

Writer's Digest Debut Author Interview by Chuck Sambuchino

I love debut author interviews. I think illuminating the journey of these authors can help show a path to success that you can emulate and follow. Today, our interview is with middle grade author Marcia Strykowski.

Marcia works at a public library. Earlier between earning her BS in Fine Arts and raising her children, she worked for seven years in textbook publishing. After numerous magazine and anthology contributions, *CALL ME AMY* (Luminis Books, May 2013) is her first novel (middle grade). Publishers Weekly said, "Strykowski lovingly captures seaside Maine and the travails of adolescence in her quiet, sweet-natured debut novel." The book was also praised by Booklist, Kirkus and Midwest Book Review. A second book about Amy is scheduled for a fall 2014 release. To learn more about the author and her books, visit www.marciastrykowski.com.

What is the book's genre/category?

Middle grade fiction.

(Looking for a middle grade agent? Marie Lamba of Jennifer De Chiara Literary reps MG.)

Please describe what the story/book is about in one sentence.

A shy 13-year old, living in a small fishing village on the coast of Maine in 1973, helps a wounded seal pup and discovers that everyone, herself included, has a voice worth hearing.

Where do you write from?

My favorite place to write is on the coast of New England, perched on a rock.

Briefly, what led up to this book?

The setting for *Call Me Amy* developed from strong memories of my grandparents' home on the coast of Maine. This story was one of my earliest attempts at writing and kept evolving over the years until it became a children's novel. I had many short stories published in magazines and anthologies, before I took the time to complete *Call Me Amy*.

What was the time frame for writing this book?

The first inklings of *Call Me Amy* began almost 20 years ago. Every so often I would pick it up again in between other writing projects, raising children, and working at a public library. With great affection, I always returned to Amy, and eventually it became the book it is today. It can take forever to send out manuscripts, since some publishers don't allow simultaneous submissions (one editor declined after 3 years) so it was good I kept busy with other things!

How did you find your agent (and who is your agent)?

I don't have an agent. After receiving positive feedback from several editors at large publishing houses, I decided to try a few more companies that were open to submissions. I received 'the call' from Luminis Books in January 2012. They answered all my questions in a professional and knowledgeable manner. I happily signed the contract and never looked back.

What were your 1-2 biggest learning experience(s) or surprise(s) throughout the publishing process?

On different levels, I've been involved with publishing for years, so no real surprises, but I am finally learning that most of what I worry about (will the book be on time, will it look OK, etc.) is never a problem.

Looking back, what did you do right that helped you break in?

I kept polishing my manuscripts and I didn't give up. I also participated in critique groups and volunteered at SCBWI conferences.

(Find a writers' conference near you and pitch publishing pros.)

On that note, what would you have done differently if you could do it again?

I might attempt to have a more disciplined writing schedule (I'm still working on that!). I would also be more patient. Better to have a completely polished manuscript and make a great first impression than to send work out before it's ready.

Did you have a platform in place?

I started my website about a year before *Call Me Amy* was released. I also participate on Facebook, Goodreads, and Verla Kay Message Boards. Working at a library is helpful, too, because I get to spread the word among fellow librarians and patrons.

Best piece(s) of advice for writers trying to break in?

Don't give up and don't send your work out until it's as good as your favorite book. Also, there is no one way to write. Many authors are long-winded and later have to chop a lot of words. I write sparingly from beginning to end and then go back and plump up all the chapters. Do what works for you.

Something personal about you people may be surprised to know?

I got to pat Baby Shamu (the first killer whale born and raised in captivity) at her incredible birthday celebration. This came about after creating a prizewinning greeting card and singing my birthday wishes to her on the radio.

Favorite movie?

Just to get away with picking three, I'll choose the amazing Lord of the Rings trilogy.

Website(s)?

www.marciastrykowski.com

What's next?

I am excited to announce that a second book about Amy will be published by Luminis Books in fall 2014. I'm also polishing several picture book manuscripts.