



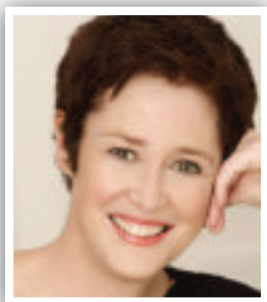
voice of
youth
advocates

VOLUME 40 ► NUMBER 5 DECEMBER 2017

the library magazine serving those who serve young adults

CLUELESS

Adult Mysteries with Young Adult Appeal 2017



► PATRICIA
MCCORMICK
INTERVIEW



► MUSLIM REPRESENTATION:
THE CASE FOR EXPECTING
DIVERSITY WITHIN
DIVERSITY

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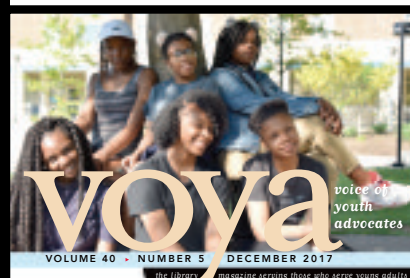
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On the cover: Some of the Shout Mouse Press co-authors of *Trinitoga* and *The Day Tajon Got Shot* pose together. The Shout Mouse mission is to empower those from marginalized backgrounds to tell their stories in their own voices. Read more in "Amplifying Unheard Voices: Shout Mouse Press" by Sarai Johnson and Rachel Page.

Cover photo credit: Shout Mouse Press

These Web-only columns will be available after December 1, 2017, at www.voyamagazine.com

REVIEWS



CLUELESS
Adult Mysteries with Young Adult Appeal 2017



▶ PATRICIA MCCORMICK INTERVIEW



▶ MUSLIM REPRESENTATION: THE CASE FOR EXPECTING DIVERSITY WITHIN DIVERSITY



A Novel Series Adopts a Cause

I never intended to write a novel about a cause. All the books about writing successfully tell you not to preach to the choir. Instead, my stories flow from my background and experience in teaching special needs. The results have surprised me.

In fifth grade, I knew I wanted to be a teacher and work with special-needs children. I have no idea how or why this motivation evolved, but my journey to accomplish this goal took longer than I had planned. I married two months before I turned twenty-one and dropped out of college with no job skills, except teaching baton twirling.

Six months after being married, I took an adult job I disliked. Being in a terrible work environment motivated me to go back to school. I found a job working during the day with children with cognitive challenges, and twice a week I took evening classes at California State College at Northridge.

Years ago, teachers didn't have a lot of information or understanding about autism. When I think back on the behaviors of the children I worked with, I suspect many of them had autism. I had found my calling. I continued going to school until I graduated with two teaching credentials, one for teaching children with cognitive disorders and the other for helping children with educational difficulties.

We moved from California to Atlanta, Georgia, and lived there for three-and-a-half years. During that time, we adopted our first dog, a neighbor's German shepherd. She was the first on the list of dogs we've raised. After we moved to Greenville, South Carolina, I was offered a job with students with learning disabilities who also had emotional disorders, in the same school my two children attended.

To keep this job, I returned to school two nights a week until I obtained my third credential—to work with children who had learning disabilities. I thoroughly enjoyed teaching a multi-challenged class for sixteen years.

My favorite subject to teach was reading. I had to be creative with my students who dreaded reading. Most of my students didn't have anyone helping them read at home. To entice them to come to school, I would read aloud to the class as our first morning activity and again at the end of each day.

The students would lean forward to catch every word. This is when my idea about writing blossomed. As a student, I spent time writing stories or articles for the school newspaper, and, as an adult, journaling every trip our family took. As I approached retirement, the craving to write took over.

My students begged me to read about animals, especially dogs. My husband and I had raised and rescued many dogs. Retelling funny dog experiences encouraged my students to share their experiences with the class. This opened the door for them to begin writing about their favorite pets.

After retiring, I walked my first Aussie, Sydney, and Jake, a black Lab, every day until they passed away. I ached with sadness. In writing classes, I dwelled on my dog episodes. I began to put ideas

together for my first novel, but I needed a hook besides just having a pet. I had read about military dogs and wondered about other types of working dogs.

I googled my questions and found information on therapy dogs. They stay with their owners and go places to help people relax and feel happy. Then I read about service dogs and how they become trained for specific needs. I called around the United States for information. Every organization had different training procedures. Some groups had puppy raisers who trained the puppies in their homes. In other groups, the puppies stayed in a small facility and worked only with adults.

By accident, inside a grocery store, I met a young boy walking with a dog wearing a vest. I approached his mother and received permission to speak with him. I said, "I see your dog is wearing a vest. Are you a puppy raiser?"

He smiled and shook his head. "No, Ma'am. This here is my service dog. I have diabetes, and he detects when my blood sugar drops or goes too high."

I thanked him for his information and, after a few phone interviews, I wrote a magazine article about his experience getting a diabetic service dog. This article, "Scent with Love," won the Dog Writers Association of America (DWAA) contest. I received a monetary award and two trophies—one for my story character and one for myself. Winning an award for my first article gave me confidence to continue writing.

Still doing research, I connected with Palmetto Animal Assisted Live Services (PAALS). They opened my eyes to the difference between a reputable service dog organization and others that want to help but don't have the proper skills.

The young boy in my article had received a dog who had been rescued from a shelter. It was wonderful for the dog to have been saved, but the organization never researched his health. The dog had been hit by a car and had a bad hip that flared after working four years. Thousands of dollars were raised to pay for this service dog. The dog was confused about not working with the boy at school. Sadly, he retired and moved in with the boy's grandmother.

