



Boston Authors Club

May 2023 Newsletter

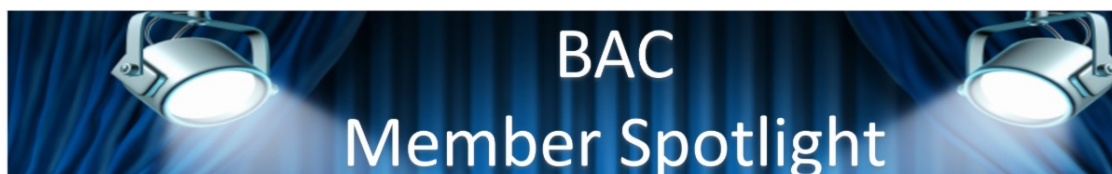
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CELEBRATING CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK

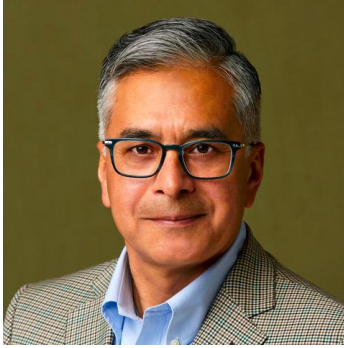


BAC's May newsletter highlights writing for children in honor of Children's Book Week (CBW) May 1-7.

Established in 1919, CBW is the longest-running national literacy initiative in the United States. This year's theme, expressed in the bookmark montage above is: **READ BOOKS – SPARK CHANGE**. As reflected in our May interviews, book news, and the **Yesteryear** featured author, the BAC membership has been sparking a love of books in children for well over a century. CBW posters, media, activities, and more are available at [Every Child a Reader](https://www.everychildareader.net).



This month's Member Spotlight is on Federico Erebia, whose debut novel, Pedro & Daniel (Levine Querido), will be published on June 6. Federico is a retired physician, woodworker, author, and illustrator. He lives in Massachusetts with his husband, and their Westie & Whippet, in the home he designed and renovated.



Federico is on the SCBWI Impact and Legacy Fund Steering Committee, was in the inaugural Poets & Writers publicity incubator for debut authors, is a Grubbie Debut Author, as well as being a member of the Boston Author's Club, and several other writing groups.

Q; What aspects of being part of a community of writers and appreciators of literature are most important to you?

A: Writing is primarily a solitary undertaking, which I've only been doing a couple years. I've managed to join many small and larger writing communities. In some ways, all the virtual events made it easier for me to meet new people, and to attend conferences I never would have been able to attend. I don't have an agent, but I was able to meet my

editor through an online event. I love volunteering my time. I've had a couple of roles in SCBWI, through which I've met so many wonderful people, both in and out of the industry. My main volunteer goal is to get books into the hands of marginalized children, and their libraries.

Q: What works have shaped you as a reader and/or writer?

A: That's such an interesting question! Reading definitely influences my writing, but reading and writing are very different endeavors for me. I'm neurodivergent, with dyslexia, ADD, and other reading challenges. I've always struggled, which is why I primarily listen to audiobooks now. As a teenager, I loved books that captured my attention, and focused my mind: books by Edgar Allen Poe, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, and JRR Tolkien. Later, Gabriel García Marquez, Federico García Lorca, and Umberto Eco. Recently, I've been impressed by the works of Padma Venkatraman, Angeline Boulley, Daniel Nayeri, Sacha Lamb, and so many others

Interview by Lisa Rogers

MEETING the MARKET

David A. Kelly's writing for children includes the 23-volume Ballpark Mysteries series featuring cousins Kate and Mike solving mysteries at different major league ballparks and the Most Valuable Players (MVP) series from Random House. David is also the author of the early reader, Babe Ruth and the Baseball Curse, the picture book Miracle Mud, and a forthcoming book for young readers, Tee Time on the Moon. More info about his books at: www.davidakellybooks.com



In addition, David has written about travel and technology for the New York Times, the Boston Globe, and many other publications. He lives in Newton, MA.

