



LITERACY MATTERS

MARCH 2022



Literacy Matters is a recurring publication of Literacy Nassau, Inc.

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FIVE FUN FAQs WITH KJ MICCICHE

(submitted by Karen Micciche)

National Read Across America Day is March 2, 2022. This "holiday" celebrates the joy of reading, and just happens to coincide with the birthday of an author who believed joy was the number one reason to create books for children: Dr. Seuss. In keeping with the idea that reading is a fun activity, I thought this month I would share a peek through the looking glass and offer some insight into what it's like to write a book intended to elicit a happy response from a reader.

I began writing novels in 2019 when I started my MFA program. I learned early on that I tend to write pretty quickly, and after three semesters, I'd written three complete first drafts of novels that all had similar themes. They were all slightly heavy, women's fiction, and by the time I was getting ready to pen my fourth novel in my final semester of graduate school, I decided that maybe it was time to try writing something different.

My mentor asked me what I enjoyed reading most, and I told him the truth: I read light fiction - the funnier, the better -

and I like love stories. I read all the time for work, especially thanks to my OG training, so when I read for pleasure I want it to be as enjoyable as possible! As a result, I wrote a romantic comedy (rom-com) for my final semester in graduate school...and wouldn't you know? That was the story that landed me a literary agent - and a book deal! So now, I'm sticking to rom-com as my genre of choice - at least for the foreseeable future.

People have interesting responses when they find out I'm a writer, ranging from "Oh, that's a cute hobby," to "What have you written that I would recognize?" and everything in between. Here are some commonly asked questions that I've gotten, along with my answers to them.

1) What's your "process?"

When I write, I need my space to be as quiet as possible and free of distractions. I use the computer to write. (I'm not a paper and pen kind of person, and my handwriting has gotten worse as I've gotten older!) I have a candle that I sometimes light - it's from Yankee Candle and it's called *Autumn in the Park*. It just sort of helps me get into

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THOUGHTS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Hi Everyone,

One of the hardest things about my job is that it leaves me little time to spend tutoring my own children. Back when I was first studying OG, I was able to work with Haley (my older daughter) 1-2 times a week. Now that our center has grown so much, I have less time available to tutor my younger daughter, Julie. It breaks my heart. However, I am so grateful to be working amongst a community of talented, dedicated teachers who have a genuine passion for helping children thrive. Julie is lucky to be paired with one of our trainees, MaryBeth Thomas, on her OG journey. It's amazing to watch her learn and grow thanks to their lessons every week. Not only is Mrs. Thomas teaching her the rules of reading and spelling, but she's also doing wonders for her confidence. It's a great reminder to those of you who have folks in your personal lives who could really benefit from our services - we are a community of tutors and students, and if you can't personally help someone you love, there's a good chance that we've got another tutor who can.

Karen 😊



Julie practices spelling words with a variety of syllable-types during a Zoom session with Mrs. Thomas. They meet online once a week to supplement their twice weekly live sessions.



JOB RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

(submitted by Jessica D'Aprile)

If you have been financially impacted from the COVID-19 pandemic, you are not alone. Due to the disruption in employment from the pandemic, there has been a large number of people-including the disabled-having to seek out employment opportunities that match their new financial situations. As always there is a lot of information needed to secure one's financial well-being. Below are some important factors to consider:

Preparing for a Job: Preparing for a job financially can include opening a bank account, the importance of good credit, and developing a budget. There are employers who will take a credit score into account when hiring, so one must learn about credit scores and how to calculate a credit score. It is also important to properly negotiate your pay when discussing a job opportunity. This will ensure that you are getting the proper compensation for your skills and experience, and to make sure it fits into your budget.

Starting a Job: Once you have secured your position at a job the next step is to properly prepare for the job. Decisions will need to be made about pay and benefits, that way you can set up a goal for savings. You will need to ask the workplace to accommodate your needs, whether at the office or working from home. If your job offers 401k and other benefits, make sure you contribute as much as you can. One of the best ways to save money from your new job is through an ABLE account, this will help accommodate a range of disability-related needs.

Maintaining a Job: The longer you work, the more opportunities you will have for benefits and saving money,

which helps with financial security. If you receive a raise, there are employment supports and help incentives that can prevent an impact on your SSI, SSDI or Medicaid benefits. ABLE accounts can also be used for qualified disability expenses – things that improve your quality of life – such as items you pay for to go to work. Also, if you receive SSI or SSDI items that you pay for to go to work because of your disability could count as a work incentive known as Impairment Related Work Expenses.

