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Story Monsters Ink



The Literary Resource for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents

JASON THARP

ENCOURAGES KIDS TO BE THE UNICORN

**SHARON LANGLEY
AND AMY NATHAN**

TELL A STORY WE'LL NEVER FORGET

ROB HARRELL

WRITES AN INSPIRING STORY
OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SURVIVAL

ANNA PIGNATARO

PENS A HEARTWARMING
STORY OF KINDNESS
AND EMPATHY

ONE TO WATCH:

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MARTHA and **ANN DRISCOLL**

SHARE THEIR LOVE OF LEARNING WITH LITTLE READERS

MICHAEL J. ARMSTRONG

DEBUTS HIS BEST BOOK EVER

NATHAN HALE

BRINGS HISTORY TO LIFE IN
GRAPHIC NOVEL SERIES

TEACHING TOOLBOX

THE SEED OF A STORY

JUDY NEWMAN

SPRING BREAK





Martha and Ann Driscoll

Share Their Love of Learning with Little Readers

by Melissa Fales

Collaboration can be a challenge for any writers, but when you add family dynamics to the mix, things can become especially complicated. The mother/daughter team of Martha and Ann Driscoll acknowledge that it took some time to sort out their individual roles and learn how to work together, but the result has been two award-winning books: *Nosey's Wild Ride on the Belle of Louisville* and *Sammy the Seahorse*. “Even though I’m an adult, we still have a parent/child relationship,” says Ann. “That had to evolve into a relationship as creative peers. We had to learn to work together and to respect each other’s difference of opinion.”

Martha and her husband raised Ann and their other three daughters with a steady stream of books. “Our house had floor-to-ceiling bookcases in the family room and every week we’d go to the public library and take out as many books as we could carry,” recalls Ann. “Reading was incredibly important in our home. We were taught to love books.”

According to Martha, who taught in elementary schools for 10 years, ran a reading clinic for at-risk kids, and taught Reading and Language Arts at Spalding University for 27 years, she never made a special effort to get her children reading. “Books were just a part of our life,” she says. “Reading was just one of those things we did without question.” Ann grew up to be an educator just like her mother, and is currently the assistant provost at Keene State College. For her, it was about choosing a job that would help her make the world a better place. “I just love helping people be their best selves and be successful at life,” she says. “The classroom is one very powerful way to do that.”

The two began working on books together when Ann’s father became ill. That’s when Martha showed Ann a rough draft of a story she had recently begun working on again after starting it more than 50 years ago. “She had put it aside while she raised her

family,” says Ann. It was about the Belle of Louisville, a beautiful steamboat Martha had admired her whole life.

Martha is visually impaired and can’t see a computer screen well enough to use one, so she writes her stories out in long hand. “She has a particular black pen she uses,” says Ann. “She writes on every other line of a white legal pad. Then she hands it to me. I can’t even describe the stacks of pages I’ve transcribed.” The act of transcription gave Ann the opportunity to suggest edits.

Having a project to work on gave them something positive to focus on. “We’d spend as much time with my dad as possible,” says Ann. “Then during the evenings and on the weekends, we’d take the phone off the hook and sit down and work on the book.” The result was *Nosey’s Wild Ride on the Belle of Louisville*. It earned the Story Monsters Approved seal and Mom’s Choice Gold Award in 2016, and the Literary Classics Gold Award and Creative Child Magazine Seal of Excellence Award in 2017.

Nosey’s Wild Ride on the Belle of Louisville was published in 2014, just in time for Louisville’s 100th birthday celebration for the Belle. “It seemed like there ought to be something for kids to take home after they’d been on the Belle,” says Martha. “It’s a historical treasure, but there were no children’s books about it. I thought it would be fun to write one.” “That’s my mother,” adds Ann. “Forever the teacher.”

