



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Designed for administrators, teachers, librarians, PTA members, youth group leaders, and anyone interested in hosting author and illustrator visits, the reception will feature exhibits and sample presentations by more than 30 local authors and illustrators.”

-Press release, 5th Annual
WIN Guide Reception on
Hosting Successful
Author and Illustrator
Visits, Sept. 30, 2006

On September 30, I spent a few hours in the multi-purpose room of Kennedy Elementary School in Newark, California. This large room with 3 basketball hoops, soft blue corduroy-like wall coverings and blue and black stripes on the marbled linoleum floor, gives weight to the word multi-purpose, since on this Saturday it was filled with children’s book authors and illustrators. Long tables displayed their books, while teachers, bookstore owners and librarians read handouts, chatted, and ate a variety of well-chosen snacks and drinks.

The occasion for this was the 5th Annual WIN Guide Reception on Hosting Successful Author and Illustrator Visits,” sponsored by the Northern California Children’s Bookseller’s Association (NCCBA) and the Writers and Illustrators Network (WIN). This reception gives librarians like me a chance to get a sense of what these authors and illustrators are like, while being introduced

to a range of books, from picture books to young adult novels.

There were some authors whose books I handle regularly and others who weren’t as familiar to me. And I was particularly struck by the interest many of them have in sharing their creative process with children. For instance, Linda Boyden – author of *The Blue Roses*, a children’s book about the death of a grandparent – had a large yellow plastic toolbox sitting on her table. She calls it her “Writer’s Toolbox” and on the front of it are all sorts of quotes, like “There’s no substitute for hard work” (Thomas Edison). With her permission, I opened it and looked inside, where I found such items as tape, erasers and pencils, as well as her two caps, a “Creativity Cap” and an “Editor’s Cap.”

Linda explained that she uses this box in her Author in the Classroom program. During her talk, she dons the first cap and talks about the importance

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of just putting down ideas, with no worries about spelling or grammar. Then she does the second one and explains how to enforce what she calls the "Writing Rules," a process that can require a lot of hard work and many drafts. As part of this presentation, she shows the various drafts of her own picture book, so the children can see that a book isn't finished in one sitting.

Jill Wolfson, author of *What I Call Life and Home, and Other Big Fat Lies*, also speaks in schools. As she says in her handout: "My hope is to inspire young authors to believe in themselves, to find their own voice and to see the wealth of stories in their own seemingly ordinary experiences."

Other authors I spoke to included the well-known Robert San Souci, who showed me some wonderful flannel puppets based on his picture book *Zigzag*, and Lynn Hazen, author of *Mermaid Mary Margaret* and

Buzz Bumble to the Rescue. One of Lynn's workshops involves making a life-size mermaid or merman and she had samples of these brightly decorated creations. I even saw two local authors who frequent my own library, Elisa Kleven and Lea Lyon, and it was interesting to see them in this other world.

I came away from this event impressed by the dedication of these artists, not just to children but also to the production of multi-cultural, socially aware and entertaining literature for children. And for the day I thank Ann Manheimer, who called me to let me know about this important event. It is thanks to writers like her, and independent booksellers, teachers and librarians, that quality children's books continue to make their way into the hands of our children.