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2005 Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market.



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The complete guide to the children's publishing world including book and magazine publishers, agents and reps, conferences, contests, and more!

Theresa Smythe

I believe that the more you meet and talk to the people you want to be like, the more your dream can become a reality," says Theresa Smythe. She found her role models through classes, such as Marla Frazee's at the Pasadena Arts Center, and organizations like SCBWI where she was surrounded by like-minded people who enjoyed success in children's publishing.

It was a welcome change from her beginnings. As a film student at Rhode Island School of Design in the '80s, Smythe had all but given up her children's illustration aspirations. Long after graduation, she heard the critical voices of the school's children's illustration instructors. "I left every class in tears and I vowed never to return," she says. "It took a long time to get some of those voices out of my head."

With the voices finally quiet, Smythe's résumé now speaks for itself. The 2001 SCBWI Don Freeman Grant winner wrote and illustrated her second release, *Snowbear's Christmas Countdown* (Holt, August 2004) and was completing illustrations for *The Halloween Queen* for Albert Whitman & Company when she took some time tell us what happens after that first contract.

What changes after that first book?

Confidence changes, that's for sure. You think, "I made it!" and coast on that while you wait for your next contract. But you still have to pound the pavement. Even though I did *The Runaway Valentine*, Albert Whitman & Co. still asked for a sample piece for *The Halloween Queen*. I wasn't too happy about that, but I wanted the contract. It's important not to let your pride get in the way when you have to jump through a few hoops.

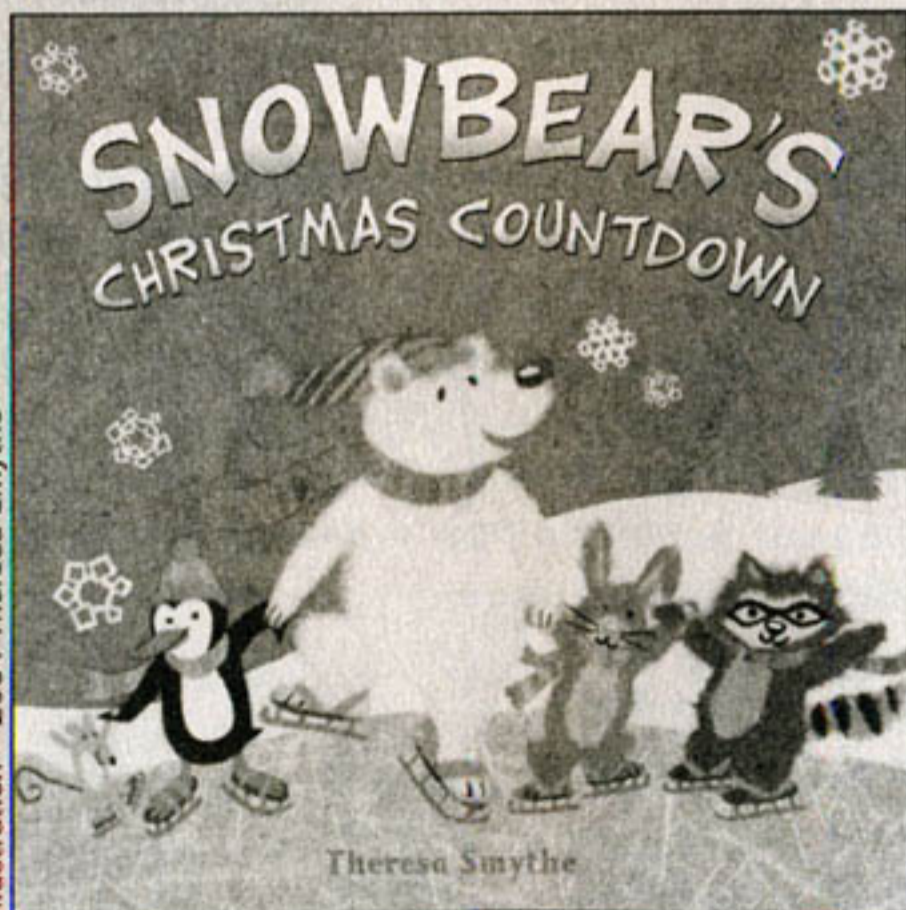


Illustration © 2004 Theresa Smythe

Theresa Smythe says her biggest surprise about writing *Snowbear's Christmas Countdown* was how quickly she was able to write and illustrate the book. Most of the writing was done in one sitting beneath a tree at a park near her home. She calls the book, "a delight from start to finish."

What was different about your second book?

I had my first child. I had to work around the clock—in between feeding, sleeping, and adjusting to life with a newborn. I don't know how I did it, but a steady supply of cookies sure helped!

Balance between career and family is really important to me now. Allowing a nanny to take care of my son for four or five hours so I can take care of my career makes the time I do spend with him more meaningful and less stressful for both of us.

What surprised you after publication?

It's still a long road to having your book in the public's hands. I didn't see *The Runaway Valentine* in a lot of bookstores and that was heartbreaking after all the work and all I went through to get published.

The truth is, after you're published, there's still a lot of promotion work to be done and it's all up to you. I had to be my own greatest cheerleader and promote my book. When you get a book signing at a bookstore, they have to stock your book! Good presentations are key. I've baked Valentine cookies and made Valentine card kits to get people to my autograph table. You want parents to have a memorable time with their children. Make it so special they will want to take that experience home with them.

What advice do you have for illustrators?

Have a good support system. It also helps to have another source of income to pay the bills and get promotional mailings going. It seems like a lot of money going out the door, but mailings are key. If you're serious about this business and do your homework, it will eventually pay off. You have to look at yourself and your career as a serious investment.