



Holm is Where the Heart Is

From the triumphs of *Babymouse* to the travails of Boston Jane, from the mysteries of *The Creek* to the antics of *Our Only May Amelia*, Jennifer Holm joins the select ranks of authors whose books can be found in multiple sections of the library. Jennifer Holm's genesis as an author came at her father's bedside, as she listened to his stories of growing up in Depression-era Washington state. She talked to him about his childhood and about the diary he had found when cleaning his mother's attic after her passing. Great Aunt Alice's diary was the spark that lit *Our Only May Amelia*. "It was only twelve pages but I loved it," recalls Holm. She found the voice she had been looking for and melded Alice's experience with her own—"I tacked on some of my brothers" and explored the dynamics of being the only girl in a family of boys.

Family relationships are a frequent theme for Holm. Her husband works with her on the stories of the spy-cat stories in *The Stink Files*. *Babymouse* is illustrated by her brother, Matt. Growing up, she recalls reading Prince Valiant and having no use for the girl super heroes. "I just hated it—the gold bodice, the red go-go boots—it was a female version of what a man would want." Matt had been a budding cartoonist and Jennifer and Matt worked on a proposal for two years. After several rejections, Jennifer went in person to several publishers and "pitched my vision that a comic book for girls by a publisher would be good." Holm, with her background in television

and her knowledge of the comic book industry, knew that parents wouldn't go into a comic book store. Random House understood her vision and the rest is history.

Jennifer Holm's family is not just behind the pen or the pad—as in *Our Only May Amelia*, they also provide the inspiration. "If you write a story about your father's family, you have to write about your mother just to keep the peace," states the author. Holm has always been very close to her mother's large Italian-American family. As she reminisced with her mother one day, Holm realized that a whole way of life was disappearing. "I wanted to remember it—that's why I wrote *Penny from Heaven*." Holm interviewed family members for research as well as professors of Italian-American culture.

Holm's taste for research was indulged as she created the Boston Jane series as well. "When you come into a library as an author, they really want to help you," notes Holm. "I read a lot of diaries by wagon train women who started off as traditional ladies—struggling to preserve that aspect of their life, taking the good china out every evening—but eventually having to give up not only their creature comforts but having to watch their children and even husbands die on the trail." She adds that these women "became quite feminist when they hit the west."

Boston Jane has its roots in Holm's family as well. A contemporary account of oystering reminded her of her own grandfather's experiences as an oysterman and contributed to her wanting to capture the experience of what it was like to

Meet Children's Author



Jennifer Holm

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at that time—to establish a connection between today and 1850s Washington.

In spite of the variety of settings and even the different audiences for each book or series of books, one theme runs constantly through all of Holm's works: family matters whether it provides the source material, the inspiration, or the pen.

Interviewed by Ellen Myrick, December 2009

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For more interviews with children's authors go to the Library Corner section of our Web site at www.btsb.com and select Featured Authors, or select Author Showcase for information on over 800 children's authors and illustrators.

What to Read When: The Books and Stories to Read With Your Child and All the Best Times to Read Them, by Pam Allyn. Published by Avery Trade, 2009. 336 pages.

Pam Allyn's how to guide does prescribe books for certain times and ages in a child's life but it goes deeper than just an annotated bibliography. I defy

anyone to describe the unique and special bond of reading aloud to one's child more eloquently than in Allyn's introduction: "The good news, wondrously, is that the world is full of literature written by people who know you are longing to make connections and are striving to put a voice to them." This is a book for parents and caregivers, first and foremost.

What to Read When begins with Allyn's top ten reasons to read aloud. Of course, anyone reading this book will have already drunk the need-to-read Kool-Aid but it is useful to look at the impact of reading on a child and the subtle messages that your reading choices send. When it comes to the crux of the matter, Allyn not only looks at chronological age but also emotional age, helping you to select books that speak to your child where he or she is in both contexts.

As with any book of this kind, the selections are entirely subjective and while a parent may



AUTHOR TRIVIA

Fall 2011

Who used the money from their first novel to start a fortune cookie company and ran it successfully for 12 years?

Our Author's Showcase, a database of information about over 800 children's authors and illustrators, has the answer. Visit the BTSB Bookstore at www.btsb.com and do a keyword search using BTSB stock number **860368** to find the answer to the above question.

be astonished that a childhood favorite is not included, take this as an opportunity to discover potential future favorites as you are led by this thoughtful and wide-ranging guide. Allyn's thematic approach enables the reader to zero in on what is most likely to interest a child. "Building, Making and Creating: The World of Mechanical Things" is a great jumping off point for young children who love their erector sets. On the other hand, if a child is trying to make sense of a world at war, "Building Peace, Confronting War, and Talking With Your Child About World Events" may be the section you need when those questions arise.

A straightforward list in the appendix presents the titles and themes in list form for easy reference.

Reviewed by Ellen Myrick

Be on the lookout for our newest Showcase Magazine.



Recognizing the Power of Information: The Robert F. Sibert Medal

The Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award, also known as the Sibert Award or Medal, was founded ten years ago and is administered by the Association for Library Service to Children. This tenth anniversary provides a perfect opportunity to reflect on the Sibert Award's creation, process and impact.



Bob Sibert, President of Bound to Stay Bound Books, explains that "We saw a large gap when the library world had high-profile awards for picture books and novels but nothing for nonfiction books. A nonfiction children's book award from librarians should be an even higher priority than the Caldecott or Newbery in my eyes."

"I also saw the 1990s as an almost unheralded Golden Age in children's nonfiction, thanks to several determined publishers and great authors such as Russell Freedman, Jim Murphy, James Gribbin and others," recalls Bob. "A high-profile award for children's nonfiction would focus more attention on the great books that were being made available for children but that a lot of kids, parents and teachers were not aware of."

