

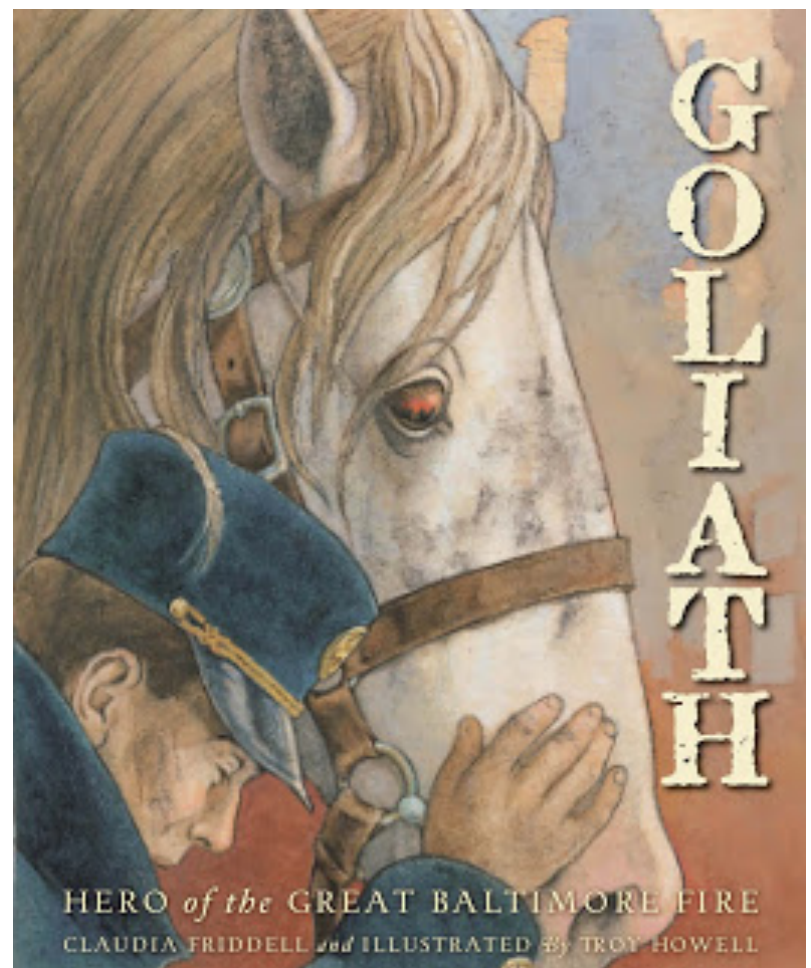
A Retreat (SCBWI-Arizona), A TeachingAuthor (Claudia Friddell), a Hero and Book Give-away (Goliath), Oh, My!

In March, 2006, Sharon Darrow and I facilitated the [SCBWI-Arizona](#) Spring Retreat we'd purposefully titled "Mining for Gold: Re-visioning Your Writing and Your Writer's Life."

But I mined gold, too, that last week of March, when I connected with writer [Claudia Friddell](#) of Baltimore, Maryland.

Claudia had arrived with an eye-opening, little-known story about the fire horse Goliath – the horse that had saved Baltimore during the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904. Claudia's heart beat loudly each time she spoke about Goliath, when she shared her research, when she read aloud her fictional tale. I knew instantly she had a winner of a story – only a *non-fiction* telling true to horse and event.

During the next four years, Claudia continued to teach First Grade at the Gilman School, a private boys school in Baltimore, worked with me as a Writing Coach to fine-tune and revision her non-fictional telling, researched and smartly targeted likely publishers at BookExpo in Washington, D.C., then sold her polished gem [Goliath: Hero of the Great Baltimore Fire](#) to Sleeping Bear Press. The picture book, gorgeously illustrated by [Troy Howell](#), published May 1 to stellar reviews. Each time I reread the book, I marvel at the "You-are-There!" experience Claudia created. Her verbs and sound words would make any teacher smile.



I couldn't wait to introduce Claudia Friddell, TeachingAuthor, former student, now friend and colleague, to our TeachingAuthor readers!

Sleeping Bear Press generously agreed to donate an autographed copy of Claudia's book, to be awarded to one of our lucky readers. To be eligible, post a comment by 11 pm CST, Tuesday, June 29 about a Writing Conference you've attended or *wish* to attend. We'll

announce the winner on June 30. If you don't have a Google profile, please include an email address to qualify. (Note from Carmela: drawing entry comments must be made to today's blog post. So if you previously commented regarding a conference you recommended, you'll need to re-post to enter the drawing. Also, this is for U.S. residents only. To read our complete giveaway guidelines, see: [this post](#).)

Thank you, Claudia, for agreeing to this TeachingAuthor interview.

And, thank you, Michelle Parker-Rock, SCBWI-Arizona Regional Advisor, for orchestrating that March, 2006 truly golden Spring Retreat.

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1. How did you become a TeachingAuthor?

