

**SECTION D**  
 SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2011

**BOOKS**

**Writers meet to critique, publish**



The Enquirer / Tony Jones  
**Connie Nordhielm Woodriddle** (left) and Linda Leopold Strauss discuss children's books at the home of fellow writer Andrea Cheng.

By Lauren Bishop  
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It's said that for every 10,000 book manuscripts submitted to publishers each year, 100 are read and only 10 are published. Another estimate puts the number published at three. Any way you slice it, chances are slim. Faced with those odds, a group of local children's book authors has been meeting for the past 15 years to critique each other's writing, offer suggestions on where to submit stories, vent frustrations over editors and share despair over rejection letters. And their monthly meetings have

paid off. Four authors in the group — Andrea Cheng of North Avondale, Sally Derby of Finneytown, Linda Leopold Strauss of Wyoming and Connie Nordhielm Woodriddle of Richmond, Ind. — have published seven books among them in the past year. Combined, the four writers have published 41 books (none are self-published). Leopold Strauss and Nordhielm Woodriddle will share some of their tips at a workshop at Joseph-Beth Booksellers Monday night. All credit the writer's group for helping them work faster and write better. "We are so lucky because letting someone read your work takes a lot of trust," Derby said. "Fortunately, the people in this group are very

trustworthy and perceptive and honest, but kind." The details on how the original members of the group met are a bit sketchy now — was it at a children's literature conference, or were they introduced by someone's plumber? — but they've grown to a group of nine. And what each author brings to the table — on this Tuesday, a coffee table in Cheng's sunny living room — is as different as the things they write about. Cheng, who has published 17 books in the past nine years, knows the business end of things. Woodriddle's comments are as thorough and well-organized as her recent

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THE ENQUIRER

FROM THE COVER

**Local authors' support breeds success**

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young-adult biography of Edith Wharton, praised by the New York Times Sunday Book Review last summer. Derby is generous with her praise. "The first sentence is beautiful," she told Woodriddle about the opening to her first foray into young adult fiction: *The Russians are not attacking us, but we're hiding under our desks just in case.* And they get more out of the group than writing feedback. "It's kind of a lonely profession, and every once in a while, you just need someone to talk to," said Woodriddle. "And just for general support," Cheng added. "When people say, 'What do you do?' and I say I'm a children's book writer, I often hear, 'When I retire, I'm going to write a children's book. When somebody tells me they're a surgeon, I don't say, 'When I retire, I'm going to be a surgeon.' So are any of them making a living writing children's books? The group laughed when asked that question. Strauss ran down the numbers: A typical children's book has an initial run of 5,000 copies. If it's a \$17 illus-



The Enquirer / Tony Jones  
**Andrea Cheng** (left) hosts fellow children's book authors, including Sally Derby.

trated book, she might get a 5 percent cut of a story that she's sent three to five years creating. She spent 20 years trying to get her first picture book, *"A Fairy Called Hillary,"* published in 2001. But with the support of their spouses and supplemental income from school visits and teaching (Cheng also teaches English as second language full-time at Cincinnati

State Technical and Community College), they've all shaped careers out of writing children's books. Want to do the same? Here's their advice: Sit down and write. It doesn't matter whether it's on weekends, as Cheng does, at the neighborhood bagel shop as Woodriddle does, at the library as Strauss does, or at home from 5 to 8 a.m., as Derby does. And keep at it, no matter how long

*'No adult loves a book the way a child loves a book. They live that book. They absolutely live it, and they will read it five or six times. How many adult books get read that often?'*  
 Children's book author Sally Derby

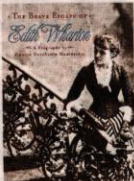
**If you go**

**What:** Drop Everything and Write Workshop with Linda Leopold Strauss, author of "Drop Everything and Write: An Easy Breezy Guide for Kids Who Want to Write a Story" and Connie Nordhielm Woodriddle, author of "The Brave Escape of Edith Wharton." The authors will share their best practices for writing fiction and non-fiction and how they turned their talent and passion for writing into careers.  
**When:** 7 p.m. Monday  
**Where:** Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road, Norwood.  
**Cost:** Free.  
**Information:** 513-396-8950, www.josephbeth.com

**New children's books from local authors**

**Connie Nordhielm Woodriddle**

**"The Brave Escape of Edith Wharton"** (Crown Books, \$20), out now: How the upper-class New Yorker defied her mother's rule that a woman's name should never appear in print (except when she was born, was married or died) and wrote wildly popular novels that were published under her own name.  
**"Just Fine The Way They Are"** (Calkins Creek, \$17.95), out this month: An illustrated story of how the dirt roads of the 1800s turned into the U.S. highway system of today.  
**Information:** www.thetruescape.com, www.justfinethewaytheyare.com



**Andrea Cheng**

**"Only One Year"** (Lee & Low Books, \$16.95), out now: A fourth-grader struggles with the news that her 2-year-old brother will spend a whole school year with relatives in China.  
**"Where Do You Stay?"** (Boyd's Mills Press, \$17.95), due out in April: A boy whose mother has died goes to stay with his aunt and befriends a man who lives in a ramshackle carriage house down the street.  
**Information:** www.andreaching.com



**Sally Derby**

**"Kyle's Island"** (Charlesbridge, \$16.95), out now: At small lake in Michigan in the 1970s, 13-year-old Kyle realizes how little he really knows about his family and friends.  
**Information:** www.sallyderby.com



**Linda Leopold Strauss**

**"Preschool Day Hoopay"** (Scholastic, \$8.99), out now: An illustrated book designed to ease preschoolers' back-to-school jitters.  
**"Drop Everything and Write"** (E & E Publishing, \$15.95), out now: A guide for kids who want to write stories.  
**Information:** www.linda-leopoldstrauss.com

