

Latinidad™ Newsletter – October 2004: Children's Books

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For lists of agents and editors seeking Latino writers, visit www.marcelalandres.com and click on Writing Opportunities.

1. Saludos

This month's issue of Latinidad™ is dedicated to the many writers who have come to me for advice about children's book publishing. If there's one lesson to be learned from this issue of Latinidad™, let it be this: editors publish either adult or children's books, not both. When you submit your proposal, be sure to send it to an editor who actually acquires children's books. Highlights from this issue include: an interview with a children's books editor in Editor Q&A; an excerpt from an informative article about how to publish a multicultural children's book in Author Spotlight [to read the entire article, visit www.marcelalandres.com, click on Newsletter, scroll down to Author Spotlight, and download file]; and a call for submissions for Latino children's books from HarperCollins in Writing Opportunities.

Helping Latino writers get published,
Marcela Landres
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www.marcelalandres.com

2. Editor Q&A

Louise E. May is Executive Editor at Lee & Low Books, one of the few publishing companies founded and owned by people of color. She has worked with many award-winning writers and illustrators, including David Diaz, Javaka Steptoe, R. Gregory Christie, Robert Casilla, Lynne Barasch, Marcia Vaughan, Joseph Bruchac, and William Miller, among others. She helped launch Lee & Low's annual New Voices Award for first-time writers of color as well as Bebop Books, Lee & Low's educational imprint, which publishes multicultural books exclusively for the beginning reading market. Below she reveals why Lee & Low is a distinctive publisher.

Why is Lee & Low a great home for Latino writers?

Lee & Low specializes in multicultural children's literature. Our goal is to produce books that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. We work closely with authors and artists to ensure that the books we publish are culturally sensitive and factually accurate. Since we began publishing nearly 12 years ago, our books have won numerous awards and honors, including two 2004 Pura Belpré Illustrator Award Honors for artists David Diaz (*The Pot That Juan Built*) and Robert Casilla (*First Day in Grapes*).

As a small independent publisher owned by people of color, our company makes a special effort to reach out to all communities of color and to finding new talent there. Since we began publishing in 1993, our company has published more than 70 authors and artists who are new to the field of children's books. In 2000, we established the annual New Voices Award, given to a writer of color for his or her first picture book.

Since 1994, publishing books in Spanish has been an integral part of our publishing program. In 2004 we began publishing books in English/Spanish bilingual editions. We strongly feel this is a growing area for us.

In addition to our Lee & Low trade list, in 2000 we established an educational imprint, Bebop Books. This is another venue where we look to work with new as well as established writers and artists of color. Books published under this imprint are developed specifically for children just learning to read, and all books are published simultaneously in separate English and Spanish editions. In this way, we make our multicultural books available to the growing Latino market at a time when children are developing their reading skills.

Which Latino authors has Lee & Low Books published?

Lee & Low has published established as well as first time Latino writers and artists. Writers include Pat Mora, Omar S. Castañeda, D. H. Figueredo, and Tony Medina. Artists include David Diaz, Robert Casilla, Felipe Davalos, Pablo Torrecilla, Enrique O. Sanchez, and Paula Barragán. Writer/illustrators include Lulu Delacre, Hector Viveros Lee, and Loretta Lopez.

What kinds of manuscripts do you seek?

The primary focus of our publishing program has been picture books. Starting in fall 2004, we have begun publishing works for middle grade readers as well. At both age groups, genres include fiction (realistic fiction and historical fiction) and nonfiction (poetry, biography, science, and other nonfiction topics as long as they have a multicultural focus). We are particularly interested in character driven stories; that is, we look for projects in which people play a strong role in the story. This applies to both fiction and nonfiction. We prefer that a child be the main character, especially in fiction, although stories about adults or stories that cover the entire life of a person are also of interest. We are looking for unique stories about people/topics that have not been published before for children. We do not publish folklore or animal stories.

How can writers avoid your "Reject" pile and get into your "Pursue" pile?

A manuscript that will catch our attention is one that is well-written and has believable characters, a compelling plot, and a satisfying ending. The manuscript should be professionally presented and fit within our multicultural focus. Writers are encouraged to view our Web site to learn about the kinds of books we publish and our editorial focus so they can judge if their manuscript will fit our list. Specific writer/submission guidelines can be found at www.leeandlow.com/editorial/wguide.html.

Other than honing their craft, what is the smartest step writers can take to become happily published?