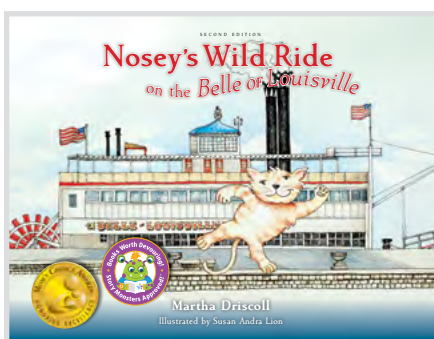
The pair was in disagreement about the book’s storyline. “Did we want it to be an inventory of every nut and bolt of the Belle?” says Ann. “Or, did we want to tell a story

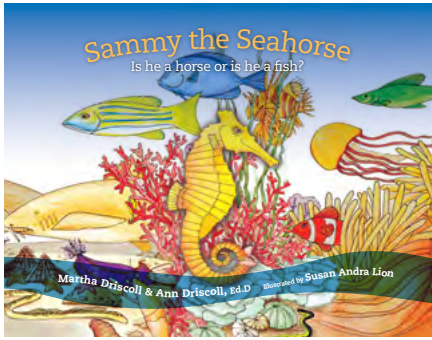


about a steamboat and the Belle happens to be it?” Feedback from others was overwhelmingly in favor of the book telling a story. “Of course, they said the same thing I’d been saying but she had to hear it from other people,” Ann jokes. Martha came up with the idea to have a cat onboard the Belle for children to chase around, providing the opportunity to show readers the steamboat’s many features.

The two took regular, reconnaissance trips on the Belle. “We wanted to make sure we had the facts just right,” says Martha. “Accuracy is very important to us.” They were there so frequently, they got to know the Belle’s resident historian and even met her sister, award-winning illustrator, Susan Andra Lion, who went on to illustrate *Nosey’s Wild Ride on the Belle of Louisville*.

Lion also illustrated the Driscolls’ second book, *Sammy the Seahorse*. “Adults seem to love it as much as kids do,” says Ann. Martha and Ann believe that some of the book’s appeal lies in the high expectations they set for the children who read it. “Sammy the Seahorse doesn’t





speak to children in a childish way,” says Ann. “We respect children enough to know that they can handle some big words....We don’t talk down to them or present the information in a diminished way.”

The inspiration for *Sammy the Seahorse* came from Martha’s lifelong interest in the creature. After the pair published *Nosey’s Wild Ride on the Belle of Louisville*, they felt a void in their lives. Martha, in particular, was eager to dive into another book, with Ann’s help. “After she worked all day, I thought she could come home and work some more,” says Martha. “I’ve been crazy about seahorses forever but once I began to think about how much I didn’t know about them, I had to learn. And I thought it would be fun to write a story about them.”

Again, the two began painstaking research. *Sammy the Seahorse* is filled with fascinating facts about seahorses, and, like *Nosey’s Wild Ride on the Belle of Louisville*, includes a glossary at the end. *Sammy the Seahorse* earned the Mom’s Choice Gold Award in 2017 and the Literary Classics Gold Award, Purple Dragonfly First Place Award, Story Monsters Approved seal, and Creative Child Magazine Book of the Year in the Educational Storybooks Category in 2018.

The duo is currently at work on their third book, *Rosa’s Monarch*

Butterfly. “There really was a Rosa,” says Martha. “She wasn’t accepted by the other students in her class because she was different.” But then, during a unit on butterflies, Rosa brought in a monarch butterfly chrysalis. “Suddenly, everyone wanted to be her friend,” says Martha. “Overnight, she went from the girl with no friends to the most popular child in her class. I’ve often wished I could see her as a woman and see what she remembers about it. It was one of the most beautiful things I’ve ever experienced.” The pair wants the book to teach the life cycle of the butterfly and they’re exploring ideas on how to include the true story of Rosa and her own transformation.

At 94 years old, Martha is delighted to be pursuing a lifelong interest. “When I was in college, I thought I

wanted to be a writer until I got an offer to teach that was too good to turn down,” she says. “But writing was always in the background for me. I’m glad I have the chance to do it now and it’s just the greatest thing to be able to do something like this with one of my children.”

By her own account, Ann has hundreds of journals of her own writing, mostly poetry. “But the only things I’ve ever published have been with my mom,” she says. “This experience is something I really treasure. To have created these books with her has been an extraordinary gift. We’ve learned so much together. And we’re still learning.”

For more information about Ann and Martha Driscoll and their books, visit driscollpublishing.com. ●

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