



Read Local Webinar: May 8, 2018



A Conversation with Picture Book Authors
Sue Fliess, author of *Race!*,
Megan Wagner Lloyd, author
of *Fort Building Time*, &
Veronica Bartles, author of
The Princess and the Frogs



webinar begins about the 5-min mark

In our May 8, 2018 Read Local webinar, we experienced some technical difficulties and audio issues. To make sure you didn't miss any of the answers from our authors, we asked them to briefly answer some of the most-asked questions from the webinar again here.

Q: What was the inspiration for your book?

Sue Fliess: My older son. When he was 3, always played with his cars. He walked around with a Matchbox car in each hand, napped with them, and raced/smashed them up. I knew I wanted to do a story about a boy and his cars.

Megan Lloyd: I wanted to celebrate creative play, building forts, and the four seasons.

Veronica Bartles: I was writing a young adult novel, with the working title "Kissing Frogs." One day, I got very frustrated, feeling like I was never going to get the story just right ... and I started playing with ideas. I wondered... "Everyone says you have to keep kissing frogs until you find a prince ... but what if that isn't the happy ending you want? What if there was a princess who just wanted a frog? But what if she loved them so much that she kept kissing them goodnight? And what if they kept turning into princes until she had a whole castle full of princes and no frogs for a pet?" – That novel I was writing didn't end up selling, but it inspired both my picture book, *THE PRINCESS AND THE FROGS*, and my debut young adult novel, *TWELVE STEPS*, so one "failure" ended up turning into two published books!

Q: What do you hope readers will take away from your book?

SF: I hope readers enjoy the world that Max has built, and have fun going back and forth from his track at the end, to all the clues along the way--and figure out the puzzle or solve the mystery of what each race track obstacle was. I also hope they learn that being small doesn't mean you can't conquer all!

ML: I hope that kids will be inspired to play creatively (as opposed to spending more time on screens) and that adults will want to build a fort with their kids/grandkids, etc.

VB: I hope they'll be brave enough to be themselves, and to find their own happy endings, even if it doesn't fit with the "happily ever after" that everyone else says they should want.

Q: Do any of the books you write come from your own childhood?

SF: My book *A Fairy Friend*, came straight from my love of miniature creatures as a kid. It wasn't limited to fairies, however. I always hoped to find any kind of tiny creature, real or imaginary, magical or not. *A Fairy Friend* is about a girl who is entranced with fairies, so she builds them a fairy house to attract them.

ML: Yes--all of them are deeply connected to my childhood as an imaginative, bookworm kid.

VB: In a way, everything is inspired by my life. I wasn't ever a princess, but I did spend almost every day in the summers catching toads in the field behind my house, and I always seem to be looking for the "happily ever after" that doesn't quite fit the fairy tale everyone else is chasing.

Q: How long does it take you to complete one of your books?

SF: Anywhere between 1 month to 1 year. I write in bursts and have multiple projects going at the same time. Sometimes manuscripts fly out onto the paper, sometimes they need to marinate.

ML: From six months to four years, though I work on many projects at once, so that's not continuously.

VB: I can sometimes write a first-draft in a day or two, but it usually takes at least a year before something is finished. (It was almost exactly five years from the time I wrote my first draft of *THE PRINCESS AND THE FROGS* to the time it was published!) That's why I always have at least four or five books that I'm working on at any given time.

Q: When you begin writing a picture book, do you know what the ending will be?

SF: Usually, but I try to think of a few different endings, in case the one I've chosen doesn't work out. And then, once it gets to my writing group, or my agent, or an editor, the ending could still morph into something else.

ML: It just depends on the story. Usually not, as I'm better at writing beginnings than endings. I usually have to revise the last half of the book way more than the first half.

VB: I always *think* I know what the ending will be, but it almost always changes by the time I'm finished writing.

Q: Sue, what kind of illustration notes did you send in to let the editor know what you wanted to communicate about *RACE*?

SF: I sent in a lot of notes, but tried to just make 'suggestions' as to what could be happening for each scene, to give the illustrator leeway as far as what he chose to do. The overall note was just the synopsis, that we see a race that will have ordinary/household objects as the course, and we have a big reveal in the end that it's a boy playing with his cars.

VB: Interesting! I didn't send in any illustration notes for my book, although I did get to talk to the publisher before they found an illustrator, to make sure we had the same vision in mind for the finished story.

Q: What was your process like in finding an agent? How long was the journey from when you started writing until you sold your first manuscript?

SF: I was submitting manuscripts to editors and agents at the same time. I was fortunate enough to have been home and not working full-time at the time I was doing this (though I was home with 2 toddlers!!). From the time I started writing, to when I landed an agent was about 4 years. But I sold my first manuscript Shoes for Me! on my own, after 3.5 years.

ML: I briefly met my agent, Ammi-Joan Paquette, at an SCBWI Conference in Oakland, CA. Years later, I queried her through the agency website. It took me about 11 years from when I started writing to when I sold my first book, Finding Wild.

VB: I met my agent online, talking about cheese and fun recipes long before I ever sent her any of my writing. A couple of years later, I had a manuscript that I just knew she would love (I had written several manuscripts in the meantime), so I entered it into an online pitch contest that I knew she was participating in. And we ended up talking on Twitter even during that contest – but she didn't see my pitch and didn't request it! I sent her a query letter anyway, and the rest was history! Publishing is not a quick process. It took nearly 6 years from the time I wrote my first manuscript (not counting the books I wrote in high school or college, before I let fear keep me from writing for 10 years) until my first book (my young adult novel, TWELVE STEPS) was published.

Q: What is your one last piece of advice for your readers & those who want to be writers/illustrators, as we say goodbye?

SF: You are the only one who can tell your story. Start writing it now!

ML: Enjoy the journey and keep on keeping on! Even after you are published, there are new challenges and struggles--so just take everything one step at a time and work to improve your craft the best you can along the way.

VB: Every one of the best things that's happened in my life came at the end of some really difficult trial. Don't give up, even when it looks like you can't possibly win. Because the only way to lose is to stop trying!