Two constants in my adult life have been teaching and writing. Four years ago, I had the great fortune to receive a sabbatical from my school to concentrate on researching and writing books. One of the books I wrote during that semester was *Goliath, Hero of the Great Baltimore Fire*. I also attended an SCBWI Writer's Retreat in Arizona, where I met Esther Hershenhorn. Right from the start, Esther treated me, and all of the participants, as professionals. She helped me believe in myself as a writer and her encouragement inspired me along the way to getting *Goliath* published. A few months later, I met Heather Hughes, the publisher of Sleeping Bear Press, at the Book Expo in Washington D.C. I loved their books and felt that Sleeping Bear would be the perfect home for *Goliath*. Fortunately for me, the folks at SBP agreed! I couldn't have asked for a better experience as a first time author!

2. What's a common problem/question that your students have and how do you address it?

My students are at the very beginning of their journeys as writers, and it is difficult for them to offer details, especially when writing journal entries and stories. They write a few minutes, stall, and say, "I don't know what else to write." Of course they can verbally offer lots of specifics, but when it is time to put pencil to paper, they often write sentences like, "We played a game. It was fun." To help them include more details, I encourage them to try their best to answer the five W's in their writing: who, what, where, when, and why. This simple suggestion helps guide them in creating interesting and informative sentences.

3. Would you share a favorite writing exercise for our readers?

One of my favorite lessons is our recipe unit which teaches students to write lists and directions. The purpose is to help students write important details by choosing words carefully. First, I ask the students to write down the steps to making a peanut butter (or soy nut butter!) and jelly sandwich. I read one student recipe aloud and with the ingredients, I follow the written directions exactly. If they write, "Put peanut butter on bread," I put the jar of peanut butter on the loaf of bread. You can imagine all of the ridiculous interpretations a teacher can make with vague directions. The demonstration can get very messy and hilarious! The students then correct their own writing by making their directions (especially their verbs!) more specific - "Spread peanut butter on one side of one slice of bread with a knife." Of course, the students get to make and eat their own sandwiches when they are finished writing their own detailed directions!

4. What one piece of advice do you have for teachers?



My advice to teachers is to allow students to write in a journal as often as possible without editing their entries. Ignore the misspelled words and the run on sentences. Offer only encouragement and focus on their strengths. There is plenty of opportunity to correct and edit writing assignments, but it is important to remember that a journal is the place for writers to have the freedom to take risks without the fear of being critiqued.

5. Can you share an important story about a book signing?

One of the most exciting aspects of being a teacher/author has been sharing the launching of Goliath with many of my students, former students, and their families. Since Goliath was a fire horse in the 1904 fire that nearly destroyed Baltimore, we had the launch party at the Fire Museum of Maryland. This was the perfect place for children and

adults to see what turn-of-the-century fire houses and equipment looked like. They were excited to see the Hale Water Tower that Goliath pulled to safety, but the biggest hit of the day was Sam, the one ton Percheron draft horse (just like Goliath!). This gentle giant helped greet the visitors at the fire museum door. It was quite a treat to see my students meet such a magnificent (one ton!) horse! My students and their parents are still talking about Sam!

To “attend” the signing, click [here](#).

Esther Hershenhorn

A Very Long P.S.

The substance of Jeanne Marie’s Monday post was much on my mind as I readied this interview and I must share why.

In 1989, I flew aboard a small plane from La Guardia to Poughkeepsie, NY to attend the Vassar Children’s Book Publishing Institute, THE best children’s book writing program at that time, created by Barbara Lucas, the former head of Harcourt’s Children’s Book Publishing when it had a Brace and a Jovanovich. I’d declared the program My Final Test: would/should/could I keep on writing for children – or – must I now join the staff of a children’s bookstore? I’d been writing for 12 years and publication of my work still proved elusive. I was so undone by my perceived ineptitude and un-readiness, so certain I was “less than,” I spent the entire plane ride throwing up. The stewardess had to find extra paper bags.

I’d studied the attendee list, found a writer from my sister’s Pennsylvania home town, readied an introduction for the opening social event, only to learn my sister’s neighbor “knew nothing about children’s books” yet had 3 books coming out with Harper and Row, one illustrated by William Joyce, another by Hillary Knight.

I was sipping Chardonnary, feigning great interest, but mentally planning my return home the next morning, by train (!), when a conference faculty member sought me out, sharing the news that Barbara Lucas had made an exception, giving her special permission to work with me privately, they had both deemed my submitted novel that close to publication.

I attended the Vassar Institute 3 Junes in a row, still unpublished. Posters from The Original Art Exhibition which celebrated The Fine Art of Children’s Book Illustration

had graced our classroom all 3 years. To show her Faith in me as a writer, the last year Barbara gifted me with my favorite. It was illustrator Troy Howell's image of a beautiful black-top-hatted little boy, breasting an open book, surrounded by a possibility-filled sky. The magic was palpable. I later learned Mr. Howell created the poster to celebrate the exhibition's 10th anniversary; the little boy was his.



I've worked at my writer's desk beneath that beautifully-framed poster for 19 years.

Imagine my smile, my delight, my sigh when Claudia told me Troy Howell was illustrating her Goliath.

The delicious Karma of our Children's Book World continues to amaze me.