

FOR ALL OUR VOICES

Issue No. 7

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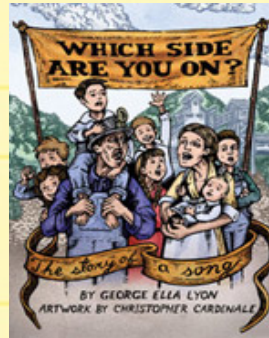
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BREAKING NEWS: Picture book sings out in Wall Street protest!



In 2004, when I began work on "[Which Side Are You On?](#)" [The Story of a Song](#), I had no way of knowing it would be published on the 80th anniversary of Florence Reece's anthem for workers' rights, in a season when that anthem is being sung in New York by Occupy Wall Street and in Athens amid protests against the Greek government's austerity measures. Never out of circulation, Reece's impassioned lyrics are especially tuned to the economic injustices of this moment. Written on the back of a calendar in 1931, while gun thugs were shooting up her coal company house, her union-organizer husband was fleeing Harlan County, and her seven children were hiding under the bed, "Which Side Are You On?" asks for a declaration of allegiance at a time when the gap between rich and poor, powerful and marginalized gets wider every day.

Don't scab for the bosses.
Don't listen to their lies.
Poor folks ain't got a chance
Unless we organize.

Just as Reece took an old tune (or two) and wrote new words for it, so folks have been writing their own verses to her song to fit it to this hour's urgent needs. That's the folk process. It's what keeps the song--and the hope of working together for a better day--alive.

To hear Florence Reece speak and sing, click [here](#).

To listen to versions of "Which Side Are You On?" by Pete Seeger, [Ani DiFranco](#) and others, visit the Cinco Puntos Press [Facebook page](#). You can Cinco Puntos is the publisher of [Which Side Are You On? The Story of a Song](#).

NEWS

picture books

I finally got to meet Lynne Avril this summer, when we received ALA's Schneider Family Book Award for [The Pirate of Kindergarten](#).

○ *All the Water in the World*, illustrated by Katherine Tillotson, was chosen as one of the best books of 2011 by American Booksellers for Children. A teacher's guide is available [here](#).

Planes Fly!, a companion to *Trucks Roll!*, has been accepted by Richard Jackson at Atheneum. The illustrator is Mick Wiggins.

fiction

○ In August, while on a fellowship to the [Hambidge Center for the Arts](#) in north Georgia, I finished the third draft of *Something Happened*, a YA novel in poems. Now it goes to my agent, Brenda Bowen.

Writing a novel in poems was a steep learning curve, since a poem generally makes you want to stop and let something arrive whereas a novel makes you want to turn the pages. I had to write poetry in a different way, which was sometimes frustrating but always rich and surprising. Here's hoping it works!

I've corrected the first proof of *Holding On to Zoe*, a YA novel due out from Farrar, Straus, and Giroux in early 2012. By then, it will have been seven years since it began as an exercise in my journal.

○ As my writer friend Leatha Kendrick says, "It takes a long time to realize how slow things are."

poetry

"Marilyn's Montessori Memo" will be reprinted in Georgia Heard's collection of found poems, *The Arrow Finds Its Mark: A Book of Found Poems*, due out next year.

QUOTATIONS recently copied into my journal

"We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

Lewis Brandeis

○ "A true revolution of values will lay hand on the world order and say of war, "This way of settling differences is not just." A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

Martin Luther King, Jr., Riverside Church, April 1967

WRITING EXERCISE and POEM

○ October is harvest month, and I've chronicled a little of my harvest here: a picture book begun in 2004 just out, a novel started in 2006 due to appear in the spring.

For some folks, the harvest is more immediate. What they planted in March or April is now shining in jars on their pantry shelves or waiting for winter suppers in their freezer.

Listening for lines or imagery in the voices around you is another kind of harvest. I'm always writing down other folks' words and very often they turn out to be doors into poems, stories, or songs.

Here's an example. This woman did her harvesting at the farmer's market:

OVERHEARD

○ "I'm just dying to can!"
says the wirey woman
in the Osage Market
parking lot.

I hope so
since on a dolly

rolled up next
to her orange
truck, two giant
net bags bristle
with tasseled ears.

She has
her work
stacked up
for her
in Georgia's
August swelter.

But she has
girded her loins
with yellow shorts,
clad gray hair
in a lime scarf
and she is
heading home
to canner and stove
full steam ahead.

If you don't already have one, get a little pocket notebook and tune in to language around you. People say amazing things in the grocery store line, at the post office, the gas station. When you've harvested several of these, pick the one that has the most energy for you, write or type it on a new page, and follow it wherever it takes you. Or you may find that some of your voices want to talk to each other. Let them go! Let yourself go!

Happy writing! Happy harvest!

George Ella Lyon