PAALS is ninety minutes from my home. When I started writing, they used puppy raisers to train their puppies. The puppy raiser and the entire family had to take extensive training and pass tests to become qualified for the job.

One willing volunteer offered to let me meet her daughter who had chosen to be a puppy raiser. Eleven-year-old Madison told me about her responsibilities. She gave her time and energy to train this puppy and to help someone in need: I now had my main character.

I traveled during the summer to watch Jennifer Rodgers, the

owner and creator of PAALS, and all of the volunteers work with puppies. After experimenting with the puppies living in homes, problems surfaced. Families moved or couldn't complete the two years of dog training because of unforeseen circumstances.

PAALS now teams up with incarcerated men who qualify to care for some of the pups (from six months old to one year of age); PAALS teaches the inmates how to work with the dogs. Others train at the PAALS facility and go to foster homes over weekends for socialization.

PAALS devotes time to teaching young people ages ten and older how to work with the dogs during the summer months. Then, they can volunteer to be helpers with puppy socialization.

As I began writing my story, Madison's dog was being trained to work with a boy with autism. The young boy lived by the ocean and needed a water dog. Given my teaching background, this became the basis for a fun character to add to my first novel, **Seven Days to Goodbye**. I set the story on my favorite place to vacation, Edisto Island, South Carolina. Now, I had my plot.

In the story, puppy raiser Trina is thirteen and has completed Sydney's training. In seven days, he will be returned to his facility to be matched to his forever companion. During his week on the beach, he learns how to be a water dog and magically helps Logan, a young boy with autism. Logan doesn't speak or make eye contact.

I called to Logan.

He did a one-sided skip toward me.

"Do you want to practice calling Sydney?"

He nodded. His eyes rose for a moment.

"Say, 'Sydney...Come.'"

Logan clapped and bounced.

I patted his shoulder and said, "Stand. Don't move. Then Sydney can listen."

After a couple more hops, his hands grabbed his shorts and squeezed. He gulped short breaths of air and then shouted, "Sydney." He started to clap and then put his hands back on his shorts and said, "Come."

Sydney raced to Logan.

I said, "Good boy, Sydney."

Logan's eyes caught mine before he bowed his head.

I finished saying, "Logan, you did great."

Logan held a treat in front of Syd's face. "Good doggie. Good Sydney."

I tingled inside. This was a perfect example of Sydney's talent. I stretched taller, seeing the happiness in Logan's face. "Can I hug you, Logan?" (p.69)

After **Seven Days to Goodbye** was published, I attended a fundraiser for PAALS. While standing around, I spoke with the web designer for PAALS, asking for advice. Since I was involved with PAALS, she offered me her services. Since that day, PAALS has made an effort to support my book.

In my sequel, **Starting Over**, I wrote about the issue of mobility. In the third novel, **For Keeps**, post-traumatic stress disorder will be highlighted. PAALS helps me write accurately and sponsors my work. In turn, I help the group with proceeds from my books, author visits, and teaching writing workshops.

When I do author events close enough for a PAALS volunteer



FACTS ABOUT AUTISM

1. Autism affects one in sixty-eight children. Source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/04/1-in-68-children-now-has-a-diagnosis-of-autism-spectrum-disorder-why/360482/>
2. Autism is not a disease. The brain functions differently. Source: <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Fact-Sheets/Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-Fact-Sheet>
3. Autism is an ability, not a handicap. Source: <https://amysmartgirls.com/temple-grandin-autism-is-an-ability-not-a-handicap-a1a42762593a>.

to join me, he or she brings a service dog-in-training. Sometimes clients will share their dogs and explain how their dogs have changed their lives.

For students to get a glimpse of disabilities—to hear about the clients' needs and see the skills of service dogs—makes my presentation memorable. My novels also cover teen friendships and explore that people are all different and the need to help others.

I am very thankful for teaming up with PAALS and sharing with my readers how this group teaches special skills that change lives.

One of my favorite quotes is from Dr. Temple Grandin, who was born with severe autism and is a professor at Colorado State University of Denver: "Autism is part of who I am. It has given me special skills."

Grandin helps families understand why children with autism flap their hands, spin in circles, make no eye contact, lack social interaction, use repetitive behaviors, and can be verbal or non-verbal. She believes her life changed because of the people who believed in her and pushed her to interact in social environments. If you are interested in learning more about autism, read Grandin's book, **Thinking in Pictures** (Vintage, 2008), which describes her life.

PAALS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 2007. The accredited organization is a member of Assistance Dog Interventions International. ■

TRINA RYAN SERIES BY SHERI S. LEVY

Seven Days to Goodbye. Barking Rain, August 2014. 212p. \$13.95 Trade pb. 978-1-935460-74-9.

Starting Over. Barking Rain, August 2017. 206p. \$13.99 Trade pb. 978-1-935460-77-0.

Sheri S. Levy is the author of an award-winning debut, **Seven Days to Goodbye**, the first entry in her Trina Ryan series. The story won in the Dog Writers Association in the Special Interest category in 2015, and her magazine article, "Scent with Love," won in 2011. She is an active member of SCBWI and SIBA. Levy tutors teens in reading and writing, and PAALS has helped with her research on writing about service dogs and how they change lives. Levy shares her book proceeds to support PAALS.org. You can find more information on her website <http://www.sherisleavy.com>. Follow her on: Facebook at Sherisleavyauthor; Twitter, @SheriSLevy; and LinkedIn, Sheri Shepherd Levy.



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