYRA CALVANI

I recently had the privilege of conducting an email interview with Mayra Calvani. I first met Mayra when I purchased her book, *The Magic Violin*. I enjoyed the book so much with my daughter (who just started playing the violin) that I felt compelled to contact her to share my excitement. Since then, we have remained in contact encouraging and celebrating one another along the way in our respective writing careers. Without further ado, journey along with me as Mayra shares with us insights into her writing career.

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## Quote of the Month:

"Don't let any feelings keep you from writing. Don't let the world slow you down. Your story is the most important thing coming down the line this year. It's your year - make the most of it."

Walter Mosley  
August 2007

**AUTHOR INTERVIEW – MAYRA CALVANI – continued**

**DMc:** What has been the most memorable experience in your writing career?

**MC:** First of all, thanks for interviewing me for the first issue of this newsletter. It's an honor.

The most memorable experience I had as a writer was when I held my first published book in my hands. That was back in the 1990's. It's an amazing, exciting feeling of validation. You hear about it from other authors, how it feels, but when you experience it yourself, there's nothing quite like it. You want to jump up and down, scream, open a bottle of champagne and hold your book and look at it for a long time, hardly believing that you wrote it and that people you've never met will actually read it. The second time you publish a book, it isn't nearly the same as that first time.

**DMc:** What style or genre of book do you write/have you written?

**MC:** I enjoy writing in various genres: nonfiction, horror, paranormal, fantasy, satire, chick-lit and children's/YA.

My novels, *Dark Lullaby* and *Embraced by the Shadows*, fall into the horror/supernatural thriller and romantic horror categories. *The Slippery Art of Book Reviewing*, which I co-wrote with mystery author Anne K. Edwards, is a how-to book on writing book reviews. I have two children's picture books out with Guardian Angel Publishing, with two more titles coming out next year. I also have a Latino parody/satire with a chick-lit flavor, *Sunstruck*, scheduled to come out from Zumaya Publications in a couple of months.

Currently I'm trying to find a home for a tween fantasy novel I wrote during Nanowrimo two years ago, and I have various works-in-progress in the nonfiction, modern fantasy and kidlit categories.

I enjoy switching from one genre to another because each one is a different world that brings forth different facades of my character and creativity. I would get bored writing in only one genre. But if I'd have to choose one favorite style or genre, I'd say I deeply enjoy writing dark fiction with elements of the paranormal. These were the types of stories I wrote when I was a young teenager and these are the types of stories that will always have a special place in my heart.

**DMc:** What type of creative process do you use for the development of your ideas? Are you an outline writer?

**MC:** I'm pretty flexible and versatile when it comes to this. I may be 'struck' by the Muse and write a book purely using stream-of-consciousness, like I did during Nanowrimo when I wrote my tween fantasy novel. With that novel, I really didn't know what would happen next. Or I may write a full outline and detailed synopsis, like I did with a work-in-progress I'm currently working on.

Usually, though, what I do is play with an idea for a while (sometimes an idea may take years to simmer), then mentally come up with a 'loose' structure where I have a pretty good idea of the beginning, middle and end, but not of the in-betweens.

I'm definitely not one of those authors who often use detailed outlines, as they make me feel restricted, but I also agree that having an outline is often pretty helpful, especially for avoiding plot problems later on. For instance, sometimes I may get stuck in the middle of the book, and I painfully realize this may have been avoided by writing an outline or detailed synopsis early on.

But I love working in stream-of-consciousness most and this is the manner by which I most often experience 'Flow', the state of optimal experience where you're so deeply concentrated that time seems to stop and everything disappears around you except you and the story. Reading about 'Flow' is fascinating and I would recommend writers to get a copy of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's book.

Let me just add that for nonfiction books, however, an outline is essential if you want your book to have a well-organized and clear structure.

**DMc:** Are any of the characters in the books based on real people?

**MC:** I believe that all writers' works are, in some level or another, a combination of real life experience and fantasy. Some of my characters are 'based' on people I know, but what I mean by this is that they may share some similar physical or behavioral characteristics. Not all of my characters are based on real people, though; most are one hundred percent a construction of my imagination. Sometimes it's helpful to base your character on someone you know because then you know how that character will react to all type of situations in your story, making your scenes sound even more real and believable.

