

Crafting the Self

Published Picture Book

Unique Product, Unique Issues

So . . . You want to indie publish

Pro Tips

- Put your head down and work for three years before you decide if you're successful or not. You are a small business. In the U.S., most small businesses fail in the first year. Another fifty percent of those left fail by year three. And most small businesses don't turn a profit for 3-5 years. You must get past those early years successfully. By then, you should start to have a backlist of books which will start to support the business. Do any projects you can in the early years that will bring money in, even if eventually you decide those aren't where your heart lies. Do work-for-hire or anything you have to do. Just make it to Year 3! (D.P.)
- I had a great story, but had no idea where to begin. Researching and reading about self-publishing only made it seem more overwhelming for me. (P.H.)

Pro Tips, contd.

- There are so many moving parts and the coordination of different talents and concerns can be difficult. It takes a long time to get a book from idea to shelf. (L.W.)
- Be prepared to spend a lot of time with promotion and distribution. You would think that the difficulty is in finding the right story and the perfect illustrator, lining up the printer and the money, but all of this only half the game. Getting your book into the hands of children who will love it is a full time job and the cycle of sales lasts as long as there are books in the warehouse (or under the bed). (L.W.)
- Set a budget and stick to it! It's easy to get carried away with spending money along the publishing journey. Always be mindful of the costs involved. (P.H.)
- Reach out and talk to children's book authors. Most authors are very willing to share their stories and advice with you. (P.H.)

Pro Tips, contd.

- The most challenging aspect of self-publishing an illustrated work for children is getting the book in front of your target audience. There are so many titles, and it's hard to break through the noise. This would probably be my answer for traditional publishing as well. It's just hard to get noticed. (N.P.)
- I needed to determine the 'Why' for publishing 'Sam and the Seven Pound Perch'. What did I want to accomplish and what was the purpose for me to spend the time and money to publish my story? Was it to make money; become a recognized children's picture book author; contribute to a legacy for my children and grandchildren; or, have fun delighting children and the parents, grandparents, and teachers who read the story to them? I chose having fun and delighting children. (P.H.)

Pro tips, contd.

- Figure out why you're doing it and who your audience is, and then act accordingly. If you're simply wanting 100 printed copies to have to give to friends and relatives, you might ask around and see if someone will help you with that for a reasonable price. If you're trying to make enough money to retire, you'll make different decisions. (M.C.T.)



What makes indie publishing hard? You need to focus on craft AND production.

- Who is my audience?
- Is my story idea fresh and unique?
- Am I an illustrator or will I pair with one?
- Am I familiar with the picture book genre?
- Do I understand the “rules” of pb’s (and when to break them)?
- Why am I bypassing traditional publishing?
- What is my plan?
- Who do I need on my team?
- What is my budget?
- How and where am I going to sell my finished book?

Picture books are unique

- There is stiff competition – especially in certain categories like 1st day at school, holidays like Christmas and Halloween, bedtime stories, wanting a pet, monsters acting un-monster like, etc.
- Compare your idea with what's already out there.
- WNDB and recognizing “own stories” is very important in the picture book world now.
- Nonfiction books are popular among teachers, especially when they dovetail with current curriculum.

How can I produce the best possible product?

- Is my text as strong as it can be?
- Have I studied the interplay of text and art in picture books?
- Am I willing to pay for high quality art?
- Am I truly prepared to take on independent publishing?

Taking on independent publishing

- E-publish, POD, or print on a press (and how these choices affect sales)
- Creating a budget so you can assess what you need to charge per book
- Choosing a book designer
- Choosing a printer

