Photo © Ian Coristine/1000IslandsPhotoArt.com

St. Lawrence ABCs: for everyone

Written by Susan W. Smith posted on June 13, 2012 07:29

Whether it is pronounced as Zed (Canada) or Zee (USA), letter Z makes me smile. So, my favorite letter from the ***St. Lawrence ABCs: 1000 Islands, 26 letters, 1 river...*** written by Silvana Gargione and illustrated by Megan Gaffney has to be Z!.

> ***Z – At Zavikon Island, zealous children zig-zag around zebra mussels while Zipper zooms by.***

St Lawrence ABC's is a non-flction, alphabet, book thathighlights islands, plants, animals, boats, and places along the River. Photo couretesy "St. Lawrence ABCs". Drawing © Megan Gaffney

I met Silvana via email and then telephone. I was intrigued as there are few nonfiction books written for children about the Thousand Islands.

Author and actress, Silvana Gargione, lives in Los Angeles but visits her family each summer in Thousand Island Park.

In real life, Silvana, who lives in Los Angeles, is an actress. She grew up in Lawrenceville, New Jersey and graduated from Emerson College in Boston with BA in Theater. Her mother hails from Ogdensburg and Silvana remembers travelling north to visit her grandmother each summer to the family "camp". Today five family members have cottages in Thousands Island Park and their 23 grandchildren, plus spouses and children, meet in the Park each summer.

When Silvana moved to Los Angeles, about four years ago, she took a class at UCLA called, Children's Book Writing " It was just for fun." she says, "My dad always encouraged me to write, and I always did well in English in school."

She discovered that she could take ordinary words and turn them into rhymes easily. Three years ago, while exploring the Islands by boat, and seeing Astounder and Zavikon Islands on the charts, she wondered if there were islands for every letter of the alphabet! It took a couple of years for her to capture her version of history in the islands. ***St Lawrence ABCs*** is a non-flection, alphabet, book that highlights islands, plants, animals, boats, and places along the River. There are 40 pages of beautiful illustrations by Megan Gaffney. The book includes an in-depth glossary of terms and a map for locating each island mentioned.

All authors know that writing a book can be difficult and time consuming, but finding the right publisher and including the right illustrations can be most discouraging. Silvana's "luck" in finding Megan Gaffney is a story in itself.

"Z – At Zavikon Island, zealous children zig-zag around zebra mussels while Zipper zooms by." Photo couretesy "St. Lawrence ABC's". Drawing © Megan Gaffney

Megan was born and raised in Pennington, New Jersey. She graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology with a Master's Degree in Medical Illustration. However, her link to the River, much like Silvana's were visits to her grandfather's cottage on Bartlett Point, in Clayton. Her grandparents, Miller Gaffney and Adelaide Gaffney are well known on the River. They donated their five antique boats/skiffs to Antique Boat Museum. The boats are on display and the skiff named "Addie" is mentioned and illustrated in the book.

Here is part of my interview with Silvana:

Megan Gaffney, illustrated St. Lawrence ABC's. She is an accomplished medical illustrator.

How did Megan come into the picture?

I put an ad on Craigs List for Syracuse and Rochester looking for an artist who had a personal connection to the River, and got about a months worth of replies that were just not quite right, and then Megan responded. She literally asked if the ad was a prank or a scam when she first replied, probably because the ad read something like "looking for freelance artist who is familiar with 1000 Islands region and loves the area as much as I do- to illustrate 26 pages for a children's book in a watercolor-pencil style".

This the "D Page" that Megan Gaffney drew as an audition to be the artist for "St. Lawrence ABC's"Photo couretesy "St. Lawrence ABCs". Drawing © Megan Gaffney

I guess it just seemed too good to be true! She illustrated the D page as an 'audition' of sorts and I fell in love with it - it's actually the same final drawing that is used in the book. We both spent all our summers on the River, and both are from the same area in Central NJ (she is from the town next to mine and even attended a school where some of my relatives taught), but never knew each other until she answered the ad.

How did you decide on the format?

I felt that without beautiful pictures, the story would just end up as a list of tongue-twisting sentences, and that a 'picture-book' in the classic sense would lend itself to the simplicity of the text. Also, Megan's illustrations bring life, texture,and energy, to the pages that I had only dreamed about achieving.

Glossary

One of the Glossary pages, which provides important River information. Photo couretesy "St. Lawrence ABCs". Drawing © Megan Gaffney

How long did the project take?

