

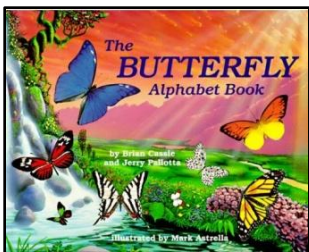
Lunches with Two Authors by Linda Redding

Brian Cassie

I caught up with science author and educator Brian Cassie in Plymouth this winter at the rare sighting of an Ivory Gull.

One book that I keep in my car for quick reference is the *National Audubon Society Field Guide to New England* that you wrote along with Peter Alden. You have also authored a couple of other field guides. Does the writing of a field guide differ than writing a book like *Say It Again*, *The Butterfly Alphabet Book*, or *Tornadoes*?

Writing a field guide is all about getting the facts straight. Don't get it right and your credibility is shot. So it is weeks of choosing material, writing about it, matching up photos to text, and having editors say, "We need one more line." Editors are indispensable and make good books better.



***Say It Again* is a wonderful book to read to early readers. What inspired you to write an animal book in rhyme?**

I wrote this book as a story about a brother and sister who end up visiting a land where all of the animals have double names. I

liked the idea but the editor chucked all the "story" text, also in verse, in the trash and just kept the poems. Oh well. But your real question was why rhyming and the answer is because I like rhymes. I wrote a poem a day for quite a spell. Maybe I'll find them and look them over. Thanks for reminding me.

A few years ago you were facilitating an after school nature program for students in Halifax and presenting professional developments workshops to the teachers. Now, you are back in the classroom. How does it feel to be back?

I am in the classroom but not technically back in the classroom, as this is my first teaching job. The students and their parents are very appreciative of my work and our work together and so it is most worthwhile and fun being a science teacher.

What did you think of the Ivory Gull visiting Plymouth, MA this winter?

Ivory Gulls of any age are a rare sight in New England. Two adult Ivory Gulls at the same time in Massachusetts....one in Plymouth and the other in Gloucester....was magical. Of course, I went to see both of them and loved my time viewing them.

What projects are you working on now?

Right now my #1 writing project is in the research phase...and has been for many years. I am gathering information on the seashells of New England for a popular book on the subject. Most of the data I have is my own and is based on thousands of hours of fieldwork and lab work. I wrote *The Butterfly Alphabet Book* in four hours. This book has taken ten years...so far!

For more information about Brian Cassie visit:
<http://www.charlesbridge.com/>

Peter Arenstam

Plympton Public Library recently hosted a visit by author and captain of the *Mayflower II*, Peter Arenstam.

You have written both fiction and nonfiction. Do you approach each in the same manner?

Both forms of writing require a fair amount of research before I start writing. It is just as important to get facts and real information for setting scenes in an authentic fashion in fiction as non-fiction. With *Mayflower 1620*, much of the information we needed for writing the book was available to us at my work place, Plimoth Plantation. Of course sailing the ship to get an authentic feel for what it must have been like for passengers on the 1620 voyage was about the best kind of research there is.

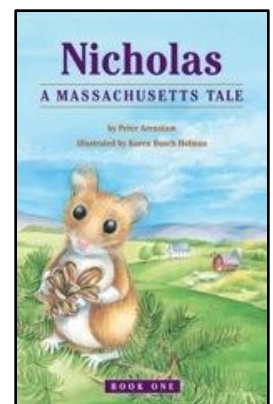
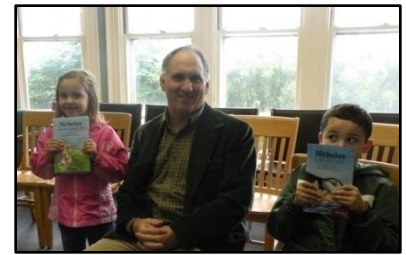
Do you find one easier to write than the other?

I enjoy writing both kinds of work and feel there is as much a creative element to non-fiction writing as fiction. I do like the freedom of fiction however. If I want Nicholas to visit a certain location, that's the way I write it. With the *Mayflower* story, what happened, where the ship went and when it traveled is all pretty much established.