Unexpected challenges – Pro Tips

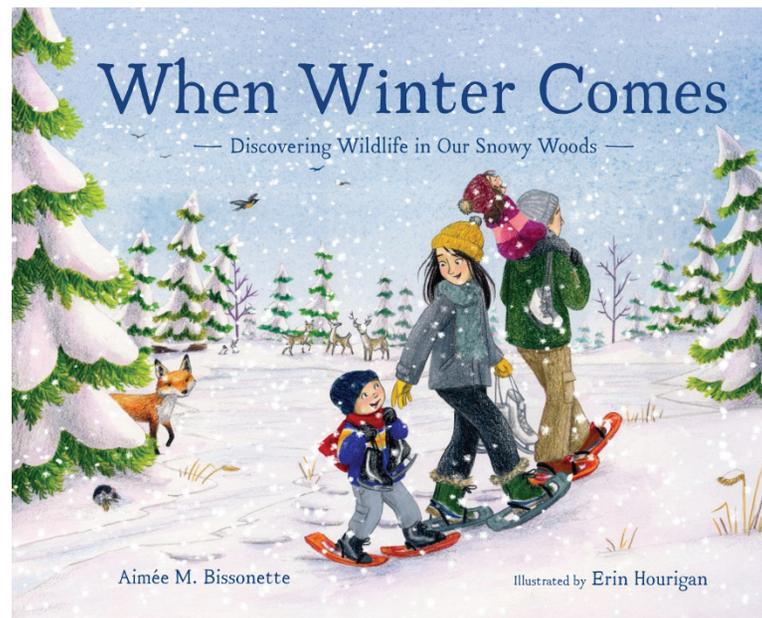
- Accounting. I never had any sort of accounting class, so I came to it with zero knowledge. (D.P.)
- Identifying the possible venues for publishing my books, choosing which ones I felt would be most advantageous, and then implementing according to the requirements for each format--because, of course, they are all different. (M.C.T.)
- There are a million things to keep up with and figure out. And, if you're like me and doing all of this about once or twice a year and not as your day job, it's difficult to remember how to do everything. I take notes when I think about it, but it's still a lot to know and keep up with. (M.C.T.)

Get your story in the best shape possible

- Who will help you edit your work?
- Is your story didactic or too obviously message driven?
- Are you familiar with PB parameters: page (multiples of 4; generally 32) and word count; storyboarding; page turns; creating a dummy
- Do you know what educators want and what fits their curriculum needs?

Interplay of text and art

- With no other genre is “look and feel” more important.
- Study how publishers place and interweave text and illustrations.
- The text needs to include opportunities for illustration.



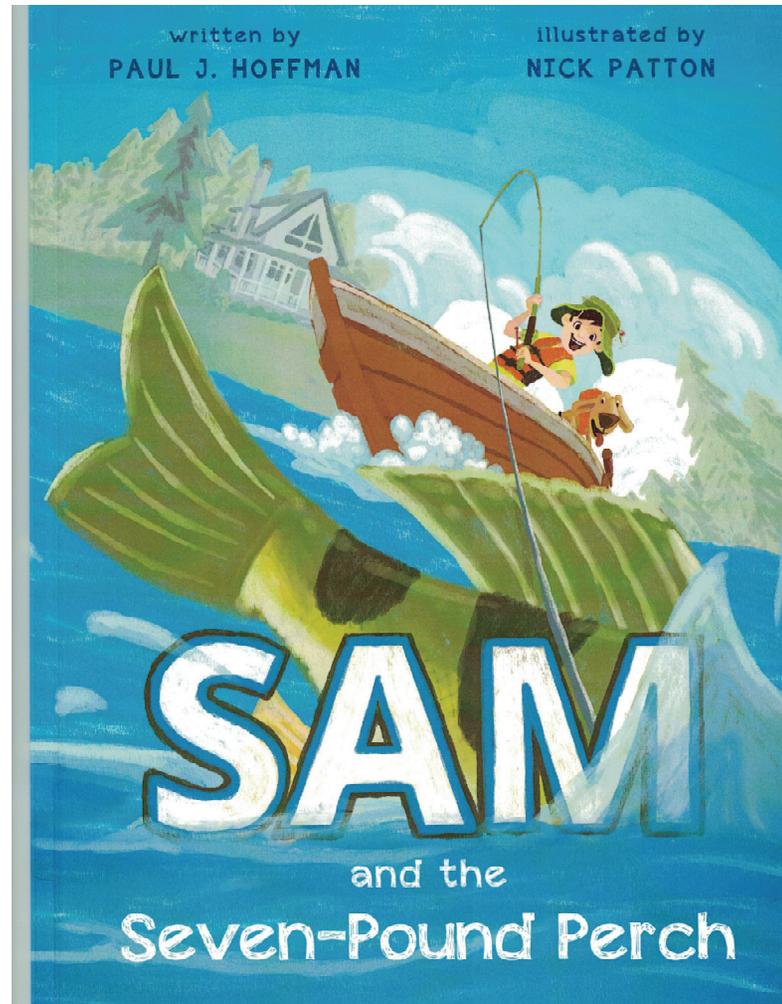
Art and Text contd.