Unfortunately, I cannot devote all my time to my creative life, so I would work on the book in bits and pieces for the first year (2009). I'd write a sentence or two after work, or I'd come up with a new page in the car. After I got the first draft completed, over the course of a winter/spring away from the River, it was probably another year before I began editing. During the editing process, I decided to include a glossary so I could share all the fun facts that I had come across. It wasn't until May 2011 that I got serious about printing, and began looking for an artist.

Interesting stories about collecting information ?

Hunting down islanders, during the off-season from California, was a serious challenge. Even in the age of Facebook, Email, Google, and Twitter, very little is written down, and there is little that is online. I felt that the only chance I had to properly present each island was to talk to the current residents. It was all about finding the person who was a link to the next person, who then knew the family who lived on the island I was looking for, etc. I made so many new friends, and also realized just how small the world is! I pursued Peter Charron to talk about Fairyland Island - it turned out that he and his brothers went to high school with my mom and her sisters. I reached out to Jeff Rand to talk about Juniper Island - it turns out he owns the building next to my college apartment in Boston. I found Brice Kincaid on a rental website advertising Quadkin Island, and was able to share photos and stories with him of the week I spent on his island as an 8 year old. I've owned Ian Coristine's books for years - his nephew found me on Twitter talking about the book

and suggested I contact his uncle. Ian has become a friend and great mentor through this whole process.

What reader were you aiming for?

Anyone who loves the River - a first time visitor or the oldest River Rat! I think of the book as both a bedtime book for children, and a keepsake book for adults: the little ones will learn letters and new words, and the adults will find new facts about the places they've loved for years.

Silvana Gargione – you have written a beautiful tribute to the Thousand Islands. Reading your book aloud is a delight.

Megan Gaffney – you have captured each and every place with illustrations that are so real, I can recognize each place and each island scene immediately.

To you both – we sincerely thank you.

By Susan W. Smith, susansmith@thousandislandslife.com

Sailing Seaway Clayton
June 15, 2012 8:00 pm – June 17, 2012 5:00 pm

TI Art Center, Book Signing and Release Party
June 23, 2012 Noon – 2:30 pm

Mare's Wares Art Fest!
July 1, 2012 (All Day)

Art and Architecture Tour – TI Art Center
July 20, 2012 (All Day)

38th Annual Ogdensburg Zonta Antique & Artisan Show
July 22, 2012 10:00 am – July 22, 2012 4:00 pm

Silvana Gargione will be on hand for book signing. Be sure to bring your favourite little ones to meet the author.

Posted in: People, Book Review

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Comments

Comment by: Kristen Taylor *(Clayton, New York)*
Left at: 6:40 AM Friday, June 15, 2012

Looks like a River treasure! We're excited to get the book and see/read it all!

Comment by: Jen Mead *(Grindstone Island)*
Left at: 2:07 PM Monday, June 18, 2012

Sounds like it will be a classic! Where can the book be purchased? Is it available at Corbins? Thanks!

Comment by: Diana Davis Duerkop *(Kingston, ON.)*
Left at: 9:58 AM Sunday, July 8, 2012

Looks wonderful!
I'm waiting to see where I can buy it for my Grandsons for Christmas!
Is it available in Canada? At Arthur Childs Museum, by any chance?
Diana

Comment by: Silvana *(Wellesley Island)*
Left at: 9:22 PM Sunday, July 8, 2012

It is available to order and ship online, or locally at the following stores:

Corbins
Porch and Paddle
Antique Boat Museum
TI Arts Center
Capt Spicers
Blue Heron Coffee and Gifts
Cornwall Brothers
Lyle's Lighthouse
TIP Landmark Society
Arthur Childs
Leeds County Books
Main St Books
TAWNY
St Lawrence University Bookstore
Boldt Castle Gift Shop
Singer Castle Gift Shop

Thanks for your interest and enthusiasm.

Comment by: Brian d. Yaiser
Left at: 6:39 AM Tuesday, July 4, 2017

Hello Megan, my name is Brian and am a member of the Antique Boat Museum. In Aug. of 2016 I purchased a 1905 boat named Pastime, I believe this boat was owned by, perhaps a relative of yours. Any history you might have on this boat I would greatly appreciate. I can be reached by e-mail or you may call me at (716) 574-8802. Thank You Brian

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