

## From Chapbooks to Children's

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**A WD competition champ finds publication in a new realm.**

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It all started with a tree.

In 2005, with "White Birch," poet Nancy Tupper Ling found inspiration in her backyard, channeled it on the page, submitted it and took grand prize in the 74th Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition.

Since claiming her victory, Ling's career has taken root in a different genre: children's writing. WD took a moment to catch up with the author following the May 1 release of her new children's book, *My Sister, Alicia May*.

### **What do you think when you look back on your WD competition win?**

I'm still pinching myself to this day. To be one of over 17,000 contestants chosen to win the grand prize, that's amazing in and of itself. But to win with a poem against screenplays, short stories and personal essays, that was totally miraculous. Poetry rarely upstages these other genres.

### **How has your writing career grown and evolved since then?**

My chapbooks, *Coming Unfrozen* by Blue Light Press and *Character* by Poet's Corner Press, have been published. More than that, I now feel confident saying that I am a "children's author and poet." To be a good listener is key to a writer's growth. When editors give me feedback, I will never dismiss it. I will take it and work with it and, hopefully, craft a better story because of it. They know what they're talking about. Oh, and my children ... well, they provide me with all my best story ideas.

### **How'd you end up cinching the deal for *My Sister, Alicia May*?**

Well, this is why it is so important to find a great critique group. Jean Cochran, the editor at Pleasant St. Press, had been a former member of my crit group. When she had open submissions, she allowed our members to be the first authors to submit. As she's since told me the fact that I was a WD winner impressed her. So a Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators workshop, critique group or conference can be invaluable to any children's author.

### **Is poetry still your first love?**

Honestly, I'm finding it so hard to do both. I have two groups, though, and they keep me going. ... I firmly believe the best children's authors are poets.

### **What's your best advice to new writers?**

The best advice is something I received from Donald Sheehan, who was the Director of the Frost Place Festival in Franconia, N.H., for many years. He used to tell us that every poet "wants to be praised" and "we often envy the person who is." But the best thing we can all do as writers is to "make one person's work stronger." In other words, have a generous spirit, always, and don't forget to encourage others along the way.

### **Do you see competitions as useful in jumpstarting writing careers?**

You betcha! You've got to enter to win, and when you win, it will open doors in amazing ways.

### **What's next for you?**

I'm working on a sequel to *My Sister, Alicia May*. ... And I am, like so many other authors, awaiting those magical phone calls of acceptance for my other stories, and loving the process along the way.