Writers should research the topic of their story thoroughly and study the competition to see if other books are published on the subject. If it is a popular topic, then a writer should make sure his or her approach is unique, or it will fail to garner interest. Writers should also research publishers and target their submissions to appropriate companies that publish works similar to theirs. It is also helpful to learn about the children's book publishing industry by joining related organizations, such as the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

Send submissions to: Submissions Editor, Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. For submission guidelines visit www.leeandlow.com/editorial/wguide.html.

Lee & Low web site: <http://www.leeandlow.com/>

More Editor Q&A: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id60.htm>

3. Recommendations

The Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators offers a variety of services that no serious writer or illustrator can do without. A sampling of these services include: regional newsletters, most notably a free online newsletter based in Mexico, which feature announcements about local events; regional conferences and classes in locations such as Arizona and Texas (see Writing Opportunities for examples); and a free manuscript and illustration exchange program which allows members to obtain feedback on their works-in-progress. The SCBWI also sponsors awards and grants, including the Sue Alexander Most Promising New Work Award for unpublished manuscripts, and the Kimberly Colen Memorial Grant for unpublished authors and illustrators.

Web site: <http://www.scbwi.org/>

Offer a recommendation: marcelalandres@yahoo.com

More recommendations: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id25.htm>

4. Author Spotlight

Mayra L. Dole is the author of *Birthday in the Barrio/Cumpleanos en el Barrio*, a follow-up to her critically-acclaimed debut *Drum, Chavi, Drum!/¡Toca, Chavi, Toca!* *Birthday in the Barrio* follows the adventures of Chavi, a plucky Cubanita from Miami, and her best

friend Rosario. Rosario's dad is out of work and can't afford to give her sister, Lazarita, the quinces of her dream. Chavi and Rosario cleverly conspire to enlist their entire neighborhood in organizing a benefit for a homeless shelter that, not coincidentally, is on the same day as Lazarita's birthday. Like Chavi, Dole's energy and enthusiasm are infectious, and she clearly relishes helping others, as evidenced by the many practical tips she offers in the interview below, as well as in her useful and instructive article, "Writing Children's Multicultural Books in 15 Easy Steps."

Which author or book inspires you, and why?

The day I found Zoey Valdez's "I Gave You All I Had" I lost myself in a melodramatic world worthy of a script for the wildest Telenovela in history. Zoey's genius and brilliant metaphors are mind-boggling. Her writing reminds me of growing up in my old barrio, "Home," where exclamations, exaggerations, melodrama, slang, colorful obscenities, morbid fears of strange things such as dying of una embolia from swimming after eating a snack, rule. Home inspires me to write children's books, adult novels y poesia negra. Home can sometimes be as simple as everyday dichos such as: "¿Que te pica?" "¡Le zumba el mango, chica!" or, "¡Si cocinas como caminas me lo como todo!" At a reckless speed, Zoey zooms me Home, that bouncy place deep in my marrow, brimming with passion, lucidity and locura.

Why do you love to write children's books?

I grew up a gutsy Cubanita girl in a lower working-class boy barrio without niñas to play with. When I recall how mercilessly I bossed around my best friend, Antolinsito, and the fun I experienced by not having a typical girly-girl upbringing, I become fired-up to write my bilingual barrio stories. My picture books have Latino kids expressing their true personalities without being gender-molded. I love writing in order to motivate children to think creatively while they have a blast solving challenges. Kids in my picture books and middle grade novels are little rebels that refuse to accept defeat, hence teaching adults what's right and not the other way around. Writing picture books became the first step in helping me develop skills for writing middle-grade, YA and adult novels. Not only is writing for kids fun and gratifying, but in having a voice and being heard by children, an author can help change the world for the better, because I strongly believe that children are our only hope.

How did you meet your agent?

I met my agent, Janell Walden Agyeman, through word of mouth. I pleaded with everyone I knew to ask anyone they met if they knew of an agent. A friend asked a library patron and voila, the rest is history. Don't be shy to ask mail carriers, teachers, grocery store clerks, bank tellers, librarians, neighbors, etc. When I lived in Boston, some taxi drivers, street cleaners and hot-dog vendors had PhD's and some were published authors or knew someone who had an agent. Many agents are famished for Latino writers that have never been published and prefer cover letters with enclosed manuscripts. Other agents prefer snail mail queries and already published writers,

particularly those who've studied the craft in workshops. (Mentioning that you took Marcela Landres' workshops is a huge plus, since she's so highly respected in the literary field.) You can find agents through books and search engines. Email and call them (leave a brief message stating who you are and that you're sending them a snail mail cover letter, synopses of your work and manuscript). Let your voice be heard but don't expect a response. Persevere. Agents take up to six months to get back to you, depending on how passionate they are about your work. Therefore, the more agents you contact, the better your chance of finding one.

