

More about our presenters

Al Batt of rural Hartland, Minnesota is a writer, speaker, storyteller and humorist. Batt writes four weekly humor and nature columns for many newspapers and does a show three times a week about nature for number of radio stations. He creates several cartoon strips that are syndicated nationally and has contributed to a number of magazines and books, including the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series and *Minnesota Bird Watching*. Batt has even written for the movies! He speaks at festivals, conferences and conventions all over the United States and has received the Ed Franey Conservation Media Award from the Izaak Walton League, was named birder of the year by *WildBird* magazine, was honored with the National Eagle Center's Hero Award, received an award for outstanding contributions from the Bluebirds Across Nebraska, was honored by Modern Woodman for conscientious and dedicated community service, and given the Thomas Sadler Roberts Award by the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union. He is a trustee of the American Bald Eagle Foundation, a member of Ray Brown's Talkin' Birds Hall of Fame and the Freeborn County Softball Hall of Fame, the official staff ornithologist for the Bulletin Board in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, on the board of the Environment for the Americas and the Albert Lea Public Library Foundation and is clerk of Hartland Township. Batt speaks to anyone who will listen. His mother thinks he is special.

Ruth Berglin is a former public school teacher of 5th and 6th grade communications and is a published author.

Betsy-Tacy Society board members and volunteers will lead sessions on journal making, basing the presentation on the works of Mankato-native Maud Hart Lovelace and her beloved characters Betsy, Tacy and Tib. Maud Hart Lovelace wrote the Betsy-Tacy series based on experiences from her own childhood growing up in Makato. She was able to recall the events of her life some 25 years after leaving Mankato by referencing the journals she kept as a youngster. Learn about Maud, her characters and the importance of keeping a journal. Then make a journal of your own to take home. Learn more about the Betsy-Tacy Society at www.betsy-tacysociety.org.

Peter Bloedel is a theater professor at Bethany Lutheran College and performer with Peter Bloedel's Perpetual Vaudville.

Kim Bovee paints and draws everyday sights that highlight the southern Minnesota environment. Designs of nature afford patterns for imaginative exploration in color. Kim works to preserve the seasons by observing light filtered through life. In addition, she is on the roster of teaching artists for the Minnesota State Arts Board and has been conducting art residencies for the past 15 years.

Julie Bowe is the author of the Friends for Keeps series: *My Last Best Friend*, *My New Best Friend*, *My Best Frenemy*, *My Forever Friends* and *My Extra Best Friend*. *My Last Best Friend* was included in Kirkus Reviews '07 First Fiction Spotlight: Promising Debuts from Important New Voices, won the 2008 Paterson Prize for Books for Young People, and was a

finalist for the 2008-09 Great Stone Face Book Award. School Library Journal describes it as perfect for readers who have graduated from Sara Pennypacker's 'Clementine' stories, Barbara Park's 'Junie B. Jones' series, and Megan McDonald's 'Judy Moody' books. Julie has worked as a youth director, camp program director, and as a curriculum writer and editor. She lives in Wisconsin and can be visited online at www.juliebowe.com.

Susan Chambers won the National Federation of State Poet Societies Grand Prize twice. She can be found on the Minnesota Literature website as a three-time finalist. Chambers serves as a Poet-in-the-Schools, presenting to classrooms nationwide, and gives poetry workshops in multiple states.

Dr. William Cosgrove (Professor Origami) is a retired Professor Emeritus of English. He has more than 40 years of college teaching experience, including traditional undergraduate and graduate classes as well as evening classes for community and non-traditional students. Cosgrove has initiated and taught scores of community outreach classes sponsored by the Minnesota Humanities Commission and the North Dakota Humanities Council funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has performed his one-man show *An Evening with Mark Twain: 'The Trouble Begins at Eight'* more than 120 times for audiences ranging from grade-schoolers to senior citizens. Cosgrove has presented his hands-on, "living origami" presentation in conjunction with his one-man show in venues ranging from the grand opening of the Science Museum of Minnesota to a formal, black-tie fund-raising gala and dance at St. Paul's Landmark Center and most recently, at a fundraiser for Family Pathways at a children's bookstore.