Changing or Losing a Job: Many of us will experience a time when we change or lose a job. If you receive a social security benefit due to your disability, you must report all changes in income to the SSA. If you have lost your job and you are concerned about healthcare coverage, you may be able to enroll in your state's healthcare exchange system, elect COBRA, and/or qualify for Medicaid. If you feel that you need to brush up on your skills before finding a new job you can visit careeronestop.org for numerous job preparation resources.

Retiring from a Job: Retirement can be a very exciting thought for many, but it still requires preparation. It is important to understand your employer sponsored benefits, healthcare benefits, and other retirement savings, in order to feel prepared for your retirement. There is no such thing as starting to save for your retirement too early or too late, the only mistake is not starting at all. Utilizing resources like the IRS to learn more about your pension, 401k, and/or your Individual Retirement Account (IRA), will help you fully understand how to make the most of your retirement.

For more information about employment preparation and maintenance for the disabled you can go to:

www.dol.gov/agencies/ebsa/secure-your-financial-future

LITERACY NASSAU: HELPING NAVIGATE THE TRANSIT SYSTEM SINCE 1996!

(Submitted by Jerry Fitzgerald, Tutor)

Literacy Nassau's January 11th Registration Night at the Freeport Library resulted in two dozen new English Language Learners – and one alumna! Lupe, an Accountant currently employed by the library, excitedly related to us the success story of her interaction with Literacy Nassau twenty six years ago.

Lupe had emigrated from Ecuador in 1980 and struggled with English for sixteen years. Finally in 1996 came the last straw. Subsequent to an urgent-sounding broadcast, Lupe rushed off of a Number 7 train in Queens following the lead of all of the other passengers. She boarded another train across the platform, thinking that the initial train was experiencing an emergency of some sort. Too late, she learned that she was on a non-stop express to the end of the line in Flushing. The announcement simply was that the initial train had changed to a local.

After taking a return train to her destination, Lupe decided to seek out help with the language and she enrolled with tutoring at Literacy Nassau. She attributes the informal, practical tutoring she received with enabling her to finally communicate in English. What followed was more meaningful employment, integration into the community, and an appreciation for a program and its people dedicated to helping others.



Lupe works at the library and also co-teaches a citizenship class.



SUNDAY, MARCH 13

Don't forget to change your clocks!



FIVE FUN FAQs WITH KJ MICCICHE (CONTINUED FROM COVER)

a more "zen" place. I sometimes listen to music on my headphones, but not always. I set aside at least three hours per writing session. I find that if I don't have at least that much time, it's really hard to get into the zone.

2) What's your book about? My debut novel is called *The Yearbook*. It's about a woman named Gracie who writes romance novels for a living, but is struggling (both financially and emotionally) because she can't seem to figure out her own happily-ever-after. After a particularly bad breakup, she goes out with her friends and drinks a little too much - and ends up e-mailing her high school crush, Colin Yarmouth, at his office. What happens afterwards is the meat of the story.

3) How long does it take to write a book? That depends. It varies greatly from one author to the next. Personally, I have grown accustomed to writing one manuscript per semester - so, two per year. I like the semester schedule because in the summer I try to spend as much time in Cape Cod with my family as possible, and in December I try to be fully present for the holiday season. Writing from January - May and September - early December makes that possible.

4) When did you start writing? I've been writing since I was a kid, but I only started writing novels when I entered my MFA program. I've been fascinated with the English language from a very early age, and I used to (and still) write song lyrics as a hobby. I majored in English in college because I preferred writing papers to taking tests. I wrote my first piece of creative non-fiction when I was 21 years old, and it was an incredibly transcendent experience that made me see writing in a whole new light. I learned it could be used therapeutically, a lesson which has stayed with me throughout adulthood. And, of course, I ended up working in a field where there's a lot of writing - grants, reports, newsletter articles, etc.

5) Have you ever had writer's block? Hm. Not really. There are definitely times when I struggle with a scene or with a plot twist, but I don't think I've ever had a real block. Usually, I push through it by creating dialogue for my characters. I feel like they're most alive in active scenes, and this might sound weird, but during dialogue, my mind just takes off, and the story kind of writes itself.