What is your writing ritual?

As a teen I wrote whenever inspired and filled notebooks with short stories and poetry, written in broken English and Spanglish. Eight years ago, I started writing my first adult novel (hasn't been published yet) by longhand on four notebooks (1,800 pages, now a YA novel, down to 200 pages) during work breaks on my three jobs. After I purchased my first computer, 6 years ago, I quit longhand. I go to sleep thinking hard about whatever story I'm writing and awaken at 4 am bursting with ideas and dialogue. I unhook my phone, sit to write around 4:01 am, eat breakfast and lunch while writing, and don't stop till around 4 pm. I write to live, so discipline is a must. I let it pour and stop when I must get to work on revising my YA novels, middle grade novels or picture books with critiques from executive editors. For me, writing is a difficult and extraordinarily challenging full-time job (I also write adult articles and poetry for magazines and newsletters). The submitting process and waiting for rejection or approval -- as you all know -- is grueling, but it's work that I love, so I do my best to stay focused and try to write exciting, plot-driven stories that I hope will bring about change, engage/entertain others and myself.

Other than honing their craft, what advice would you give to Latino writers looking to land a book deal?

Write! Write! Write! Write at every spare moment. If you have zero time to write, for a full year stop reading for pleasure and replace it with writing. If you must read, read new award-winning books purely as study guides. One page per day equals 365 pages per year (8 picture books, 2 children's novels or one adult novel). I grew up in a lower working-class semi-illiterate family/barrio that didn't value education and I never read a single book (except school texts), until age 18. Recently, I started "reading" (listening to books on tapes) in order to master valuable skills from the pros. Although my fresh ideas come from never having been exposed to reading in the past, I do understand that reading benefits writers tremendously and gives us an edge in this cutthroat publishing world. (I would have been published much earlier if I had read and learned better English, grammar, and writing skills.) In writing for children, I'd advise you not to preach or teach lessons, but, rather discreetly, have your work ask challenging questions. Write important, plot-driven stories that have never been told. If years pass and you aren't landing a contract, put your work aside and write what the market wants. (Go to amazon.com and find out how many books have been written on the subject you have

chosen.) Once your foot is in the door, you have a better chance to publish what you wish. Before submitting, give your manuscript to ten people for harsh criticism and on the spot comments. Learn to edit (the most important skill I've learned) or hire a professional editor with credentials if you have the means. (Be careful, though: I hear that many online "editors" are rip-off artists.) Rewrite, revise, rework and reedit so that you submit impeccable work. Go through the Writer's Market and Google. Find 50 names and addresses of presses that publish your type of books. Read publishers' Home Pages, familiarize yourself with the books they publish and their Submission Guidelines. For snail mail cover letters, state on the envelope in bold letters LATINO WRITER. Most editors loathe email queries, but a few welcome and prefer them. Under SUBJECT heading, write: "Latino Writer" or something more seductive, such as the type of stories they're looking for that you've written. In your email cover letter or query, introduce yourself professionally in two short sentences and attach a two-sentence synopsis of your manuscript. Make acquisitions editors pant and want to crawl on walls to get to your work before anyone else does. When submitting by snail mail, send your manuscript with SASE and a cover letter. This eliminates much wasted time if they wish to ask you to submit your story to read. If your writing entices them, they will contact you. Persevere. When they respond and ask for your manuscript, only write one sentence back, thanking them. Never bother or burden editors, they are the busiest people on Earth.

BONUS ARTICLE: WRITING CHILDREN'S MULTICULTURAL BOOKS IN 15 EASY STEPS

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My Personal Success Story

Here is how I -- a person raised lower-working class, who grew up in a Cuban barrio without much of a formal education -- published the critically-acclaimed bilingual picture book that's quickly becoming a Latino classic, "Drum, Chavi, Drum!/Toca, Chavi, Toca!" and just released my second multicultural picture book, "Birthday in the Barrio/ Cumpleanos en el Barrio." Is it luck? NO WAY! It is extremely hard work.

If you have passion for the written word, a willingness to perfect your writing skills, and a faaabulous story that's never been told, you're on your way to getting published. All you need is to write a mesmerizing story, with a powerful beginning, brilliant middle, and an explosive end.

