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Children's Book Authors in Lamorinda

By Andrea A. Firth



The Bay Area has long been the home to and source of inspiration for many authors, and Lamorinda is no exception. Local children's book authors Deborah Trotter, Maddie Dychtwald, and Ginger Wadsworth have taken varied paths to print; however, they have each put their passion and experience into their work in words.

Deborah Trotter

Deborah Trotter, a twenty-year resident of Moraga, has spent several years refining her writing craft and learning the ropes of the publishing world. Now with two children's books published—*A Summer's Trade* (2007) and *How Do You Know?* (2006)—Trotter can confidently claim the title of children's book author. But it's not about titles and recognition for Trotter who seems to have been able to strike a comfortable balance between her writing pursuits and the demands of her family—with family coming first. A native of northern California, Trotter graduated from law school through the UC system and spent her early career working first as a registrar at the Stanford Law School Library and later as a litigator in a large law firm. But as children started to arrive in the Trotter household—she had four in regular intervals—she took down the lawyer shingle and turned her attention to writing.

Trotter started writing children's books when her offspring were young. "Of course as a mother, you read books to your kids," states Trotter. "Some are wonderful and some are awful." A life-long student, Trotter's ability to write for children is essentially self-taught. "I read about the process. I studied how to do it. And I kept writing," she adds.

Despite Trotter's assiduous work ethic, success was not immediate. Like many who venture into the writing world, Trotter received pleasant but brief rejection letters from publishers in response to her early manuscripts. Even her first published book, *How Do You Know?*, took three years from the time of submission to reach store bookshelves.

The inspiration for *How Do You Know?* came to Trotter on the daily morning drive to school from her home in the Bluffs to Campolindo High School. As she approached the intersection of Rheem Boulevard and Moraga Road, the shopping center and the school up the way were shrouded in fog. "Because we could not actually see the buildings, I pointed out to the kids that the school might not be there." She received the typically teenage response of 'Yeah, right mom', but the idea stuck with Trotter who then set her story on a farm where a young child and mother explore the comings and goings of the mist.

Trotter likes to write stories that have an educational focus, and through her research she has recognized the value of the niche market in the publishing. Having grown up in the small ranching town of Red Bluff and having traveled extensively through the Southwest, Trotter chose to base her second book at a Navajo trading post. The book's publisher specializes in stories set in the Indian community, and the story, which is written in both English and the Navajo language, appeals to a wide range of readers and ages. "I'm never short of ideas," states Trotter. "I want to keep writing, and I want to keep publishing." But like many writers she talks about the need for 'bum glue' or that special something that keeps one seated in front of the computer and away from the distractions of daily life. "I don't even have internet access on the computer that I use to write, so I eliminate that diversion," states Trotter. Now with child number three off to Stanford in September, and just one more left at home, Trotter may find she has more time to focus her muse.

For more information visit her web site at www.deborahwtrotter.com

Maddy Dychtwald

"You can have a new beginning no matter how old your are," states Maddy Dychtwald, a twenty-year resident of Orinda and the author of *Gideon's Dream: A Tale of New Beginnings*, the story of a caterpillar's transformation to a butterfly. Dychtwald co-authored her children's book debut with husband Ken and Grace Zaboloski, the young daughter of the book's illustrator. "Grace was the critical eye of the target audience. She read the manuscript, looked at the drawings, and provided important feedback that we incorporated in our revisions," explains Dychtwald. "She was the youngest person to receive an author credit from this publisher," she adds proudly. "It truly was a group effort. We just had a great time writing it."

Dychtwald and her husband first began thinking about writing a children's book several years ago when their two children were young. "We noticed the messages that were being addressed in children's books. None of the books talked about what happened as you got older and aged or the idea of second chances," she states. Aging and second chances have long been a focus for the Dychtwalds who founded a marketing and communications firm, Age Wave, 17 years ago. "It's generational marketing. We forecast lifestyle and consumer marketing trends among the emerging mature marketplace, the boomer generation," she explains.

"Nobody likes changes," notes Dychtwald who uses the caterpillar's metamorphosis to represent life change. "We wanted anyone who read the book—kids, parents, and grandparents—to recognize that change at any age is truly liberating."

In contrast to most children's books, where the publisher chooses the illustrator, the Dychtwalds wanted to find the artist who could deliver the look they envisioned for their story. Their first manuscript draft sat unpublished for ten years until a chance meeting led them to Dave Zaboloski, a well-known Disney animator. Once they connected with Zaboloski, the process to publication moved very quickly. "We had a revised manuscript and artist renderings in about six months," notes Dychtwald.

"It was great ride. It's been a new beginning for us with publishing our first children's book," she states. Dychtwald and her writing partner husband already have an idea for their next children's book, so the challenge will be fitting that project in with their business ventures and their new life as empty-nesters as their youngest child heads off to college.

For more information visit her web site www.maddydychtwald.com

Ginger Wadsworth

A veritable veteran of the children's book writing world, Ginger Wadsworth sits comfortably in her living room where an illustration of a woolly mammoth from the cover of one of her recent books hangs above the fireplace. With her constant companions, golden retrievers Willa and Scout, at her side, Wadsworth launches into a discussion of one of her life-long passions—writing. Wadsworth has authored several children's books and usually has one or two new books in the publication process, but her first break into print did not come easily. "I wrote for seven years and didn't sell a thing," notes Wadsworth who refused to use her father's connections (he was also a writer) or to publish under her maiden name to expedite her career. "I'm feisty like that," she states.