Bev Jackson Cotter is an author, storyteller, artist, columnist, retired history museum director and K.T.'s "gram'ma."

Michael Cotter is an author (15 years), storyteller (30 years), radio show host (18 years) and farmer (75 years).

Kristin Cronn-Mills is a writer and a teacher. Her first young adult novel, *The Sky Always Hears Me and the Hills Don't Mind*, was published in 2009. Her second young adult novel, *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*, will be published this fall. She teaches at South Central College in North Mankato. She love books, words, stories and being a nerdy English major.

Terri DeGezelle, is a photographer and author with more than 60 children's non-fiction titles published as well as several photos in national publications. She continually strives to blend her two arts forms, writing and photography. Recently, Terri's manuscript entitled, *Paint the Town Pink, Washington D.C.'s Cherry Trees, A National Treasure* was awarded the 2011 Shabo Award from the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. Terri is a presenter at Young Writers & Artists Conferences around the upper Midwest.

Marcella Elders is a local crafter and has a degree in therapeutic recreation.

Jonathan Friesen is an award winning author, international speaker and youth writing coach. To learn more about Jonathan, visit <http://www.jonathanfriesen.com>.

Blake Hoena grew up in central Wisconsin, where, in his youth, he wrote stories about robots conquering the Moon and trolls lumbering around in the woods behind his parents' house, and the fact that the trolls were hunting for little boys had nothing to do with Blake's pesky brothers. Later, he moved to Minnesota to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from Minnesota State University, Mankato. Since graduating, Blake has written more than 30 books for children, including retellings of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and the Perseus and Medusa myth. Most recently, he's been working books in the Tony Hawk 900 Revolution series.

Ryan Jacobson has long loved to read and write, but he never planned on becoming an author. It wasn't until he read a Magic Tree House chapter book that his love of children's stories was born. In the years since, he has launched a successful career as an author and presenter. He has written more than 20 books—including picture books, graphic novels, chapter books, ghost stories and choose-your-path books—with several more projects in the works. He has presented at dozens of schools, organizations and special events throughout the state of Minnesota. He lives in Mora, Minnesota, with his wife Lora, sons Jonah and Lucas, and dog Boo. For more about the author and for free samples of his work, visit his website at www.RyanJacobsonOnline.com.

Christopher Johnson is a Bethany Lutheran College professor and director of studio services.

Margie Kiefer is celebrated for her transforming wall murals and illustrations. She specializes in flowers, trees, garden scenes and turning the ordinary into beautiful works of art.

Marie Kreft is an educator and storyteller. She teaches German, coaches and judges speech, and directs plays.

Lillian Lamoreaux is a secondary education student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She loves books, words, stories and being nerdy as an English major.

Mary Z. McGrath, Ph.D. is a speaker and author/coauthor of eight education books. McGrath works with schools, parents, and organizations to reflect on and improve the quality of career, relationship and life transitions. Her website (www.maryzmcgrath.com) offers more practical articles on education, parenting and care-giving.

Scott Rolfs is a professional illustrator/cartoonist specializing in creating art and characters with "kid-appeal." Rolfs's current projects include educational graphic novels and teaching aids, activity and coloring books, and kid-oriented food packaging.

Patrick Ryan is a writer from Rapidan, Minnesota. He has written over thirty books including *The Baseball Diet Book*, a book of short stories about baseball. His latest project is a screenplay.

Melanie Schmidt is the youth development program supervisor for Mankato Community Education/Recreation and a consultant for South Central Service Cooperative.

