



*Boston Authors Club*

## April 2018 News & Events

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### Meet 4 Authors and an Agent

#### So You Want to Write a Children's Book?



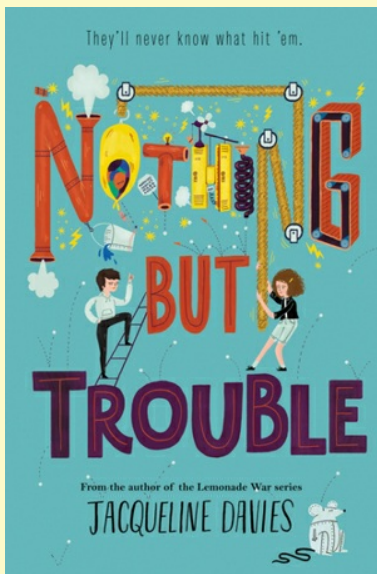
On **May 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7 p.m.**, join children's authors Nancy Tupper Ling, Josh Funk, Nandini Bajpai and Ammi-Joan Paquette at **Whitelam Books in Reading, MA** ([whitelambooks.com](http://whitelambooks.com)) for an informative and fun evening as they discuss what it takes to turn an idea into a picture book or a novel. The authors will provide insight into the publishing scene of children's books, while Ammi-Joan will speak to her role as a literary agent as well.

Join renowned children's authors Nancy Tupper Ling, Josh Funk, Nandini Bajpai and Ammi-Joan Paquette for an informative and fun evening as they discuss what it takes to turn an idea into a picture book or a novel. The authors will provide insight into writing and publishing successful children's books, while Ammi-Joan will speak to her role as a literary agent. **May 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00 p.m.** at **Whitelam Books in Reading, MA** [whitelambooks.com](http://whitelambooks.com)

#### Authors Panel on May 22

### FEATURED AUTHOR: Jackie Davies

*Jacqueline Davies is the author of 13 published works, spanning picture books, titles for middle grade readers and a young adult novel. Her work has garnered numerous literary awards; Lost was the 2010 Julia Ward Howe Young Reader Winner and a finalist for the Jewish National Book Award. Nothing But Trouble (HarperCollins) was a BAC Finalist for 2016. Jackie balances her writing with frequent school visits and bookstore talks around the country. In this interview, she talks about the sources for Nothing But Trouble, authoring the Lemonade War*



## INTERVIEW

*Q: The creative, audacious, and ever-escalating technical pranks perpetrated by Maggie and Lena, the middle-school protagonists in **Nothing But Trouble** are described in great detail. What inspired the hacker aspect of your plot? Did you draw from any real incidents, or use any sources like the fictional “Hackers Bible” of Maggie’s MIT-educated father?*

JD: Years ago, my brother-in-law told me about MIT’s long and storied tradition of student pranks. It was part of the school’s identity, and a source of great pride, both as a showcase for the students’ technical prowess but also as an act of subversion. Scientist-types like to thumb their noses, and this attitude was celebrated at MIT. The students would come up with wildly creative and daring ideas, the goal of which was always to do something that simply couldn’t be done: putting a real, fully functional police car on top of the domed roof of a building; creating a working Tetris game that could be played using the lighted and dimmed windows of a 14-

story building as the tiles; installing an upside down lounge on the underside of a building walkway, complete with chairs, a working lamp, a pool table, and a sleeping cat. All of these wonderful, irreverent, astounding pranks are catalogued in the book **Nightwork: A History of Hacks and Pranks at MIT**. It was the exuberance and joy and sheer determination of these past pranks that inspired me to create the character of Maggie’s father who was the greatest hacker of all time at MIT.

