

appreciate. It fired me up to continue making books. Going to Hattiesburg to accept the award was really special. It was my first time since being a working author/illustrator that I was surrounded by other folks in the industry. It was totally humbling to be considered their peer, and really helpful to hear the advice everyone had to give.

Describe what an average work day is like for you.

Ever since I can remember, I've liked to wake up early to work. Morning, alone in my studio, is when my mind is clearest. Unless I have super urgent emails to attend to, I usually start the day with creative work. Writing or illustrations or sculptures if I have time. I have an assistant who helps run my shop who comes in the afternoons, so unless I'm mid-creative project I usually do more business emails etc. later in the day, when I've lost a bit of my creative momentum anyway. My schedule and hours are dependent on what I'm working on, though. If I have a project I'm extremely obsessed with, I'll work late into the night or all day without stopping. There are many days where I don't get dressed . . . if I'm still in my pajamas at the end of the day, it's a sign I was too caught up in my work to even notice, which I think is a good thing. There's nothing I love more than that headspace when everything melts away but your project.

If you could spend a day with any illustrator, living or dead, who would it be and why?

Barbara Cooney. I think I would want to meet her, because she already feels familiar so to me. Like a great-grandparent who died when you were very young and only have a few memories of that you're not even sure are real. I practically lived in the pages of *Miss Rumphius* growing up; the coastal Maine landscapes in it are so similar to those of Northwest Washington. I would love to spend a day with her just walking on the beach or drinking tea and talking shop.

What is your best piece of advice for SCBWI illustrator members who are starting out?

Trust yourself. Trust that the things you're called to draw and write about are "good enough." Trust that you WILL have another idea for a story even if the well feels dry (that's a hard one for me). Trust the imagery that recurs in your life, the stories that obsessed you as a kid, dig deep into those weird, dorky, beautiful themes instead of resisting them. Chances are there's a well of creativity there, that a lot of other people can relate to, too. Ask for feedback. Verbally processing projects I'm stuck on or excited about opens lots of doors that felt firmly shut, it's amazing what another perspective can unlock. Don't wait to show people your manuscript or piece until it's perfect, because it will never be, and that's okay.

P O E M

MURDER IN THE FIRST DRAFT

I killed my darling late last night.
The house was dark.
The room was still.
I did it by the desk-lamp light;
a tap-tap-tap,
a keyboard kill.

Returning to the gruesome scene,
I face what's left
in black and white,
this carnage splayed across the
screen.
Forgive me, darling . . .
Time to write.

—Suzy Levinson

Suzy Levinson writes picture books and poetry. Appropriately enough, she revised this poem about a gazillion times before it wound up here. You can find her online at www.suzylevinson.com and on Twitter @suzylevinson.