In this interview, David talks about his decision to self-publish the latest title in the Ballpark Mysteries series, and what he has learned in the process.

Q: What motivated you to experiment with self-publishing after many years of working with traditional publishers?

A: A great question. I'm going to back up just a little bit to set the context for my decision. Random House started publishing the Ballpark Mysteries series, my chapter books for young readers, in 2011. Since then, I wrote one to three Ballpark Mystery books every year, with each title set in a different baseball stadium, for a total of 22 volumes. But then Random House decided they didn't want to continue publishing the series. There were at least 11 more Major League Baseball teams to cover, and plot lines I had planned, with characters that kids loved to read about. That was the impetus for me to move from traditional publishing into self-publishing. Authoring a long-running successful series was a nice base to build on, and I saw an opportunity to extend the series for current readers along with the potential to attract a new audience.

Q: What have you learned about the differences between traditional and self-publishing? Were there any big surprises, either positive or negative?

I started with what I know the best, which is doing the research to write my story, a New York Mets mystery, which ended up being released as *The Black Cat Change-Up*. Once the manuscript was written, I was lucky enough to reconnect with my previous Random House editor to edit the story for content and flow. At that point, I knew the quality of new book would be equal to earlier titles. But then the surprises started. In retrospect it's obvious, but I learned that the layout design for books with artwork is very time

consuming. That was especially true because I wanted to be more creative with the layout to freshen the look of the series after a decade. Realistically, I needed to hire someone to accomplish that and we spent a lot of time finalizing the book template and illustrations. On the plus side, I was really happy being free to innovate and the printed book looks great.

When you are self-publishing, the most popular paths are Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) via Amazon and Ingram Spark, which distributes to all bookstores. I decided to publish in both channels, starting with KDP. A big negative surprise was about a week after publishing *The Black Cat Change-Up*, KDP notified me that the title had been removed because of a content problem. Unfortunately, KDP didn't provide a lot of details. After multiple calls and unanswered emails, I never got a clear answer about what the problem was. I found out that this had happened to other authors, and the advice I got was just to republish the title. Fortunately, this time it actually stayed published. That experience made me realize that you don't have a lot of control over what these platforms are going to do. One potential advantage is that I can make more money through self-publishing. Of course, that comes with a lot of investment upfront, and ongoing investment for promotion and marketing and other things. Summing up, there's a bigger long-term opportunity, but it's definitely one that takes a while to come to fruition.

Q: Now that you've been through this process once, are you planning to do it again?

A: Yes, I'll do at least one more Ballpark Mysteries title, about the Milwaukee Brewers. Since we put a lot of investment into the layout, and production template and process, I feel pretty confident that everything will be a lot smoother the next time. In addition, I have a Football Mysteries book manuscript about the Dallas Cowboys, that will be ready for publication this year, probably on KDP and Ingram Spark again. So that'll be exciting. At the same time, I'm continuing to pursue traditional publishing. For now, I've decided to take a two-track approach.

Q: What advice would you give to other authors who are thinking about getting off the traditional publishing path in favor of self-publishing?

A: One thing I've realized is that books for young readers, where illustrations are so important, are especially challenging to self-publish. I think that genres with only text, like adult mystery, science fiction, and romance are a more natural fit. So authors should consider how their work fits into the self-publishing market.

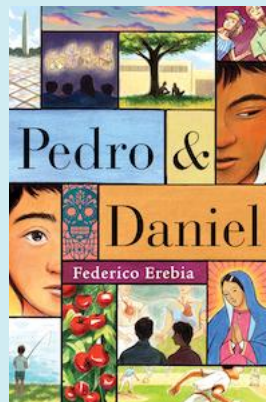
Self-publishing is a lot of work, and much of that work isn't about the writing. So be prepared to educate yourself, and potentially to pay for some of the expertise that's needed. I've learned that there are lots of places to learn, from classes to Facebook groups where you can ask questions as they come up. One of the downsides is how much time authors end up spending on the production and logistics side and then on the release and marketing side. Personally, I feel it's really important to make the look your book look professional in terms of designing the cover art, the table of contents, and any illustrations and back matter.