- The text doesn't need to spell out the illustrations – edit for this up front AND after the art is done.
- *Chattering red squirrels race up and down the ~~tree's~~ trunk. They leap among the branches, snacking on seeds and cones. If the weather turns bad, the tree ~~offers them~~ protects them ~~ion~~. They snuggle deep into soft needles ~~and curl their tails around themselves~~. (Aimee: will show this; don't have to say because not involving a tree.)*

The need for high quality art

- PB's are different! They are highly visual – the illustrations are not just an “add on.”
- Study PB's: how have publishers placed and interwoven text and illustrations?
- Editing text to accommodate for illustrations – leaving words out AND giving the artist a lot to work with (this doesn't mean illustration notes but it does mean reference materials for NF work)- the illustrator ADDS to the story.

Working with an illustrator



Pro tips

- Get the very best illustrations you can. I avoid the cheap sites because their site-contracts are insufficient, and because mediocre digital art will not sell books! (D.P.)
- When selecting an illustrator, choose someone who can bring the words to life and tell the story through the illustrations as well as the words on the page. Chemistry between author and illustrator is extremely important. (P.H.)

Pro Tips, contd.

- Finding an illustrator was daunting. I interviewed four illustrators and was so fortunate to find Nick Patton. Throughout our wonderful collaboration we were able to shorten the words in the story and bring it to life through his creative illustrations, and use Nick's relationships in the 'picture booking world' to work with an editor to fine tune the story. (P.H.)

Working with an Illustrator

- Do your homework – know where to look for artists and what to look for.
- Making contact – know what you should be prepared to talk about.
- Have a contract/spec sheet – set clear expectations.
- Prepare for the worst case scenario, which likely won't happen (this applies to all your team members, but especially the artist).

What an illustrator will want to know

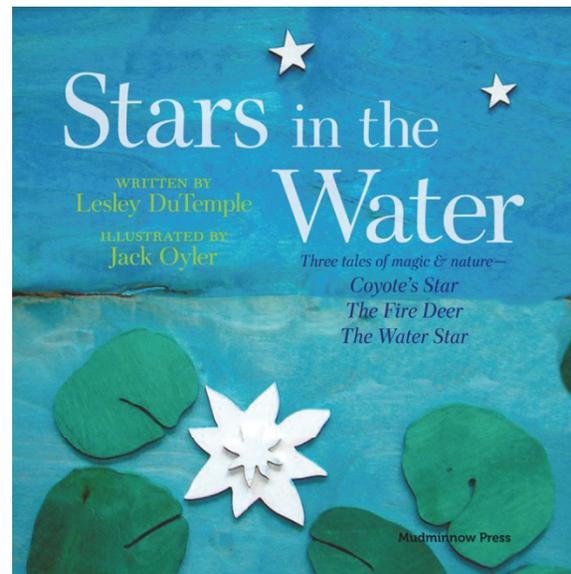
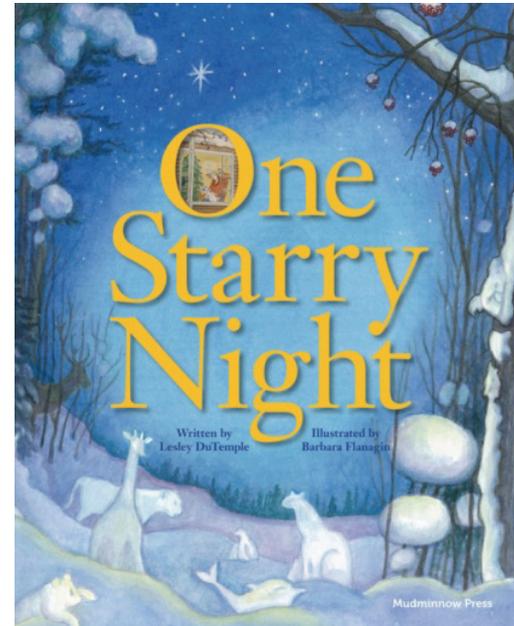
- Name and subject matter of your book
- Genre (board book, picture book, NF, etc.)
- Illustrations needed: entire book, vignettes, cover
- Your budget
- Advance with royalty vs. work for hire
- Copyright ownership; use of artwork
- Timeline and deadlines
- Revisions/changes and how they'll be handled
- Payment
- Number of copies to illustrator