But to answer your question, yes, some of my characters are based on people I know. The protagonist of my horror novel, *Dark Lullaby*, is based on my brother. Both are astrophysicists, both have the looks of a rock star, both have a high sense

of justice. Of course, in the novel, I added a lot of fictional elements about his past, relationships, life. Needless to say, my brother never committed murder as my protagonist does! LOL. I gave the character his goodness, but in the story, I pushed that goodness to the limit to see what would happen. Every time, I kept thinking 'How would my brother react to this situation?' This helped a lot, especially because the protagonist was a man and I had to put myself inside the mind of a hero instead of a heroine. This is the only book I've written with a male protagonist.

**DMc:** Of your many books, do you have a favorite? Favorite character?

**MC:** Definitely *Dark Lullaby*.

I've always been very interested in moral dilemmas and in the concept of a higher good. For instance, is it okay for a man to steal in order to have money to save his little girl, who is dying? In the case of *Dark Lullaby*, I went a step further: is it okay for a man to kill for the higher good? Does the end justify the means? It's a dark story that takes place in an exotic setting, the type I myself like to read. It's actually more of a paranormal suspense than horror, strong in mood and atmosphere.

My favorite character would have to be Gabriel Diaz, the protagonist of *Dark Lullaby*. I think it's the most complex character I've created so far. Also, since it's partly based on my brother, it has a special place in my heart.

Readers may learn more about *Dark Lullaby* from my website, [www.mayracalvani.com](http://www.mayracalvani.com).

**DMc:** What did you find to be the most frustrating step/process of getting your first novel published?

**MC:** For me, the waiting has always been the most frustrating aspect of publishing. You give all your energy preparing all these query letters, proposals, and synopses. Then you have to wait months and months (sometimes as much as six months) for the publishers to reply—often with a form rejection letter. After you've been accepted, you sometimes have to wait as much as two to three years for the book to come out. For most writers, waiting is part of life and there's nothing you can do about it, unless you want to take the self-publishing route. If you go the traditional way, though, you'll often have to wait, and wait, and wait.

**DMc:** Please describe your new book, *The Slippery Art of Book Reviewing*?

**MC:** A few years ago, I woke up in the middle of the night and 'heard' a voice in my head say, 'You have to write a book on how to write book reviews'. Afterwards, I immediately started writing down topics and preparing an outline. I also invited my author friend Anne K. Edwards to collaborate. This was a great decision because we complemented each other and she was able to bring ideas I had not thought of before. It was a great experience working with Anne.

We wrote *The Slippery Art of Book Reviewing* not only with the aspiring reviewer in mind, but for the established reviewer who needs a bit of refreshing and also for anybody--be they author, publisher, reader, bookseller, librarian or publicist--who wants to become more informed about the value, purpose and effectiveness of reviews.

The book came out in June and already there are two universities using it as a textbook for book reviewing writing courses. I'm also proud to mention that the book was a National Best Books Award Finalist in the Writing & Publishing category.

For a list of contents, excerpt and reviews, readers may visit [www.slipperybookreview.wordpress.com](http://www.slipperybookreview.wordpress.com).

**DMc:** Please share a tidbit about your life that our readers would be surprised to hear.

**MC:** I have the complete *Gilmore Girl* series on DVD and I always watch an episode with my daughter every night before I go to sleep. I'm such a crazy fan, I bought the same Marc Jacobs handbag that Lauren Graham wore during most of Seasons 4 & 5. If purchased new, this bag costs \$800, so I had to buy a second-hand one on Ebay for \$300. Mind you, I'd never paid more than \$50 for a bag before, so this was big for me! But there's more... I've never switched bags since then, and that was two years ago! LOL.

**DMc:** What would you be if you were not a writer?

**MC:** Definitely a vet! I love animals and I'm a fierce advocate.

**DMc:** What advice would you like to convey to aspiring writers?

**MC:** If you have a dream, never give up, no matter what other people say. If you don't keep going in spite of obstacles, you may reach the age of seventy and ask

yourself 'Why didn't I try?' If you don't make it, at least you'll have the satisfaction of having done your best. Chances are you'll make it if you keep at it, though. And of course, read as much as you can in the genres you enjoy writing; keep submitting; join a good critique group.

Above all, write, write, write.

**DMc:** Anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

**MC:** I'd like to cordially invite readers to visit my websites and blogs: [www.MayraCalvani.com](http://www.MayraCalvani.com), [www.slipperybookreview.wordpress.com](http://www.slipperybookreview.wordpress.com) and [www.mayrassecretbookcase.com](http://www.mayrassecretbookcase.com) (children's fiction).

