

Writers club builds 'Wall'

Panel took turns penning chapters of children's book

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To commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Phoenix Writers' Club, 10 authors took turns writing one chapter apiece in a children's book. Each writer would pick up where the other left off, with no one quite knowing how the story would end.

Their combined efforts created the book, *The Wall*, which chronicles the adventures of 9-year-old Belinda after she kisses a wall that had always encircled her world and it suddenly disappears.

"She turns around and realizes the wall is now behind her," said Mabel Leo, the club's president, who wrote the prologue.

Club member Eileen Brinn, a non-fiction writer, was tasked with writing the final chapter and editing the book to make the story come together. Juana Martinez-Neal illustrated *The Wall*, giving shape and color to the characters, such as Belinda and Governor Bluebottle.

Why write a progressive story in such an odd fashion?

"We wanted to do something different from other groups," Leo said.

Phoenix Writers' Club touts itself as being the oldest club of its kind in the state. Leo, an author of eight books, said the club was founded in 1926 by a group of women who were not allowed to join the Arizona Press Club at the time.

"In 1994 we started letting men in," she said.

The club currently has about 60 members and they meet at noon on the third Saturday of each month at the Calico Cow restaurant in Phoenix. Meetings usually feature a speaker talking about some aspect of writing, such as copyrights, publicity, character traits, self-publishing or on-demand publishing vs. traditional publishing, and literary agents.

"At some meetings we give members a chance to talk about their work," Leo said. "This gives us a chance to get to know one another."

At the May 20 80th anniversary meeting, the club will welcome Arizona's State Historian Marshall Trimble as guest speaker and author Patricia L. Brooks, also a lecturer at Arizona State University, as emcee.

Leo said many members plan to dress up for the event, some in flapper-era wear or poodle skirts, to celebrate the years the club has been operating.

The best part of being in the club, according to Leo, is the camaraderie and support, "We are writers helping writers," she said. "If you have a problem with any of your writing one of us will have the answer, or we'll help you find it."

To join the club, e-mail Leo at mibbles1274@msn.com. She said all that is required for membership is to pay the \$25 annual dues and have a serious interest in writing. You don't have to have anything published.

Club members will unveil the newly printed joint effort *The Wall* at the May 20 meeting. The book will also sell online for \$11.95 at www.amazon.com.

As to what happens to Belinda, not even Leo knows, "they won't let me see the ending!" she said. "I'll have to buy a copy to see how my own story turned out."

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