Leslie Schultz is a lifelong artist intrigued by subtle connections between stories and images. She likes exploring how to tell stories not only with words but also with photographs. Leslie began writing stories and poetry in third grade. Today, she has published poetry, fiction, essays, interviews and book reviews, and makes her living as a freelance writer and editor, helping such non-profit organizations as the Bush Foundation, the Guthrie Theater, Minnetonka Center for the Arts, the San Diego Opera, the Richmond Symphony, and the Norton Museum of Art in Palm Beach, Florida. She regularly reads her work at the Northfield Arts Guild. In addition, Leslie carries her camera everywhere, and she exhibits and sells her photographs. Leslie brings an entrepreneurial spirit to her life as an artist. In 2000, she co-founded the publishing house, Chronos Unlimited, to publish materials on labyrinths, including *A Pocket Guide to Labyrinths*; that same year, she established Heartwork Yoga Studio in Northfield, Minnesota. Since 2005, she has homeschooled her daughter, Julia, now 12 and in 7th grade; in 2008, she began teaching a weekly creative writing class for elementary and middle-grade students that is ongoing. In 2010, she served as a regional judge for the Poetry OutLoud competition, and was appointed to the Arts and Culture Commission in her hometown of Northfield. In 2011, she published her first book of middle-grade fiction called *The Howling Vowels*, and is currently working on a sequel with her daughter, Julia, as co-author. For more information, visit her website at www.winonamedia.net.

Kate St. Vincent Vogl teaches at the Loft, the largest creative writing center in the country. She also teaches at the Hudson Valley Writers' Center. National ABC News has featured her book, *Lost & Found: A Memoir of Mothers*, and she has presented her story at national and international conferences. Vogl's essay about growing up with 26 Clydesdales was anthologized in *Why We Ride*, which includes a forward by Jane Smiley. Her fiction and non-fiction have won honors in international competitions, most recently for the New Letter's Prize in Essay. Not so recently she was graduated from Cornell University cum laude and from the University of Michigan Law School. An Outstanding Girl Scout Leader for the largest council in Minnesota, Vogl has worked with students in a variety of settings.

Bryce Stencil is an educator, author, historian and costumed historical interpreter portraying Abraham Lincoln since 1989 to audiences of all ages. Stencil is a licensed social studies teacher (grades 5-12), has both full and part-time teaching experience, as well as a Master of Arts degree in history. He is a recipient of the Anthony Wayne Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution's Outstanding History Teacher of the Year Award (2010) and member of Minnesota River Valley: Rich in History teaching cohort.

Art & Barb Straub are retired elementary school teachers. They currently present environmental programs to hundreds of elementary school youngsters throughout southern Minnesota. The Straubs are volunteers for the JR Brown River Center and Ney Environmental Learning Center in Henderson, MN and facilitate "Feathers," a mini-science museum in Henderson.

Kate Stuart is a dance teacher at the Northfield Arts Guild and the Northfield Senior Center. She has been teaching ethnic dance and historical dance for several decades.

Kathryn Sullivan is the author of young adult fantasy novels *The Crystal Throne*, *Talking to Trees* and *Agents & Adepts*. Sullivan is also the distance learning librarian at Winona State University.

Ben Tecken is a published poet and co-author of *Ink on their Fingers*. Tecken is a past YWAC presenter and has toured numerous states attending homeschool conferences to promote his books.

Victoria Tecken is a novelist, poet, multi-state homeschool convention featured speaker, presenter at multiple Young Writers & Artists Conferences, author of nine published books, presenter at two writer conferences for adults, and high school and college performing actress and president of the Bethany Network Ventures company.

Phil Wels is a Bethany Lutheran College production assistant and media specialist

Lucas Youngerberg is a student actor actively involved in Lincoln's Traveling Troupe, a group of students ranging in age from 6-18, whose purpose is to offer a hands-on approach to history by promoting Abraham Lincoln's life and legacy through drama. The group was first organized in 2009, the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth. Since then, they have done a dramatic play on an aspect of Lincoln's life and career. In 2011, the members of Lincoln's Traveling Troupe were awarded the Spirit of Youth Award for their efforts. This vignette is part of a larger dramatic play being performed on May 19-20 at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Mankato, entitled: "...We Cannot Escape History..." *Abraham Lincoln's Trials by Fire*.

Michaelene Zawistowski is a former fifth grade teacher and travel writer for Northwest Airlines WorldTraveler Magazine and Midwest Living Publications.