This first time, I did not plan my release and pre-launch marketing far enough in advance. There's lots of advice out there on how to plan a launch campaign and get people to preorder the books, and write reviews. But finding the time to do it all is challenging, and I'm still working on the marketing strategy.

One final piece of advice is to think out of the box about how to make your book unique. Self-publishing allows you to expand the content and format in ways that a traditional publisher might not be interested in doing, but that will appeal your readers. There are a lot of opportunities to stand out and be different and better than traditionally published books.

Interview by Mary J Cronin

AUTHOR/AUTHOR! May News



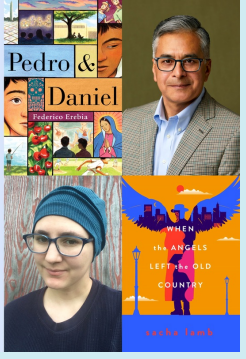
Fedrico Erebia's debut novel, *Pedro & Daniel* (Levine Querido) will be published in June 2023. Everyone is invited to a launch event as part of Grubbie Debut series on Tuesday, June 6 at 7pm at Porter Square Books, Boston Edition. Register to attend in person or online.

Pedro & Daniel

Will be a Grubbie Debut Author Event at Porter Square Books Boston Edition

June 6, 2023
7 pm with reception

Federico will be in conversation with Sacha Lamb, whose debut novel, *When the Angels Left the Old Country* is a Printz Honor Book, a Sydney Taylor Book Award winner, a Stonewall Book Award winner, and a National Jewish Book Award finalist!



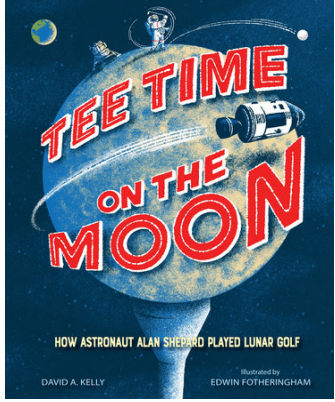

Susan Lynn Meyer's latest novel, *A Sky Full of Song* (Union Square Kids) launched in April 2023.

Set in North Dakota in 1905, it tells the story of eleven-year-old Shoshana and her family, Jewish immigrants who flee persecution in the Russian empire to start a new life on the prairie.



Eric Jay Dolin's *Rebels at Sea: Privateering in the American Revolution*, has won the 2023 Fraunces Tavern Museum Book Award, and was also selected by the Massachusetts Center for the Book as a Must-Read book for 2023.

Rebels at Sea comes out in paperback on June 6.



David Kelly's forthcoming book for young readers, *Tee Time on the Moon* (Astra Publishing House), will launch 7/25/2023. It recounts why Astronaut Alan Shepard hit a golf ball during his visit to the moon to measure the impact of low gravity.



Lisa Braxton's book review of *Truth Tellers: The Power and Presence of Black Women Journalists Since 1960* has been published in Story Circle Network.

Reading Right Now

Elly Swartz, the author of five middle grade novels that

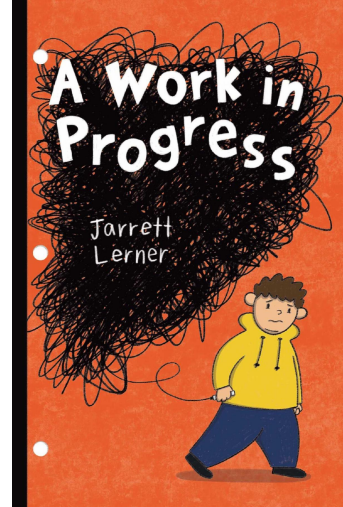
reflect her commitment to raising awareness about mental health, is currently reading the just-published *A Work in Progress* by Jarrett Lerner.

Q: What motivated you to pick up this title?

A: It's important to me that kids know they are not alone. That they feel seen, heard, and respected. With anxiety and mental health challenges for kids escalating*, books can be a catalyst for conversation and a lifeline of hope.