*Q: The success of **The Lemonade War**, published in 2007, sparked a five-book series culminating in **The Magic Trap** in 2014. Did you think about creating a series when you were writing **The Lemonade War**? What are the pros and cons from an author’s perspective of committing to a multi-title series?*

JD: When I wrote **The Lemonade War**, it never occurred to me that the book would become a series. I conceived and wrote it as a single, stand-alone title. At the end of the book, some money goes missing: \$208 disappears, and you never find out who took it—as sometimes happens in real life. But the missing money wasn’t, in my mind, a crucial part of the story; it was just a plot point that gets the characters from Point A to Point B. However, so many readers of **The Lemonade War** became fixated on that missing money! I received question after question about it, until finally I realized that I needed to write a sequel, which then led to a five-book series. For me, writing the series was nothing but joy. It allowed me to deepen the characters with every book, so explore different themes (identity, justice, change, love, and growing up) with characters I knew well, and to develop a relationship with Evan and Jessie that is different from my relationships with my other characters in stand-alone titles. It’s like we’re old friends, and we keep meeting and meeting and meeting. And so the friendship keeps growing.

*Q: One of the many positive reviews for **Nothing But Trouble** called it a “pitch-perfect start to a new series.” Are you planning on one or more follow up books with Maggie and her friends as the characters? If so, will the plots be grounded in small town Odawahaka, Pennsylvania or further afield?*

JD: Like Evan and Jessie, there are so many more stories I could tell about Maggie and Lena! They’re very vibrant characters for me and offer a lot of potential. But at the moment, I’m not planning to write a sequel. I’m busy with so many projects right now, it’s impossible for me to think about taking on another.

*Q: In addition to your middle school and young adult books, you have written five picture books, including **Panda Pants** which came out in 2016 the same year as **Nothing But Trouble**. Could you describe your personal approach to writing for these different age groups and some of the challenges involved in crafting works for such different audiences?*

JD: Actually, I think it would be a challenge for me to *not* write for different age groups. I would find it

terribly difficult to write for *only* young adult readers or *only* middle-grade readers. It's a joy to write for the broad range. Because I spend so much time in schools visiting with students of all ages, I'm constantly interacting with the full range of students. So when a story idea comes to me that is clearly appropriate for a particular age (pre-school, primary elementary, upper elementary, young adult), I don't have much difficulty settling into that age range with my writing because I'm constantly interacting with kids of that age. My own children used to provide a compass for me in terms of writing for different ages, but now it's the kids I meet on my travels. It's just one of the many reasons I love doing school visits.

*Q: You have a very active calendar of school visits and book talks. Based on your experience with frequent speaking events, could you reflect on the value of those activities? Besides promoting book sales, do you get inspiration for future stories from your readers?*

JD: It's always a delight when a student approaches me after one of my presentations and says, "I have a great story idea you should write about, You see, there's this..." I listen intently to the story idea (many of them are terrific), and then I say, "Wow, it sounds like you have a lot of passion for that story idea. I think *you* should write it." Kids also often suggest to me that I should write a book about their class or their school or *them*. So while I'm often presented with ideas at school visits, I can't honestly say I've ever used one in a book. However, the energy of the kids and the love they have for reading good books and their excitement at meeting a real live author, always fuels my desire to write more and better stories. There's no way to leave a school visit without absorbing their infectious enthusiasm. School visits are tiring—there's no two ways about that—but they're also invigorating and reaffirming. And all writers need that. The physical proof that what we do matters greatly.

**Interview by Mary J Cronin**



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**AUTHORS!**

## News About BAC Authors

*The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month. Please send news about your activities, speaking, and new books (along with related pictures) to [bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com](mailto:bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com) by April 25 for publication in the May 2018 newsletter.*



**Helen Marie Casey's** chapbook, **Zero Degrees**, has just been released by Finishing Line Press.

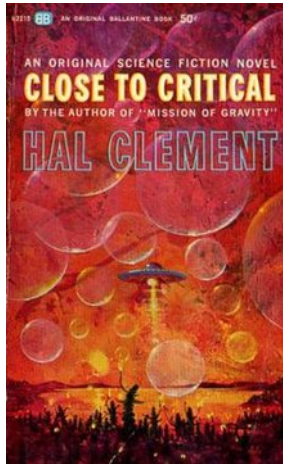
*Jack B. Bedell has written about this work: "These days, it's easy to be overwhelmed by stories of violence and terror occurring all over the globe, to feel powerless, or worse hopeless, in the face of hatred. Poetry can be an escape for sure, or place of solitude, but it's rare to find poems that go beyond providing a haven, poems that seek to conquer terror with clarity, detail, and beauty. Page, by page, the poems in Helen Marie Casey's Zero Degrees offer such resistance to the violent tragedies infecting our world. Casey's lines give necessary voice to victims of terror, foreign and domestic, male and female, young and old. Her poems pay tribute and empower through memory those whose lives are often avalanched under the news cycle as it rolls on."*