Additional illustration issues

- Communicating with the illustrator – specific terms, deadlines, keeping track of progress.
- Spacing out payments: 25% on signing; 25% on approval of sketches; 50% on delivery of final art).
- Rights licensing: work for hire (easiest), website use by artist, artist retains copyright, royalty agreement.
- Tech issues: dpi, bleed, text on illustrations, gutters (and other print specs) – who is responsible?

Team members

- Author and illustrator
- Editor
- Copy editing/proofing
- Book designer
- Printer
- Book sellers



Working with a team - Pro Tips

- I still have problems getting my originals in the right resolution required for each format. And converting files to EPUB format? Fahgedaboutit! (M.C.T.)
- Just how many printers can one little operation go through?!? We wanted to stick with a local option and actually have two highly qualified and wonderful options in our backyard. But BOTH suffered incredible setbacks while we have worked with them - death, divorce, robbery, problems with machinery, etc. You can have a plan, but that doesn't mean everything will go according to plan or even fall within your wildest dreams of possible interruptions. (L.W.)

Pro tips, contd.

- Please get an objective editor. Having friends read and respond to your book or illustrations may not give you a true market test. (L.W.)
- Get a great lawyer for your contracts. Contracts are crucial. My business IS copyright. Unless my contracts protect my copyright, I have no business. (D.P.)
- Be professional. Work with professionals. Self-publishing should not mean cutting corners. Paul and I worked with a contract similar to a deal you'd receive from a publisher. We set expectations, and we followed through with each other. Your goal should be to have a book that is to the same quality as if traditionally published. (N.P.)
- Work with professionals for legal, editing, illustrations, and publishing that understand the picture booking business. (P.H.)

Pro tips, contd.

- Making our business relationship legal was also a challenge...until we were blessed to find a literary lawyer to draft a fair contract between the two of us. (P.H.)
- The greatest disappointment was the retail cost of the book when printed on demand and sold through Amazon and B&N. The soft cover version sells for \$14.95, and the hardcover \$24.95. Both versions are overpriced and are a deterrent for people interested in purchasing the book. My hope is that we will someday be able to interest a large publisher to print and market the book at a lower cost to the public. (P.H.)
- I was also surprised how small the royalties were when selling via print on demand. I'm glad that 'making money' was not the driving goal for me. Based on the revenues received from retail sales, it will be awhile before we will recover the investment made to publish 'Sam'. (P.H.)

SCBWI – the “trade association” for children’s writing

- National and regional chapters
- Michigan chapter is very active AND has resources for indie publishing PB’s.
- Contact Melissa Bailey at melissa@mbaileyart.com

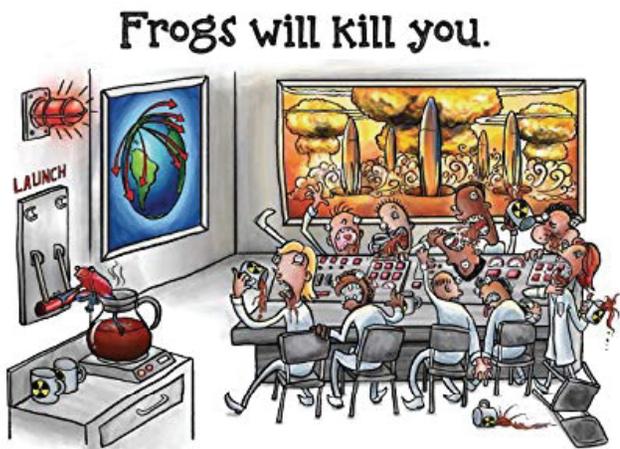


E.g. SCBWI Spark Award Winners

- The Artist Who Loved Cats by Susan Schaefer Bernardo; illus. by Courtenay Fletcher
- This is Our Ocean: The Dream of Clean Seas by Tracy Sabin (author and illustrator)
- The Santa Thief by Alane Adams; illus. by Lauren Gallegos
- Bad Monkey Business by Michael Hale (author and illustrator)
- Beautiful Hands by Bret Baumgarten; illus. by Kathryn Otoshi

Thinking outside the PB box!