Barbara Brand of Johnson County Public Library in Kansas was delighted to chair the Sibert Award committee this past year. She had served on both the Caldecott and Newbery committees so she was familiar with the way things worked. The guidelines to the Sibert Award are very explicit and it is vital for each member to follow them rigorously as they evaluate candidates for the award. "Our committee was great," exclaims Brand. "Not only were they very responsive, timely and dedicated, but they also really listened to each other."

Barbara was also making her own recommendations and responding to the special challenges laid out in the guidelines. One of the most difficult issues to work through was the broad age range of the award. Committee members must look at the support material—bibliographies, back matter, research—while also keeping in mind the audience for which the book was intended.

The level of information needed for a three-year-old is very different for a 14-year-old, "yet we still have to know that the same care was taken to ensure the information is correct and appropriate for the younger child," she comments.

"I'm the mother of two boys and boys tend to like nonfiction," reflects Barbara. "This really helped me on a personal level." Brand notes that this committee helped her "gain a huge appreciation for nonfiction" and also feels that "since this award has been created you can see a difference in the way the authors and publishers approach nonfiction." With notable exceptions (see above), Barbara remarks that "Once upon a time [nonfiction books] were just remakes of adult books where they took the facts and simplified them for kids."

That is clearly no longer the case, as proven by this year's winner, *Kakapo Rescue: Saving the World's Strangest Parrot*, written by Sy Montgomery, and photographs by Nic Bishop.



Possibly the most fun Barbara had was when she hosted a Mock Sibert at her library. "It was so much fun to talk about the books and see people's reactions." She adds that "It's important for a child to know that an adult didn't just make this up—the author needs to show where the information came from."

Lastly, Barbara enjoys that "The beauty of some of these books is that they do question things that have been accepted all along and they will tell the readers that things change and that the reader should question things."

And that is really what the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award is all about—informing and enlightening young readers, inspiring them to think and feel and know the world around them.

2011 BTSB Scholarship Winners Announced

The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) has announced this year's recipients of the BTSB Scholarships. They are:

Nancy Graves of Denton, Texas plans to attend Texas Women's University.

Danielle Gregori of Elmont, New York plans to attend Queens College.

Rachel Ortiz of Washington D.C. plans to attend the University of Wisconsin.

Robyn Woods of Saint Cloud, Florida plans to attend the University of South Florida.

Each recipient will receive a \$7,000 scholarship to attend graduate school in library science and prepare for a career in children's library services. This makes over seventy BTSB Scholarships that have been awarded since the program began in 1985.

For more information about the BTSB Scholarships, contact ALSC at 800-545-2433 or at www.ala.org/alsc. For a complete listing of our BTSB Scholarship winners go to the About Us section of our Web site www.btsb.com and select Scholarships.



Engaging the Senses with BTSB Audio and Video Previews

by Ellen Myrick

When was the first time you were told that the more senses were engaged, the more a student would be able to remember the lesson? Interactive learning still remains challenging in times of strained budgets and overflowing classes. So how do you provide an extra sensory experience for your students without further expense?

It's easy. Check out the audio and video clips on the Bound to Stay Bound Books Web site. Although they were originally put there to give librarians a better sense of whether they wanted to buy a particular title, these clips can also be used in a variety of ways to help kids connect with books on a deeper level. Here are just a few ideas to start your own creative juices flowing:

Use the audio clips as a tease. Do you have students who are reading-resistant? Perhaps they have not made that leap in the imagination that gives each character a distinctive voice. An audio clip literally gives a voice to the book that they can hear long after the audio has stopped. Think of it as walking them a few steps down the path that they will eventually travel by themselves.

Use the audio clips as models. Reading aloud—kids either love it or hate it. A child may dread reading aloud because they just don't know how to do it. Start with a familiar book like *The Lightning Thief* and let them hear the narrator read the story. Discuss the choices the narrator makes regarding a character's voice or the clues in the text within the attributions such as "he whispers," or "she laughingly replied."

Make the authors real with the video clips. If you ask city kids where milk comes from, chances are they will answer "the grocery store." If you ask most kids where books come from, they will probably answer "the library," or, occasionally "the bookstore." Demystify the journey of a book by helping kids get to know some of their favorite authors through video clips. Amazing! Christopher Paul Curtis really is a person! And Buxton really is a town!

The new "book trailers" can help kids get in the know on the new books. From a *39 Clues*

take on the evening news to a tantalizing taste of the world of *The Book Thief*, this relatively new phenomenon can build excitement for new acquisitions or provide a theater-like experience for today's visually sophisticated students.

Here are just a few of the books with audio clips available on www.btsb.com

- *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* by Jacqueline Kelly
- *Fairest* by Gail Carson Levine
- *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling
- *The Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell
- *Louise, the Adventures of a Chicken* by Kate DiCamillo

Check out the clever and intriguing video clips of these titles:

- *The Battle of the Labyrinth* by Rick Riordan
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
- *Elijah of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *The Emperor's Clues* by Gordon Korman
- *The Magic Tree House* series by Mary Pope Osborne

These are just a few of the hundreds of books that have audio or video clips at www.btsb.com. To search available titles, just go to Advanced Search and scroll down to the "Previews" section. Click your preferences and watch the results come in. Narrow your search by any of the other Advanced Search criteria including publication date, publisher, availability in your school's preferred reading program, grade levels and much more. Once you have some search results, click on each title to see expanded information on the title, including the audio and/or video clips. To create playlists of our audio and video clips please go to the instructions at our Web site, www.btsb.com/btsbplayer. By adding another dimension or two to the book experience to nudge students on their way, you just may create even more lifelong readers.



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