I also keep two blogs where I regularly post reviews and author interviews: [www.mayrassecretbookcase.blogspot.com](http://www.mayrassecretbookcase.blogspot.com) and [www.thedarkphantom.wordpress.com](http://www.thedarkphantom.wordpress.com).

**Book Trailer - Magic Violin -** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1CbXaMYonQ>

Thanks for this interview, Donna. I enjoyed answering your questions!

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## ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW - DAWN PHILLIPS

Over the past several years my writing career continues to cross paths with many of the same writers and illustrators. Illustrator Dawn Phillips and I first met at The National Writing for Children Center and have continually re-connected through various social networks. Ms. Phillips is quite the talented illustrator and is expanding her talents through writing.

**DMc:** What inspires you as you begin a new project?

**DP:** Reading a story which inspires my imagination, humor, unique characters, plot with a unique twist.

**DMc:** Was there a person from your childhood who encouraged you to pursue your artistic talent?

**DP:** Several Art Instructors ranging from Elementary through College encouraged me to pursue my talent. They displayed pieces of my artwork in art

galleries, encouraged me to participate in workshops with illustrators and authors, and submitted artwork to contests.

**DMc: What was the best piece of advice you received when you started your career as an illustrator?**

**DP:** Never give up, and try not to take rejections personally. Watch and learn from other illustrators as you take part in various discussion groups, and organizations.

**DMc: Who are some of your favorite children's illustrators?**

**DP:** Walt Disney, Charles M. Schulz - Peanuts.

**DMc: Please describe your path to success in becoming an artist? Were there any particular obstacles that you needed to overcome?**

**DP:** Success can only be achieved with hours of practice in several mediums and styles while maintaining your own unique style. Also, researching the environment of the story, personality of the character, and relating the story through your illustrations. I hope to have the opportunity to work with some traditional publishers in the future.

I believe you'll always have obstacles to overcome, it's just the matter of how big or small they may be. For instance, the vision of a character or story by an illustrator can be different to the author's vision.

**DMc: How long have you been working as a freelance artist and illustrator?**

**DP:** Over 15 years as a Freelance Artist and 2 years as an Illustrator of Children's Books and Magazines.

**DMc: Do you have a favorite medium or style?**

**DP:** It's hard for me to choose just one medium or style. I enjoy working with pastels, watercolors, pencils, and black/white water color markers. Majority of my illustrations are done by computer.

**DMc: How long does it take to illustrate a picture book?**

**DP:** Average 2-3 months depending on my work load and number of sketches being requested.

**DMc:** Please describe the collaboration involved between you, the publisher, and the author. Now that you are embarking on a writing career, did the collaboration efforts between publishers and authors inspire you to do so?

**DP:** I have very little interaction with the publishers at this time. I deal directly with the author.

I've been working on three children's stories with Working Writer's Coaching Club which is a critique group with several lessons to learning the do's and don'ts for writing children's books and children's magazine articles.

You're welcome to visit my blog, Creative Eye of Dawn Phillips Children's Book Writer in Progress at [www.rdchildrensbooks.blogspot.com](http://www.rdchildrensbooks.blogspot.com).

It's extremely difficult to become both a writer and illustrator with publishers. It's best to get accepted as one or the other with publisher. Then pursue the other once you've established a relationship with the publisher.

**DMc:** Do you conduct school visits? If so, how is a typical visit structured?

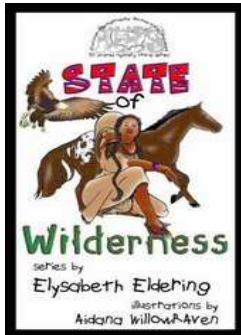
**DP:** I've participated in PTA Book Fairs at Schools. As students arrived by classroom I would demonstrate my illustration process which consisted of sketching characters, dummy story-boards and final illustration. I was available to answer any questions and sign books.

Dawn is currently illustrating children's book "Curly Top" with three additional children's book to follow. You're welcome to visit Dawn's website at [www.rdchildrensbooks.com](http://www.rdchildrensbooks.com).

