



Julien Chung

SCBWI Bologna 2018 Report

The Bologna Children's Book Fair as usual, was like a city-size beehive with publishers, illustrators and agents buzzing about in seemingly wild, haphazard patterns but with resolute purpose.

It's a good thing the SCBWI booth was there. It provided a haven and a focal point for me with familiar faces and many new ones. It was a place to hang out, chat with fellow members, trade tips and share experiences.

This year was a significant one for me personally as I had winning illustrations in two exhibitions - five in the Fair's own sought after illustrators exhibition in the central hall and one in the BIG right in SCBWI's own booth in Hall 25. Along with the work being published in a thick colourful exhibition catalogue and as souvenir postcards in the bookshop, there is plenty of exposure for the winners in the Fair's exhibition. Several works, including my zebra, were chosen to continue on to PittiBimbo, the international children's wear show in Florence, then the whole show moves onto Tokyo for the summer and to New York for the fall.

The overarching theme for my visit to the Fair turned out to be networking, more than anything else. Of course I was awed and inspired by the originality of the exhibited illustrations and all the prize winning books but it was talking to people from all parts of the industry and from all parts of the world - from Korea to Iran to Scotland - that left an impression on me. I also ran into illustrators whom I had only met on Facebook and Instagram. I was introduced to many amazing people.

Meanwhile back in the SCBWI booth, I was a happy finalist in the SCBWI Bologna Illustration Gallery. The winning illustration was a great conversation starter and was beautifully reproduced along with the others on a large panel. Another finalist, Cheryl Pilgrim, was also on hand having flown in from Texas just for the event.

Lin Oliver, SCBWI president, was in the booth as well and regaled us with tales of travel and books. She took me aside and gave me a challenge - she said it was her maternal instinct - to develop a picture book dummy for the next New York conference now that I had some exposure here in Bologna. (Make sure you do this Julien, says Christopher)

I was invited in the last minute to replace an illustrator for the opening illustrators duel. Two illustrators, side by side and in front of the public, illustrate an unpublished manuscript, page by page with a 3 minute deadline for each page. A new experience for me and, at the outset, unnerving. However with the encouragement of fellow

SCBWI members and the ongoing chatter of Chris Cheng, it turned out to be entertaining and challenging. A very creative workout. It was very interesting to see ideas come to life and see how they resembled or differed from the other illustrators. My “opponent” Elizabeth Dulemba was a practiced dueller with many years of making books. She made it seem so easy! Next time I will have to hone my doodling skills to meet the 3 minute deadline with something more than stick figures!

I had a few meetings scheduled with publishers. Some were cancelled, others were held on the run and I had at least one real sit down interview. And a surprise meeting with a publisher of my dreams, thanks to SCBWI.

I also met with the show organizers, received an award onstage and shook hands with the international panel of judges. I met the Korean contingent of Nami Concours who are wooing picture book illustrators with great prizes including a residency on Nami Island. Who wouldn't want that?

Tips:

There are plenty of activities for illustrators, from portfolio reviews to panel discussions all day and every day.

The Fair is well organized from a visitors point of view. There is a comprehensive printed map to the Adair and an app that is updated regularly. The tourist office on site was a big help with bus tickets, taxi reservations and even telephoning restaurants for reservations.

There are many activities off site during the week. The trick is finding out about them. Some are private, like the SCBWI opening dance party at the downtown *Trame Libreria* bookshop. It's a good way of meeting others and discovering other events.

Keep in touch with your social media. I found out about friends who were at the Fair that way. We met up and had an espresso or two.

Plan in advance as much as possible. Contact publishers before the show and find out if they are viewing portfolios and if so, is it by appointment or first come, first served? Then let the Fair and the city surprise you. Be flexible and leave room for the serendipitous encounters.

Thanks to Christopher, Sarah and the volunteers who made my visit a pleasure and an unforgettable experience.