TUTOR SPOTLIGHT: JERRY FITZGERALD

(submitted by Kate Quijano and Jerry Fitzgerald)

Jerry has been tutoring with us for nearly seven years. He previously worked with one-on-one students and always excelled at building relationships and retaining students over a long time span. As we switched over to small groups, Jerry transferred his one-on-one skills over to teaching more students. He helps students get to know each other and work together to build their English skills.

We are always glad to have Jerry share his ideas and suggestions during our bi-weekly virtual ELL tutor meetings. As we started planning for the winter session, Jerry even offered to help us out at registration. He attended our Freeport registration and was an enormous help taking students names, helping to proctor the writing sample given to new students, and directing students to the next available staff member for the next step in the registration process. It was so nice to see him chatting with incoming students, helping them to feel at ease, and letting them know what to expect at their first class.

In his own words:

"The endeavor that most impacts people's lives I believe, is English Language Learning – hence my involvement with Literacy Nassau. My mother had spoken of her father, Hendricus Reijnsman, immigrating from Holland in 1911 speaking no English. "Henry" found tutoring in Long Island City through a volunteer program and I saw the difference knowing the language made in his life. He was then able to work as a plumber and to communicate with his customers.

My Freeport Level One Class is from the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, and Columbia. They have been in the USA from 6 months to 16 years, range in age from 22 to 42, and they are all enthusiastic. During my several years of tutoring one-on-one and in-class settings I have experienced only one student who was not enthusiastic. Further, most of my students have attended tutoring while also working full time and supporting their families.

Tutoring for Level One requires some degree of expertise but more so, empathy. It primarily requires our willingness to guide and encourage our students while they speak, listen to, read, and write their new language. Almost all students have young children at home who speak English, but the parents, uncles, aunts, etc. rarely speak English at home with "Los Ninos". The most significant contribution we as tutors can make is simply to encourage, demand, and cajole them (every week) to speak English at least a little every day at home.

On a personal note, I try to retain as much of my mental and physical youth as I can partly by reading and exercising every day. I've read most of the works of Kenneth Follett, Herman Wouk, and Michael Lewis among others. My wife Cathy and I have taken many road trips throughout the USA – each for several hundreds of miles. We fly to a destination and rent a car from there. Our favorites have been Arizona, Nevada, and Moab, Utah with its Arches National Park."



Jerry's level one class. Left to right are Walter, Yorgeli, Romairys, Sarah, Julissa, Jerry, Maria, Isis, Raquel, and Hilda. Catalina was absent.



Jerry (far right) assisting students at our Freeport Library student registration. His class was full by the end of the night.



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Warm Birthday Wishes to our Tutors!

- Tahara Anderson – Frank Annese – Alissa Belize
- Marilyn Benson – Joan Borruso – Kristen Brennan
- Stephanie Budhan – Harvey Caust – Alisa Clark
- Claire Deroche – Linda Diamond – Nancy Doyle
- Eleanor Feingold – Alan Freeman – Mary Greenfield
- Linda Hanson – Carol Horvat – Margaret Kemp
- Craig Kennedy – Robert Lanzisera – MaryLou Laurie
- Maureen Lonergan – Mindy Mangot
- Cynthia Marquez – Harri Meyers – Joyce Mongitore
- Deborah Monteko – Carol Morris – Justine Mulvihill
- Aruna Paingankar – Anne Picone
- Laruen Quinn – Janice Raven – Jennifer Reedy
- Charlene Serenita – Sophia Shapiro – Mary Smith
- Vickie V.Y. Stanco – Gladys Stuart – Sara Beth Torns
- Peter Walsh – Christian Wrigley – Carolyn Zaremba



Traditionally, we would be hosting our UnScrabble event this time of year. With the ongoing pandemic and no in-person events, we thought you'd enjoy this contest.

Have you played Wordle yet? Are you good? We challenge you to a Wordle contest against the rest of our LN family. Please play Wordle throughout March. You can play using this link: www.powerlanguage.co.uk/wordle/

On March 31st, check your statistics. Either print out the page and mail it to us or take a screenshot and email it to

kquijano@literacynassau.org to enter. Whoever has the best **GUESS DISTRIBUTION** will win a Word Game Prize Bundle. This challenge is open to ALL tutors, students, families, and friends of Literacy Nassau.

Be sure to follow us on social media to see updates about this contest as well as directions in case you've never played before.