- M.C. Tillson's **Ms. McNair's Fantastic Hair** – it doubles as a coloring book!
- Shane Hawley's **ABCDeath** – dark humor and way over 32 pages!
- Bret Baumgarten's **Beautiful Hands** – so simple, so much white space, fingerprint art!



A poison dart frog is two centimeters long and has enough poison in its tiny body to kill 10 adult men. It has enough hate in its heart to kill millions.



What surprised the Pros

- I am surprised by many things! I'm surprised at how much fun indie publishing has been. I'm surprised at how hard it is to believe in yourself. And I'm surprised at the reach that you can have as an indie publisher. My English language books have sold in over 75 countries; books have been translated into Portuguese for the Brazilian market (1 book), Chinese (4 titles) and Korean (7 titles). As my illustrator said, it's a thrill that our work is being read by kids in China! (D.P.)

Surprises, contd.

- The thing that surprised me the most about self-publishing is the flip side of my first answer. When you talk about scale and turning a profit, these projects are challenging, but if you want to bring joy to a child through your work, that is possible. I have parents come up to me and tell me that their kid is obsessed with SAM AND THE SEVEN-POUND PERCH or that they read NORBY AND THE COLLEGE MASCOT every night. For those kids, my work has brought joy and a love for books. Can I be selfish enough to ask for more? (N.P.)

Surprises, contd.

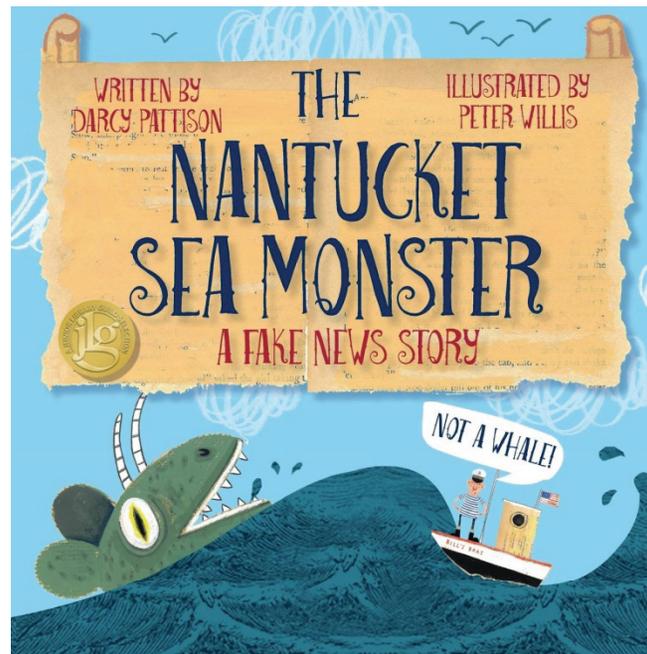
- Although we continue to receive modest royalty checks from sales on Amazon and Barnes and Noble, I have had the privilege to read and discuss Sam's story with over 120 elementary school classes. Needless to say, 'Papa Paul' is having fun! I have donated almost 1,000 hard cover books to classrooms, libraries, and people with young children. Selfishly, I'm receiving far more pleasure than I'm giving! (P.H.)
- Bottom line: Facing the challenges was part of the fun on our journey to achieving a published children's picture book. (P.H.)

FREE Zoom session Oct. 5th!

- Dara Beevas of Wise Ink Creative Publishing will talk about the challenges and successes that are unique to indie publishing as a picture book author, and how indie authors can position themselves as experts and thought leaders even while writing for young audiences. She reveals how the right authors with the right projects can publish picture books with impact to accelerate their personal mission or the movement they're building.
- Zoom link here: <http://mollybethgriffin.com/events/>

Thanks to our “pros”

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- Mudminnow Press (aka Lloyd Wescoat)
- Darcy Pattison
- Melissa Bailey



www.aimeebissonette.com