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## BOOK REVIEW



Title: *Junior Geography Detective Squad - State of Wilderness*

Written by: ElysaBeth Eldering

Illustrated by: Aidana Willow Raven

Ages: 8 to 12

Publisher: 4RV Publishing LLC

ISBN: 13-978-0-9797513-5-6

Published: July 2008

Soft cover: 100 pages

Price: \$10.99

*State of Wilderness* is the first installment of the 50 States Mystery Trivia Series, Junior Geography Detective Squad. Ingeniously weaved together, three young children Matt, Guy, and Mary Beth, are drawn to a hand-held computer game; and the ying and yang of competition ensues as to who will uncover the identity of the state first.

"Want to make a bet?" Matt looked over at his friend. "A bet? Sure, let's write down our answers when we think we know the state, and the one who knows it sooner get to pick what the loser has to do."

The ultimate surprise results in the discovery that learning when presented in such a way can be fun and rewarding. The reader is not preached to or lectured. You are sure to find yourself playing right along with the characters. The state is revealed at the end, but not here. You will need to go on your own adventure to reveal the identity of the state.

As an added bonus, there is a "learn more about the state" section, which includes an image of the state flag and history, a list of the questions used throughout the story, cryptogram, answer key, and bibliography.

Elysabeth Eldering has placed in numerous writing contests and the SCWW anthology, The Petigru Review. Her new series, The Junior Geography Detective Squad, takes you on an unforgettable journey of learning about the individual states within the United States.

To learn more about Elysabeth's writing career visit her at:

<http://jgdsseries.blogspot.com>

<http://junior-geography-detective-squad.weebly.com/index.html>

<http://elysabethsstories.blogspot.com/>

<http://elysabetheldering.weebly.com/index.html>

Reviewed by: Donna M. McDine

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## REFLECTIONS OR DREAMS

### THE STARS ARE ALIGNED

by Donna M. McDine

My day started out as any other ordinary day. I rose before the rest of the household. Always the best time of the day in my book. Turned on my trusty computer and it beamed at me with its welcoming glow. I clicked send and receive to view my email, with hopes of positive writing news. Out of the forty plus emails there was the usual junk and requests from my 9-5 job. I deleted the junk and reluctantly started to open the work email. Projects were in demand from many of the vice presidents I support. I sighed and began to print all in an attempt to prioritize my work. How would I find the time in the day to get to my true passion of the written word?

I reached the last email from the head honcho himself, the president of the company. Stunned, I re-read it several times. My heart began to pound in my chest. The email read: *"The writer research grant, which covers household expenses for one-year, has been approved for distribution to a well qualified employee of the company. Human Resources determined that you will be the recipient and an added bonus of a one-year sabbatical from your position (which will remain secure until your return) will be awarded today at the Executive Board meeting at 12 noon. Please arrive promptly. Best wishes for a successful year, Mr. Judelman, President."*

Alleluia! A whole year off to write! My visions soared of blissful days of fulfilling my muse, without the stress of paying bills. My time and funds have always hindered

me, but now I could see the possibilities on the horizon. Research would be a snap. Heck, I could even travel for research and attend conferences. The list is endless. And that's great for a list person like me. I always get immense satisfaction to be able to cross out a task. I jotted down all I wanted to accomplish. I started off with my middle grade historical fiction manuscript based around the Revolutionary War that I have been fine-tuning for just about forever. I wrote furiously about my grand plans for the year.

I never knew how much I truly wanted to accomplish in my writing career until I put it down on paper. Develop and publish a website and take a children's writing course were the next major accomplishments I wanted to achieve. Others include studying children's magazine markets for eventual query and manuscript submission on a monthly basis, remain active in a critique group, and consistently network with fellow writers.

My muse in flight screeched to a halt with the blare of my children's alarm clock. Where did the time go? It was time to start the preparation of school departures. With children and the responsibilities they come with, how was I going to find the time to write full-time and not be interrupted every ten seconds? On top of that the household chores and errands would still need to be tended to. And great as my family is...they just don't get it...that writing is work...even if it's done at home.

I sighed and trudged upstairs to prepare breakfast and lunches for the day. My husband dropped the newspaper on the table. A flyer floated to the floor. I picked it up and went to throw it out when I noticed that this was no ordinary advertisement. The top was covered with stars and the caption read: *"Let Us Be The Twinkle in Your Day."*

My eyes were drawn to the Tinkerbell image. Her wand pointed to: *"We'll take care of all your chores, household cleaning, and dinner every week of the year. Call us today for a quote. 555-6565."*

There was no doubt about it. The stars were aligned in my favor today. What better way to follow my writing muse than to pay someone to take care of all the mundane tasks that life throws our way?