**Helen will read at the West Suburban YMCA, 276 Church St, Newton on Friday, April 6th, at 7:00 p.m. and at Porter Square Books on Wednesday, April 18 at 7pm.**

[For more details, visit Helen's webpage](#)

**Whitney Stewart** has new children's books: *What's on Your Plate? Exploring the World of Food* (Sterling), *Mindful Me: Mindfulness and Meditation for Kids* (Albert Whitman, for ages 9 - 12), and the companion *Mindful Me Activity Book*. Stewart will also share her *Mindful Kids* activity deck and speak on using mindfulness to teach children kindness and empathy at the Barefoot Books annual summit, to be held this year in New Orleans: May 15 - 18.

## Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery



### BAC'S LESSER KNOWN SCIENCE FICTION NOTABLE: HAL CLEMENT

*Two notable science fiction writers were active in the Boston Authors Club during the 1950s and 1960s. The one you most likely have heard of is Isaac Asimov; the other, Harry Clement Stubbs, is worth learning about.*

*Asimov was the First Vice President of the club from 1964 to 1966. According to Notable Boston Authors, Mildred Flagg's 1965 book about members of the Boston Authors Club, Asimov "delights Club members as a dynamic, humorous, and learned speaker and presiding officer" and who's to doubt it? Asimov has achieved celebrity status in the pantheon of internationally known science fiction writers. What about Stubbs?*

*Stubbs wrote under the pen name Hal Clement. His entry in Notable Boston Authors, is only eighty-eight words long, half of which recount his service as a B-24 pilot in World War II. The entry ends with "...Hal Clement's Close to Critical is science fiction about exploration by a robot of a planet Tenebre near Antares, in which unexpectedly a human being becomes involved."*

In fact, there is much more to say about Clement, who wrote over 40 short stories and novellas and over 35 books. His bibliography, *Hal Clement: Scientist with a Mission* by Gordon Benson, Jr., runs to 20 pages and enjoyed five editions. There is a lengthy Wikipedia page for Hal Clement that includes a long list of Clement's publications. There also a Wikipedia page devoted entirely to *Close to Critical* as well as a page devoted to one of Clement's fictional planets, Mesklin.

On Clement's Wikipedia page we learn that he was born in Somerville, graduated in astronomy from Harvard and in chemistry from Simmons, taught at Milton Academy, and died in 2003. Perhaps of interest to today's members of the Boston Authors Club, Stubbs wrote an essay titled "Whirligig World" in the June, 1953, issue of *Astounding Science Fiction* that discussed his views of writing science fiction. "Writing a science fiction story is fun, not work. ...the fun...lies in treating the whole thing as a game...the rules must be quite simple. They are; for the reader of a science-fiction story, they consist of finding as many as possible of the author's statements or implications which conflict with the facts as science currently understands them. For the author, the rule is to make as few such slips as he possibly can..." Clement wrote what is known as hard science fiction; that is, science fiction that pays close attention to scientific accuracy. Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, and Carl "Billions and Billions" Sagan are also authors of science fiction in this genre. According to the Wikipedia page on hard science fiction, "... a group at MIT concluded that the planet Mesklin in Hal Clement's 1953 novel **Mission of Gravity** would have had a sharp edge at the equator..

Hal's view of the future is even relevant to today's concerns about the impact of climate change on

Boston. According to Clement's obituary in the Boston Globe, "He studied an 8-foot-square contour map of Greater Boston to determine what the area's topography would be after the water level rose 30 or 40 meters." Summaries of a selection of Clement's stories can be found on Tinkoo Valia's Variety SF blog. <http://variety-sf.blogspot.com/>

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## REMINDER Renew Your BAC Membership for 2018

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