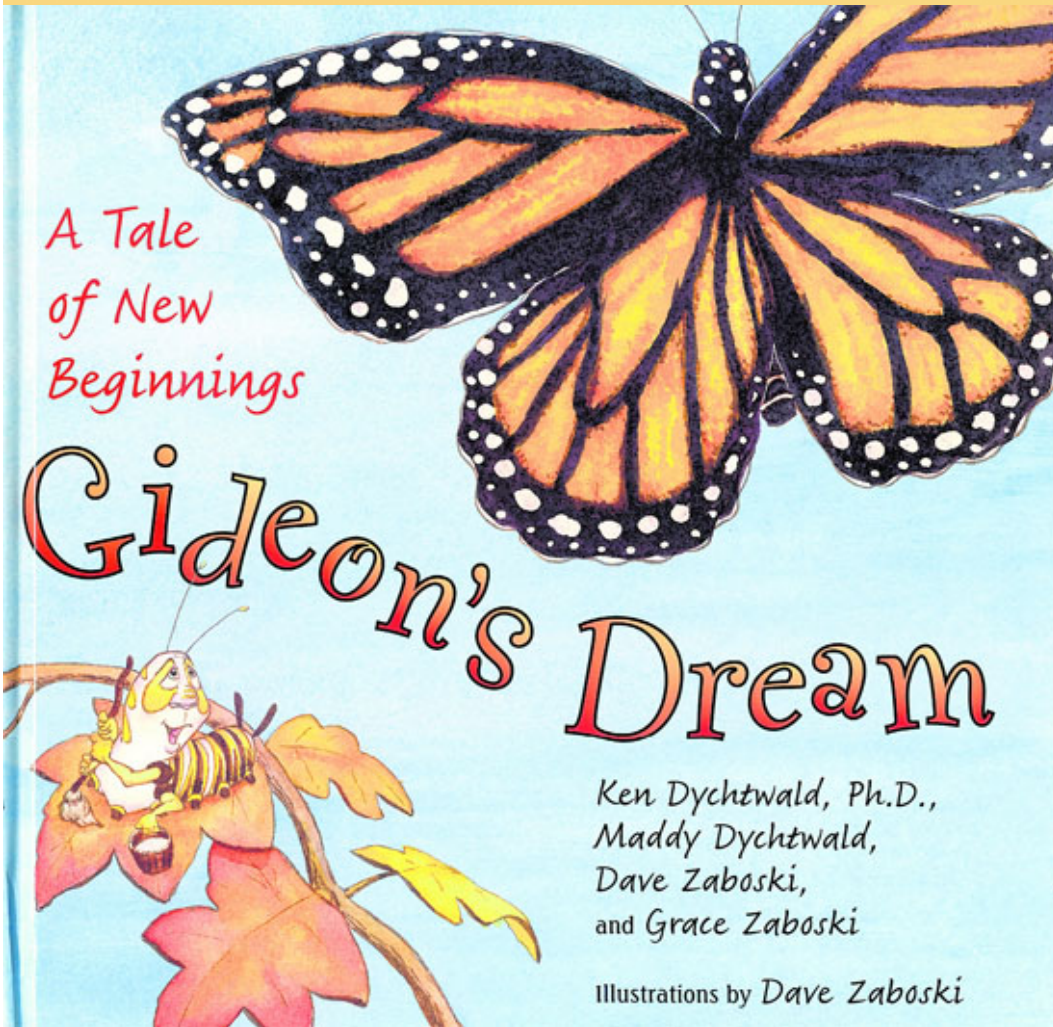
A self-described research junkie, Wadsworth, who typically gears her work to the young reader, writes about nature and the people and world around us. "I love to write for the second to third-grade age group," states Wadsworth. "I spend a lot of time researching for my writing, and I really enjoy it." Wadsworth started writing for children about 30 years ago just a few years before she settled in Orinda with her husband and two boys that would follow. She balanced writing with working as a teacher's aid at Del Rey School. After taking a class on Bay Area architects, Wadsworth discovered the subject matter for one of her early books—a biography of architect Julia Morgan. "I was fascinated by her houses and the hidden places that she would incorporate in the design," notes Wadsworth. "To this day, if I see a Morgan house for sale in the area, I will try to go see it."

She has two new books that will be published in the upcoming year. One is the story of a young man named Moses who survives a harrowing adventure after getting lost in the snow. Wadsworth seemed destined to write the story when she came across a newspaper clipping about the same boy among her father's old books that contained his handwritten notations. "My husband and I could not believe the coincidence," she states excitedly.

Wadsworth's second book will tell the tale of a camping trip taken by naturalist John Muir and President Teddy Roosevelt. "The book is really written as historical fiction," she explains. "The camping trip did happen, but the only written account is a report by the one of the packers which provides limited information." Creating the interaction between the two famous men was the fun part of the writing adventure for Wadsworth.

Although she claims to be distracted easily, Wadsworth remains devoted to her craft and sits down to write for several hours each day. "Now that my husband is semi-retired, the house is no longer just my mine during the day, and that changes everything," states Wadsworth with a laugh. Then quoting a line from a very senior children's book author who has served as an inspiration, Wadsworth adds, "As long as

the grey hair underneath is still working, I'll be writing." For more information visit her web site www.gingerwadsworth.com



*A Tale
of New
Beginnings*

Gideon's Dream

*Ken Dychtwald, Ph.D.,
Maddy Dychtwald,
Dave Zaboski,
and Grace Zaboski*

Illustrations by Dave Zaboski



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