

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Jessie Oliveros grew up watching Kansas sunsets, and she'll always have wild sunflowers and gold-tipped corn fields in her heart. She spent her college-life climbing mountains in Utah and striving for higher vistas. After a fulfilling career as a registered nurse, Jessie hung up her stethoscope to grow children and stories. She loves root beer floats, autumn, and running in the rain. These days you can find her in the Texas hill country with her husband and their four kids.

Jessie will be accepting applications for picture book writers of fiction. She prefers prose.

1. If you had to wear the same t-shirt with one word on it for a year, what word would you choose?

I love tees with uplifting phrases. And I'm not sure if it's to uplift me or the people who read it! I bought a bunch of Old Navy tees for the summer when they had their \$5 sale: *Don't Worry Be Happy* and *Rise Above*. And....I can't do just one word. I have to do three. It's my favorite phrase and from the movie *A Dog's Purpose*. BE HERE NOW. And the shirt would be cerulean blue.

2. If you had your own talk show, who would your first three guests be? Bonus points for sharing the name of your show and what it would be about.

I think my show would have an Ellen vibe. All the feels. I love the idea of bringing to light unsung heroes. Like my friend, Rachel, who can't eat and must take her nutrition by IV, hooking herself up for 12 hours at a time. But she holds her head high and smiles and laughs and shrugs her shoulders and says, "That's just my trial. Everyone has something." She would be on my show.

The biology professor I worked for during college—any time a student stopped by his office, he would stop whatever he was doing. This student would then become the most important thing on his agenda at that moment. And that student would feel important and singular. It was a gift. Dr. Gary Booth. He would be on my show.

I would do a finale with my children because I love them and—well, now they are feeling ignored because I have a TV show. After they are on my show, the studio will be covered in mud. And there will be broken things on the floor. But really, they are the best even if they are feral. It's my fault, anyway, for letting wolves raise them. And the name of my show? Anything but my name. Why do people keep naming talk shows after themselves?

*I actually raised my kids. My husband and I. Wolves might eat your children instead of raising them. Don't give your children to wolves.

3. If you could instantly become an expert in something (non-writing-related), what would it be and why?

Astronomy. I love outer space. I love how ancient and massive and eternal it is. I love all the science fiction that has been spun around our fascination with outer space. And I think the idea of other

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worlds just points us more to our own humanity. But as a bonus, I'd be super smart and well-versed in astrophysics or aerospace engineering.

I also really want to play the harp! And if you combine the two, I would play the harp in space. Which sounds like a great book idea.

4. What are your five favorite picture books not written and/or illustrated by you?

CRY MY HEART BUT NEVER BREAK by Glenn Ringtved and illustrated by Charlotte Pardi (so ethereal and touching)

THE UGLY PUMPKIN by Dave Horowitz (so hilarious)

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE by Maurice Sendak (just a forever classic)

THE DIAMOND AND THE BOY by Hannah Holt and illustrated by Jay Fleck (a beautiful nonfiction)

MAXIMILLIAN VILLAINOUS by Margaret Chiu Greanias and illustrated by Lesley Breen Withrow (hilarious book number two)

5. What is the toughest feedback you've ever received?

It's reeaallly hard when my agent tells me to get rid of a character. Usually, I end up going with it because Mike is wise and a good lit agent for a reason. However, this last manuscript...it took me A YEAR of away time to feel okay about removing a character I thought was integral to the story.

6. What are some of the most important lessons you've learned so far?

Remember the *Be Here Now* phrase? Well, I love it. It goes for regular life and publishing life. If we are focusing on the moment, we won't have time to fill our heads up with fear of (and the fallout from) rejection. And creating is a process! I have to remind myself this all the time. I still often expect to get it right the first time.

7. What writing-related accomplishment are you most proud of?

Well, getting awards for my book was pretty awesome. Kind of a once-in-a-lifetime thing. However, I have to say I felt the same joy and sense of accomplishment when I won smaller writing contests before I was published. (I was a finalist in Nathan Bransford's first paragraph contest!)

8. What are your dreams and goals as an author?

For my book to be remembered. For the readers of now to pick up my book in 30 years and be filled with sparks of nostalgia because they loved my book once and want to share it with their children in turn.

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9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I see the potential of a manuscript, I think. And it's fun! Maybe in another life I'd be an agent. I will advise but also listen! Published authors are not "better" than unpublished authors in any way. It wasn't that long ago that I was unpublished. We are all on the same road, but different places along it. I'd like to help scoot someone along a little bit faster!

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

Somebody who thinks they already got it all figured out and who is not willing to change their manuscript! Which, really, would be someone that isn't ready for this industry!

11. What are the most important things you're seeking in a mentee?

Someone who is open to constructive feedback, communicative, doesn't lose the vision of their story (they don't have to agree with all my feedback!), and works hard!

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I look at both the micro and macro all at once. That's what my critique partner tells me. Although I believe I put in the best critique work if I'm given a few rounds of it.

13. During the mentorship, how will you help your mentee and their stories develop?

I'm happy to offer industry advice, look at query letters, discuss agents, etc. In a three-month mentorship, I can help hone 3-4 manuscripts. If the mentee has several good picture book ideas, I am happy to help identify which ones have the most promise as a picture book.

I can help with structuring the manuscript so that it makes sense but also stands out, siphoning down the word count to an acceptable number (always a challenge with picture books!), finding the right voice so that your manuscript is accessible to children, and implementing important aspects of picture book manuscripts such as the Rule of Three and a complete story arc. I will be available to answer any and all questions.

And finally, I would love to offer up mentor texts—being well read in your genre is so important!

14. What type of relationship do you hope to establish with your mentee?

I would love to become my future mentee's cheerleader, from honing their manuscripts to hopefully, one day, cheering them on when the manuscript is a book!

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15. What is your style of communication like?

Open and frank. I can respond every day via email, but sometimes my hands are tied with four kids so immediate responses may not happen. But I will respond at least once a day.

I can work in a skype visit or two during the mentorship, but email will be my primary mode of communication.

16. While reading prospective mentee's manuscripts, what do you hope to experience?

Excitement. Awe.

17. What will you look for in the applications you receive?

Someone who is committed to this! (But not obsessed—meaning you let other things into your life besides writing and you are clear-headed about constructive advice.)

18. What about the idea of mentoring excites you most?

I would love to help find and sculpt something that will one day be on shelves. That would be amazing.

19. Is there anything, author-related, you wish people would ask you about? If so, what, and how would you respond?

Sometimes people ask “how do you balance motherhood and authorship,” and the answer is “I don’t!” It’s more like a see-saw. No balance. Just sometimes my mom game is on, and sometimes I got it as an author. But hardly ever at the same time.

20. What advice or inspiring and/or motivational words would you like to offer up to anyone applying to be your mentee or simply reading this questionnaire?

Don’t put all your eggs into one basket. Writing is your passion? Great. Do not let your happiness hinge upon it. It’s easier said than done, but focus every day on other interests besides writing, even for a few minutes. If you get that rejection (or don’t get selected for this mentorship), turn your attention to other things that you love and know that in time, you will get there.