Now my inspirations will have the chance to soar into the depths of my soul to create the best manuscript for the entire world to read!

**NOTE: ONE CAN DREAM, CAN'T THEY...LOL!**



## PROCLAIM YOUR SUCCESSES!

### Lori Calabrese is happy to share:

- ❖ "Magellan's Madness," will appear in the May/ June 2009 issue of Appleseeds Magazine.
- ❖ Article "Over My Dead Body" has been accepted by Focus on the Family Clubhouse, Jr., and
- ❖ "Organization: A Fairy Tale?" will appear at The Institute of Children's Literatures Rx for Writers beginning May 2009

### Mayra Calvani:

- ❖ "The Slippery Art of Book Reviewing," is a National Best Books 2008 Awards Finalist!

### Carla Girtman:

#### Short Stories:

- ❖ "Rescue Mission," *Flashshot* ~ October 10, 2008
- ❖ "Returning Home," *Flashshot* ~ November 13, 2008
- ❖ "The Client," *Clockwise Cat* ~ Issue 11
- ❖ "In His Time," *Demonic Tome* ~ November 2008

#### Poem:

- ❖ "Ocean Song," debut issue of *Use These Words* (a poetry quarterly e-zine)

### Donna M. McDine:

- ❖ "The Golden Pathway," 77<sup>th</sup> Annual Writers Digest Writing Competition, 12<sup>th</sup> place in Children's/Young Adult Fiction category
- ❖ "Interview with K. L. Going," November 2008, *Mom Writer's Literary Magazine*
- ❖ "My Daughter is Developing Early, Should I Worry?," November 2008, *Hudson Valley Parent*
- ❖ "Boy's Quest Cover Letter," 2009 Magazine Markets for Children's Writers

### Dawn Phillips:

- ❖ "Dr. Rudy Derek and The Tickle Monster," author Barbara Chertoff and Illustrator Dawn Phillips, Xlibris Publishing  
<http://www2.xlibris.com/bookstore/bookdisplay.asp?bookid=49904>
- ❖ "What If You Give A Child A Letter," author Doris Sweeney and Illustrator Dawn Phillips, Xlibris Publishing  
<http://www2.xlibris.com/bookstore/bookdisplay.asp?bookid=46438>

**Lea Schizas:**

- ❖ Signed, delivered, and excited to brag that 4RV Publishing accepted my children's story picture book: "Libby the Odd Squirrel," for publication in 2010. I'm excited because this will be my first picture book and I can't wait to see Libby, the other 'mean' squirrels, birds, and the growling dog come to life.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL!  
CHEERS TO YOUR CONTINUED SUCCESS!**

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### **Stories for Children Magazine Announces Its *First Annual "Best of" Anthology!***

Stories for Children Magazine is proud to announce the release of its first annual anthology *Best of Stories for Children Magazine* Volume 1. Come take an adventure in the World of Ink and let the SFC Contributors and Stanley Bookman show you how your imagination can be your guide.

There has always been an enchantment about reading a good children's story. Children take pleasure in having a story read to them anytime or anywhere - whether it be around a campfire, under a starry night, in their beds wrapped up tight in snuggly blankets, beneath a shady tree on a hot summer's day, or in front of a roaring fireplace on a cold winter's day. Children love to listen to a story being read and this can go as far as adolescence. Come take an adventure in the World of

Ink with the *Best of Stories for Children Magazine* Volume 1, a collection of over 20 poems, stories, and articles published by leading children's authors.

At Stories for Children Magazine the World of Ink is a place where imagination is everything and everything is only your imagination. Stories for Children Magazine has been inspiring children, parents, librarians, and teachers for well over two years with their monthly online magazine. Now with the release of *the Best of Stories for Children Magazine* Volume 1, children, parents, librarians, and teachers can enjoy the top stories, poems, and articles from Stories for Children Magazine's first year of publication over and over again.

The Best of Stories for Children Magazine Volume 1 can be purchased nationwide from any bookstore, or online through several internet websites including Amazon.com, LuLu.com at <http://www.lulu.com/content/4892856>, and the SFC Bookstore at <http://www.storiesforchildrenmagazine.org>

Come visit the SFC Team and SFC Contributors in the World of Ink at Stories for Children Magazine! There are many wonderful articles, stories, and interviews with leading Children's Authors or Illustrators in each monthly issue.

To learn more about Stories for Children Magazine visit:  
<http://www.storiesforchildrenmagazine.org>

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