Children reading the Nicholas series are being introduced to the New England states through the adventures of the little mouse. What types of things did you take into consideration when first creating the character of Nicholas and deciding where Nicholas would be travel?

I was careful to research as much as I could about the life cycle of mice, where they live, what they eat and most importantly, who likes to eat them. It would not make a very authentic story to have Nicholas, a tiny field mouse, becomes friends with a barn owl. They probably wouldn't remain friends for very long.

Deciding where Nicholas would travel in each state started with a map and the desire to write about as much of each state as I could. I also wanted to write about areas of the states that were perhaps less well known. I quickly realized, given the length of each book and the rich variety in each state, that I would only be able to cover a small percentage, geographically, of any particular place. I did travel around each state a great deal before starting to write. I tried to imagine a little mouse and how he would manage to get from place to place without running into too many predators.



The cat in *Felix and His Mayflower Adventures* is based on a cat that actually traveled on the *Mayflower II*. What primary sources were you able to use to help guide you in writing the story?

The fun part about writing this book was that I was able to talk with some of the surviving crewmen from the voyage and got a great deal of first hand information about little Felix. Joe Meaney, the American cabin boy in the story takes care of Felix, lives nearby Plymouth and visits *Mayflower II* on occasion, with his wife Anne.

There is also a large amount of written material about the voyage of *Mayflower II*. *National Geographic* produced two articles for their magazine, *Life Magazine* had a reporter and photographer aboard the ship for the voyage, and some of the crew wrote books about their experiences sailing across the Atlantic.

Seeing the *Mayflower II* out at sea is an amazing sight. What was it like to work on the book, *Mayflower 1620: A New Look at a Pilgrim Voyage*?

I have only seen *Mayflower* sailing from pictures after the fact, as I have been aboard the ship when those photos were taken. No matter how many times we sail the ship it is always a breathtaking experience. The ship truly comes alive when we head out to sea. The roll of the deck, the pull of the sails and the hum of the rigging is a kind of musical experience that I never tire of.

Describe a typical day for you as Captain of the *Mayflower II*?

Having just written my previous answer I must say that a typical day aboard *Mayflower II* is, in some ways, the complete opposite experience. My day is full dealing with the endless needs of an aging wooden vessel. There is always painting to do, repairs to complete and countless small details to cross off our work lists. We always remember, however, that it is the attention to those details that keeps the ship in shape and ready to take to the sea again.

What books to have coming out in the future?

There is a fourth book in the Nicholas series, *Nicholas a Vermont Tale* that will be out soon. I am also working on a picture book for younger readers, and a guidebook, written for children, about museums in New England.

For more information on Peter Arenstam, please visit: <http://peterarenstam.com/>

Linda Redding is Library Teacher at Silver Lake Regional High School

TUI T. SUTHERLAND

VISITS DANVERS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

By Karen Sekiguichi

In June 2009, the Danvers elementary schools received a visit from well-known children's author, Tui T. Sutherland. Danvers librarians won the visit in a drawing sponsored by MSLA during April Legislative Day activities at the State House in Boston.

Approximately sixty students from the five Danvers elementary schools met at Great Oak School for two sessions with the author. Ms. Sutherland, who also writes under the names "Erin Hunter," "Tamara Summers," and "Robb Kidd," among others,

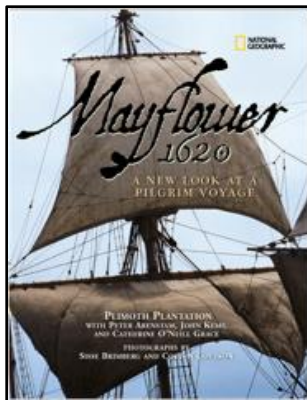
entertained a rapt audience with personal stories about her life as an author of more than 30 books, including titles from the *Warriors* and *Seekers* series and her new series, *Pet Trouble*. Ms. Sutherland also talked and about her career as an editor of children's books.

Students learned fascinating facts about the process of writing, illustrating, and editing children's books—including why authors might use so many different pen names!