LET'S START!

1) Write freely about something you're insanely crazy about that is very YOU -- something you know well -- which is exciting/fun but also has its tender moments and will help children think critically. Think about what you'd like to change in society/the

world. Search in your blood and bones for a semi-autobiographical story/event, set in your own community, and mix it with something from your culture that kids will love. [To read the rest of this informative article, visit www.marcelalandres.com, click on Newsletter, scroll down to Author Spotlight, and download file.]

Read reviews and author bio: www.mayraldole.com

Obtain Birthday in the Barrio: http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0892391944/marcelalandre-20/002-7184168-8844001?dev-t=mason-wrapper%26camp=2025%26link_code=xm2

More Author Spotlights: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id58.htm>

5. Upcoming Workshops

Latino Writers: Publishing Your Work Workshop

WHAT: Finding the right publisher is difficult for any writer, but Latinos face unique challenges--and opportunities. Topics discussed include: the significance of Latinos to mainstream publishers; writing in Spanish vs. English; dealing with the label of "Latino Writer;" how to find a good agent and editor in a non-Latino industry; overcoming cultural and social barriers, especially for Latinas; and the most important thing you can do to ensure the future success of Latino publishing.

WHEN: 8:45a.m.-10:15a.m., Friday, October 8, 2004

WHERE: [NALAC](http://www.nalac.org) Fifth National Conference, Downtown Marriot, Kansas City, Missouri

REGISTER: <http://www.nalac.org>, direct queries to info@nalac.org or 210-432-3982

Invite me to speak for your organization: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id49.htm>

List of upcoming workshops: <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id22.htm>

6. Writing Opportunities

For more calls for submissions, contests, conferences, etc., visit www.marcelalandres.com and click on Writing Opportunities.

HARPERCOLLINS SEEKS LATINO CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Rosemary Brosnan has been publishing children's books by Latino/a authors for many years, and she is interested in finding new novelists for the children's Rayo imprint at HarperCollins. She seeks outstanding fiction for middle-graders (ages 8 to 12) and young adults (ages 12 up), in English, that features Latino and Latina protagonists. Please send manuscripts, with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, to: Rosemary Brosnan, Executive Editor, HarperCollins Publishers/Rayo, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019.

AUSTIN SCBWI CHAPTER FALL CONFERENCE: "FOLLOW ME"

Date: October 16, 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Registration Deadline: October 12

Old Pecan Street Café, 310 East 6th Street Austin, Texas

Confirmed speakers include Judy O'Malley, Executive Editor, Charlesbridge; Sarah Ketchersid, Editor, Candlewick; Mark Siegel, Art Director, Simon and Schuster; and Rosemary Stimola, Literary Agent, Stimola Literary Studio. To register and for more information visit www.austinscbwi.com.

ARIZONA SCBWI CHAPTER MEETING: "THE EXPERIENCE OF GETTING PUBLISHED BY A SMALL PRESS"

Date: October 23, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Registration Deadline: October 15

Changing Hands Bookstore, Tempe, AZ, with Author Annie Weissman. Members: \$5; Nonmembers: \$7. To register email Michelle Parker-Rock at rascbwiaz@aol.com

NEW VOICES AWARD FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Deadline: October 31, 2004

Lee & Low Books, the award-winning publisher of multicultural books for children, is pleased to announce the fifth annual New Voices Award. The Award will be given for a children's picture book story by a writer of color. The Award winner will receive a cash grant of \$1,000 and our standard publication contract, including their standard advance and royalties. An Honor Award winner will receive a cash grant of \$500. For guidelines and more information visit <http://www.leeandlow.com/editorial/voices.html>.

TV SHOW SEEKS LATINO BOOKS

Edna Campos Gravenhorst will be reviewing books by Latino writers to feature in a three minute segment once a month on Enterate, a Spanish variety show hosted by Gilberto Pinela. The book has to be complete and in paperback or hardback; self published writers will get special consideration. Please mail books to: Edna Campos Gravenhorst, 3150 Ohio Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118. Be sure to include contact information so we can inform you if your book gets chosen to be featured on the show. We will only accept books that are sent to us at no charge and we will not be returning books. The books will be used as reading material by Gilberto Pinela when he reads to students in city schools to expose minority students to Latino authors. The books will then be donated to a Hispanic organization in St. Louis. The show will be expanding into other markets across the country, and there is a commitment for the show to run for an entire year starting October 2004. We are looking forward to promoting your books.