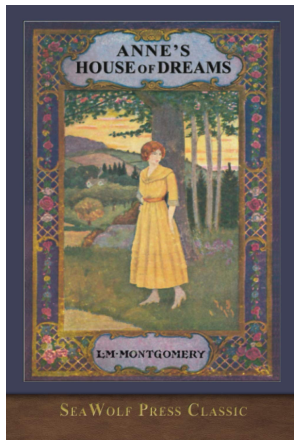
A Work in Progress tackles issues of bullying and body image. The story is told through verse and illustrations from the perspective of Will. This unique approach to such important topics during this critical time for kids, inspired me to pick up this book.

*(Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory)



Q: Would you recommend it to friends? Why or why not?

A: I highly recommend *A Work in Progress*. Honest. Raw. Heartbreaking. Triumphant. This story shows the power of words. The importance of friendship. And the transformative power of self-acceptance. It will no doubt leave an imprint on readers - young and old.



Susan Lynn Meyer is an award-winning children's book author, and teaches literature and creative writing at Wellesley College. Susan is currently re-reading L. M. Montgomery's Anne's House of Dreams (1917), the fifth book in the Anne of Green Gables series.

Q: What motivated you to pick up this title?

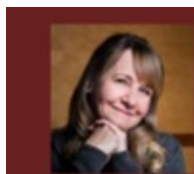
A: Some day in the last month or so I was looking at my bookshelves and, maybe feeling nostalgic, I decided to reread *Anne of Green Gables*—and then I decided to keep on and read the whole series in order. I have been finding it very interesting, as a children's author, to think about which of the books in the series are the most effective and why. Some are very episodic, as children's books often used to be, with one humorous incident happening in each chapter but not a lot of overall plot tension. I feel as if this

works fine in *Anne of Green Gables* because Anne's character as a child is so compelling and because the book does have an overall plot arc about Anne finding a home.

The later books are sometimes too anecdotal and too little about Anne herself, so they aren't as interesting to me. They are more about funny or odd people she meets. But *Anne's House of Dreams*, the one I'm currently reading, is much more engaging than some of the earlier books. It does introduce new characters, but it has emotional depth and shape in a way some of the other books don't because it is about Anne and Gilbert as newlyweds and their experiences early on in their marriage, in which they lose a child and then have a second baby who lives. There's also a subplot about Leslie, a young woman trapped in a very unhappy marriage. Montgomery herself had experience with both of those life struggles, and the novel is convincing and powerful as an account of how women of this era had to cope with these forms of grief. In the end, though, it isn't a sad book.

Q: Would you recommend it to friends? Why or why not?

A: I absolutely would. It is one of the best books in the series, and if you only know Anne Shirley from *Anne of Green Gables*, there is a lot more pleasure in store for you!



PRESIDENTS MUSINGS

Though I've mostly steered away from overtly political topics in my monthly BAC notes, this month I decided to guide my remarks to an issue I feel we all must navigate. As people interested in and concerned about literature, we have to think about efforts going on across the United States to ban books.

According to a new report released in April by PEN America, book bans are on the rise. Since this organization began tracking book bans in July of 2021, they've found more than 4000 instances of books being removed from libraries. And if that isn't alarming enough, this number is probably a significant underreporting, since it comes from publicly available data and press reports, and does not capture the increasing mandates in many states that require schools to vet reading material, or some efforts by elected officials or activist groups to ban or censor books.

EveryLibrary, a political action group working on behalf of libraries, reported that in 2022, seven states had passed laws that impose limits on materials libraries could shelve or purchase. This year, the organization states that it is tracking over 100 different bills across the country that would negatively affect libraries. In some places, municipalities are threatening to reduce funding or even close libraries that do not comply with book bans. And this, of course, would curtail and limit the books to which people have easy and free access.

The American Library Association reported that efforts to ban books in 2022 nearly doubled from similar efforts in 2021. And this year, the ALA has identified both that the majority of books that are targeted in book bans are in school libraries or classrooms, and also that the vast majority of individual books on ban lists are written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ communities or people of color.