Ms. Sutherland autographed her books and collected students' writing which she later critiqued and returned by mail. The box of manuscripts weighed seven pounds! Each workshop ended with a lively question and answer session, with thoughtful questions prepared by the children.

Over lunch, Ms. Sutherland revealed an interesting fact.

She spent much of her childhood overseas, but her dad actually grew up in Danvers. It seems fitting that Danvers students won this terrific visit from a talented and gracious children's author with a connection to their town. Danvers students, teachers, and parents are very grateful to MSLA and to Tui Sutherland for making this learning opportunity possible.



Karen Sekiguichi is the Library Teacher at Great Oak School in Danvers

Visit from Author, Cynthia Lord

by Chris Steinhauser, Reading Public Schools

Sometimes things just work out perfectly! That's what happened this past April when our school hosted a visit from Cynthia Lord, author of the book *Rules*.



Each year I am fortunate enough to have an author visit our school for a day. I work with the public library and the librarian at the other middle school in my district. The author spends one day at each school doing a whole school assembly and several workshops. The evening between the visits is spent at the public library, doing an evening program for students and parents. Costs are divided between the three libraries.

In the past we have hosted authors such as Mitali Perkins, Peter Lourie, Janet Taylor Lisle, and Doug Wilhelm. This year, the author was Cynthia Lord: <http://www.cynthialord.com/>

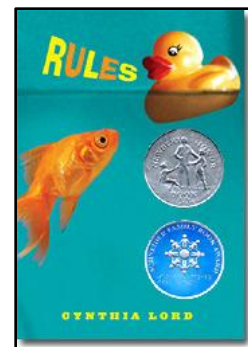
Right from the start, Cynthia was easy to work with. She is flexible about the workshops she could offer to students. She is completely comfortable talking to students and managing a classroom situation. You could tell that she used to be a teacher and that she enjoys this part of her job. Both of these qualities make a good author visit. What made Cynthia's visit extraordinary was the "above and beyond".

It all started with a conversation. I was chatting with a reading teacher about a project idea using podcasting. We then started talking about the upcoming author. One thing led to another and before we knew it we had an idea. What if we could podcast a couple of teacher reading chapters of the book *Rules*?

The idea was to introduce as many students as possible to the book and to build interest. Then, what if the students were given a forum to discuss the book between themselves? We envisioned a wiki that would include the podcasts and a discussion board. But, could we get permission for the podcast?

There was no need to worry. This is where Cynthia went above and beyond. She happily granted us permission to record teachers and students reading chapters of her book and post to them to a password protected wiki using GCast. Students were given passwords, teachers and students were given books and digital recorders and I did the editing and posting.

The result - magic! I witnessed teachers and students having an online discussion about the book *Rules*. During one evening over 200 posts were made to the wiki. I thought that I would send the link to Cynthia to take a look at and before I knew it, she had joined in the conversation, responding to individual students and even asking them questions, which they were thrilled to answer.



On the day of the visit, many students lined up to introduce themselves as "the student who made this or that comment" on the wiki. She made direct references to student comments and questions from the wiki and made the entire experience very personal for all students involved. I was thrilled to see the interest and enthusiasm of the students at such a high level.

The next day, I received what is probably the best evidence of a successful author program. In my wiki inbox, I had several messages from students. Each one was a thank you message.

One author visit: \$1000.00.

One wiki with podcasts: 6 hours.

Seven student thank you messages: Priceless.

Greetings from AASL President-elect, Nancy Everhart

Thank you for inviting me to participate in the exciting and informative MSLA conference.

The theme, "MSLA, Now More than Ever" with the ideas of *Economy, Excitement and Education* manifests AASL's current priorities and takes a proactive stance in helping school library media professionals deal with what is happening with today's economy.

I congratulate the conference committee and the MSLA officers on your outstanding array of speakers and authors who have agreed to share their views and experiences in creating and sustaining successful school library media programs. And, kudos on going green! I look forward to meeting all of you and enjoying the conference.

Please approach me and tell me your ideas for my upcoming Presidential term in 2010-2011. My theme is *Vision!*

