

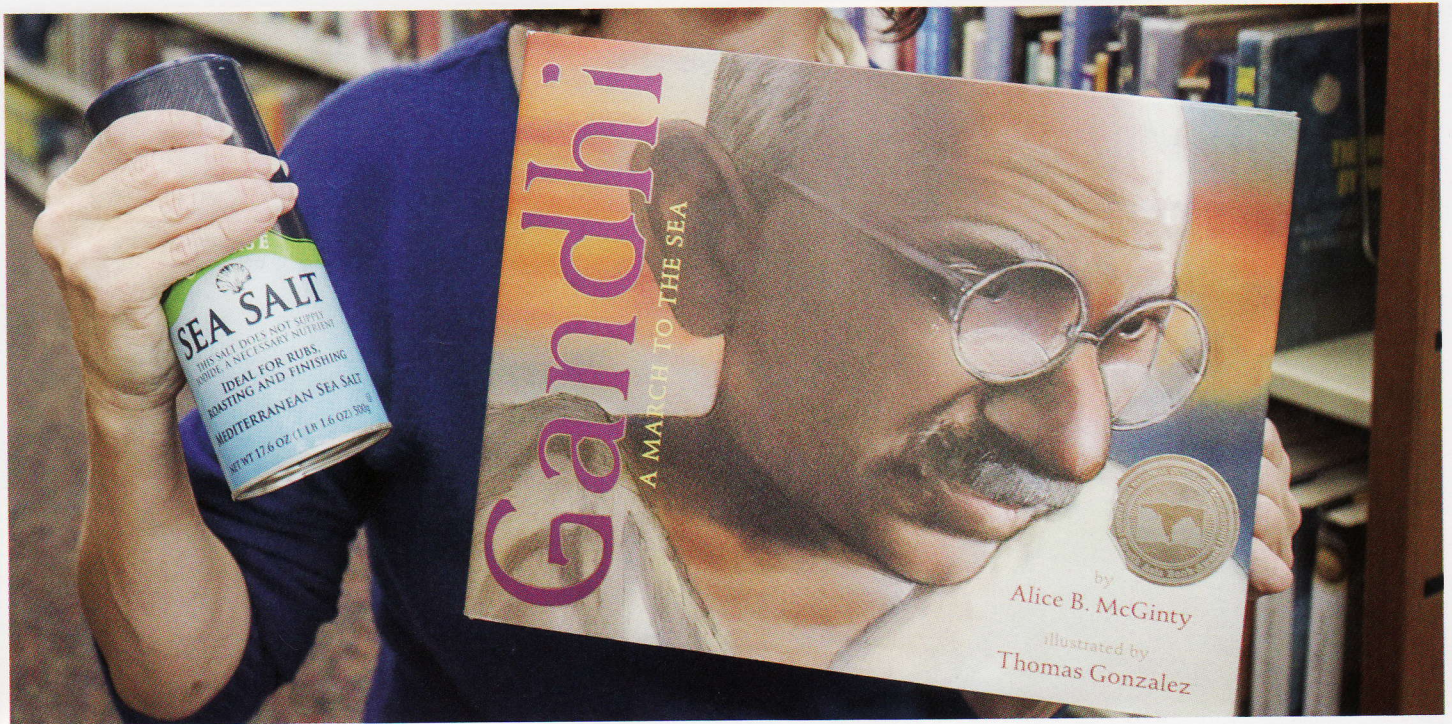


Alice McGinty holding her Guinea pig, Cookie. She based her book, "Eliza's Kindergarten Pet," on Cookie.

Story come *alive*

The very nugget of author's work

When children's author Alice B. McGinty was younger, she never really thought of herself as a writer. "I loved reading, though," she said. "I loved books." She enjoyed classics like "Charlotte's Web" and anything from Dr. Seuss.



Alice McGinty and her book "Gandhi, A March to the Sea," at the Urbana Free Library.

"Now, here I am, a working writer," McGinty said.

Working writer indeed. She has authored over 40 children's books.

"Well, counting the leveled readers, I have written over 100 books," she explained.

McGinty has also won many awards for her books. She is also a tutor, writing camp director, presenter, co-regional adviser of the Illinois Chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and a columnist for The News-Gazette.

A few years back, McGinty was awarded money from the Grant Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators to travel to India for a picture book she had contracted to write about Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India. She wanted to do research for her book, "Gandhi: A March to the Sea." Her poetic picture book tells about Gandhi and the 1930 Salt March, a peaceful protest of the British-imposed taxation of salt in India. It was her first visit to India.

"You can know about a person, but how much better can you know about someone if you travel to their homeland," she said from the Urbana Free Library children's section, where she was surrounded by her books. "India was my first research trip."

McGinty said that a child's book needs to "take it down to the very nugget." The writing has to be concise and simple, yet, engaging at the same time.

She said her experience in India was wonderful. She met many intriguing people, soaked in local culture and even had tea with Tushar Gandhi, the grandson of the famous leader. She spoke fondly of the experience, all the while holding her Guinea pig, Cookie, whom her book, "Eliza's Kindergarten Pet," is based on. Cookie nuzzled McGinty as they posed for pictures.

"She's a rock star. I'll bring her to schools for my presentations. I like to make the story come alive. I'll ask the kids if they've ever met the main character of a book, and then they get to meet her," she said.



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Children's author Alice McGinty and her books at the Urbana Free Library.

Like many, McGinty has been on a well-traveled road to get to the destination of working author. She graduated from the University of Illinois. Her major was therapeutic recreation with a minor in psychology. She worked for both the Champaign and Urbana park districts with disabled kids. This experience has helped her with her "Words on Fire" writing camps that she runs in the summer months.

According to McGinty, the Words on Fire camp is where teens in grades 6 through 12 retreat to a natural setting for a week to learn the art of writing stories. There are separate sessions for boys and girls. They tackle issues like character development, plot and voice. They explore genres like mystery, fantasy and humor in group settings, individual work and critique. Of course, it is camp, so there is plenty of time for fun with campfires, singing and s'mores.

"It's a culmination of everything that I love: nature and writing," she said.

Next summer, McGinty will be adding graphic novels to the camp as one more option for aspiring writers.

She's also working on a new children's book, "Bathe the Cat." The inspiration for this book is twofold: The first is a particularly engaging speaker at a conference who encouraged her to "break the rules" when it comes to writing. The second was a head cold.

"I was feeling poorly. I had taken some medicine that made me a little out of it," she said.

She was trying to remind herself to brush her teeth and blow her nose, so she said these things aloud to better remember them.

"Soon, I was saying, 'Blow your teeth and brush your nose,'" she said.

Her new book was born. The book is about a family with a list: take out the garbage, make your bed and bathe the cat. The clever cat, not wanting his bath, changes the list: make the garbage, bathe the bed and take out the cat. Of course, this is just a little example of the book. Readers who want to see the book's progress or order any of McGinty's selection of children's books can go to her website at alicebmcginty.com. Information about her camps and other services can also be accessed on her site. 🌐