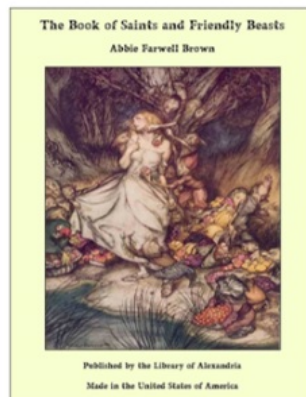
We're fortunate, most of us, to be living in Massachusetts or New England, which has for the most part been exempt from efforts to ban books. But as writers, editors, librarians, book store owners and people who care deeply about books, we still need to be concerned.

There are numerous organizations actively working against book bans and legislation that promotes literary censorship. If these are issues you're concerned about, I encourage you to get more information, and if you are so inclined, to get involved in some way. Some of the organizations working in this space include PEN America (<https://www.pen.org>); the National Coalition Against Censorship (<https://www.ncac.org>); the American Booksellers for Free Expression (<https://www.bookweb.org>); and the American Library Association (<https://www.ala.org>).

Julie Dobrow
BAC President

YESTER YEAR

ABBIE BROWN'S WELL-TOLD TALES FOR CHILDREN



Abbie Farwell Brown (1871-1927) was a poet and a children's book author and thus travels a time bridge between last month's celebration of poetry and this month's celebration of children's books. In fact, two of her books, Pocketfull of Posies and Fresh Posies, were poetry books for children. It is said that her first and most well-known children's book, The Book of Saints & Friendly Beasts (1900, cover illustration above), was inspired by the misericord depicting Saint Werburgh resurrecting a goose.

A misericord, which is defined as a small wooden structure formed on the underside of a folding seat in a church which, when the seat is folded up, is intended to act as a shelf to support a person in a partially standing position during long periods of prayer. As far as I can tell from the misericord pictured above at right, that's Saint Werburgh in the center panel, watching the goose take flight. A different misericord was allegedly credited as the inspiration for the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland*, so Brown was following in literary footsteps, however infrequently traveled.

Many of Brown's books were retellings of mythologies of diverse cultures for her young audience. *In the Days of Giants* collects Norse tales, for example, and *Tales of the Red Children* calls on Indian folklore. This must have presented both a challenge and an opportunity to the illustrators of her books since their work would go artist-a-artist with other illustrators' renderings of the same stories. Brown and her publishers were able to attract some of the leading illustrators of the time to her books. Arthur Rackham, for example, was the illustrator of *The Lonesomest Doll*. A first edition of this book is currently on offer at AbeBooks for \$1,600; it's likely this price reflects Rackham's enduring popularity. Reginald Birch did the illustrations for *The Christmas Angel*, Fanny Cory illustrated *Saints & Friendly Beasts* and the *Posies* books, Maurice Day illustrated *Under the Rowan Tree*, and E. Boyd Smith did *The Curious Book of Birds* and *Days of Giants*. On a side note, if you have an interest in the history of book illustration, you might enjoy Pete Beard's [YouTube channel](#) on this topic.

A lifelong resident of the house on Beacon Hill where she was born, Brown contributed her time and talent to BAC in the early decades of the 20th century, as well as to the Saturday Morning Club, the Folk Lore Society, Author's League, Poetry Club of America, and the New England Poetry Club. Many of her poems were set to music and appear in collections of songs for school use. Brown is also remembered locally as the founder of *The Jabberwock*, the student newspaper of what was then Girls' Latin (now Boston Latin). The paper was published regularly until 1972. Abbie Farwell Brown's papers are in the Schlesinger Library. She is buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery. There is, however, no misericord near her grave site to inspire or support literary visitors.

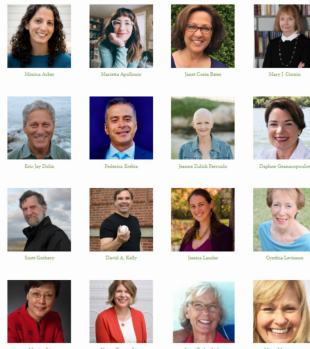
By Scott B Guthery



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events, news, and publications
by 5/29/23 to

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