PLUME SEEKS LATINA FICTION

Plume, an imprint of the Penguin Group, has a long tradition of publishing great works about and by strong women, including the novels of Julia Alvarez, Toni Morrison,

Dorothy Allison, and Joyce Carol Oates. We are always looking for new talent and are especially interested in Latina fiction. We are seeking both new and previously published authors who have a completed manuscript, especially women's fiction, both commercial and literary. Other categories that we will consider are literary memoirs and erotic fiction. If you would like to have your manuscript considered, please email a one page synopsis, sample chapter, and a short author's bio to Emily Haynes at emily.haynes@us.penguingroup.com. You can also send a query letter by mail to her attention at: Plume, 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014. She will be in touch with you if she wants to request the manuscript. Please do not send short stories, screenplays, or poetry as we are not looking for work in these areas. You can check out the Penguin Group website at www.penguingroup.com.

PUBLICITY & SPEAKERS BUREAU FOR ARTISTS AND WRITERS

Margaret Porter Troupe is the founder of a Publicity & Speakers Bureau which arranges press coverage and interviews for emerging and established authors and artists. As a complement to that, she has a literary & visual arts salon in Harlem where she hosts book signings and mounts art exhibits. At these events distinguished authors read their works and meet their audience in an intimate setting. She also exhibits paintings and other art by visual artists. To date, her guests have included Ishmael Reed (book signing), Mildred Howard (art exhibit), and Hugh Masekela (book signing). Upcoming is a book signing and art exhibit with Amiri Baraka on 12/12/04. Writers and artists interested in working with Margaret can contact her at 212-749-7771 or mptroupe@yahoo.com.

WANT A JOB IN BOOK PUBLISHING?

The Association of American Publishers (AAP) has launched a national campaign to increase diversity in every corner of the book publishing industry. The centerpiece of the Book Yourself a Career campaign is www.Bookjobs.com, a website that provides entry-level job listings from virtually every major book publisher in the U.S., along with a wealth of information about the industry. With nearly 300 companies listing jobs—including Bookspan, Elsevier, HarperCollins, Holtzbrinck, Houghton Mifflin, McGraw-Hill, Pearson Education, Penguin, Random House, Simon & Schuster, Time Warner, John Wiley & Sons, and a host of others – the website is a true “one stop shopping” resource for anyone seeking a career in book publishing. For more information visit <http://www.bookjobs.com/> and <http://www.publishers.org/>.

THE BOOK OF LATINA WOMEN BY SYLVIA MENDOZA

Award-winning Latina journalist Sylvia Mendoza is the author of The Book Of Latina Women, one of the most humbling and inspiring projects she has ever worked on. The Book of Latina Women highlights the contributions of 150 fabulous Latina women whose accomplishments in history, science, politics, art, and entertainment--past and present--have impacted the world. From political leaders like Eva Perón, who ruled Argentina with flamboyance and an iron fist, to pioneers like France Anne Cordova, the youngest person to ever hold the Chief Scientist position at NASA, The Book of Latina Women provides a

unique perspective on Latina women from all periods in history and all walks of life. For more information visit www.sylvia-mendoza.com.

TE DE CANELA/CINNAMON TEA BY EDNA CAMPOS GRAVENHORST

www.tedecanela.com

Te de Canela is a collection of essays, short stories and poems about Edna Campos Gravenhorst's experience of growing up in a Mexican American family in the United States. Her mother and her parents were born in America, her father was born and raised in Mexico. She was very fortunate to grow up in two different cultures, and in Te de Canela she shares life lessons that cross over many cultures.

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Borders Books & Music - Fairview Heights, Illinois

Left Bank Books - St. Louis, Missouri

Hastings Books - McAllen, Texas

Your Local Bookstore - By Special Order, ISBN 0-9745346-1-7

Also by Edna Campos Gravenhorst, Historical Home Research in the City of St. Louis, ISBN 0-9745346-0-9. She encourages Latino writers to self publish and get out there and market your work! Thank you to all of you for your support.

POST AN ANNOUNCEMENT IN LATINIDAD™

E-mail announcements about contests, calls for submissions, conferences, jobs, book publications, literary events, etc., to marcelalandres@yahoo.com.

BACK ISSUES

All back issues are available at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/marcelalandres/>.

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If so, forward it to friends and colleagues. If not, take the Newsletter Survey on <http://www.marcelalandres.com/id59.htm> and share what doesn't work and why.

"Only a person who does absolutely nothing, never makes a mistake."

--Mexican Proverb

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