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Wednesday, May 27, 2009

Author Interview: Roseanne Thong



Welcome **Roseanne Thong**, author of children's picture books with a distinctly Asian flavor! :D

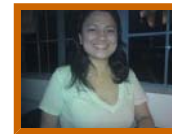
Roseanne, you have worked as a journalist and as an English teacher. What was your path to publication as a children's book writer?

My path to publication as a children's writer was purely accidental!

Welcome!

This is a blog mostly about literature for the young and young at heart. :o)

About Me



Tarie
Quezon City,
Philippines
Reader. Graduate

student (major: Anglo-American literature). Editor of EFL instructional materials. Children's and young adult literature blogger. Former (and future) English teacher. Lives for entertaining, intellectually stimulating, emotionally stirring, spiritually enriching, compelling, and engrossing narratives. Believes in The Grand Metanarrative. And yes, my favorite books are The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis. :o)

[View my complete profile](#)

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- [For more about me and Into the Wardrobe, and to learn about my review policy, click here to read children's book author Fran Cannon Slayton interview me about kidlit blogging...](#)

After my daughter, Maya, was born, I was inspired to write stories on basic themes that appeal to toddlers: shapes, colors, and numbers. Unfortunately, I just locked these ideas in a drawer, thinking that no one would be interested, other than my own child. One day, a good friend saw the manuscripts and insisted that I send them out to children's publishers. I learned how to send a query letter by joining SCBWI (Society of Children's Writers and Illustrators) and sent my manuscripts out to SCBWI's list of recommended publishers. A year later, I had sold my first book!

What motivates you to write children's books?

My world around me: what I see as I'm walking down the street, and working with students, what I care about regarding human interaction, and the things that bring a smile to my own daughter's face. I also am motivated to write about Asian culture, in a way that makes it interesting and exciting for all children. I write on universal themes, but often, with a unique Asian flavor.



- [And click here to read YA book blogger Steph Bowe interview me!](#)

Into the Wardrobe is a partner of the...



Mini-Blog: My Twitter Updates

- interviews Roseanne Thong, author of children's picture books with an Asian flavor!

<http://tinyurl.com/pg6a83>

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- Submit your best/favorite kidlit blog post of May for the Carnival of Children's Literature!

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- interviews YA writer Ellen Oh for Asian Pacific American Heritage Month!

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- Check out the results of the People's Choice YA Book Blog Awards!

<http://tinyurl.com/phrcf4> #ya **2**

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Do you have a particular writing process or any writing rituals?

Finding quality time to write is the most difficult obstacle that I face, and more important than the process of writing, is the process of finding time to write! You can't write in between phone calls, paying bills and cooking. You need a chunk of quality, quiet time. What I can do on these days, is to list out ideas...in a prioritized way...so that when I am presented with time...I already know what I'm going to focus on.

On my writing days, I don't answer the phone between 6:30 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. I put a sign on my door that says "Mom at work," and don't let anyone enter. I schedule all appointments for my non-writing days. Then...as soon as I have time...it's a mad race to get ideas down. I write as much as I can, with as little editing as possible. Then, later on, I will go back and edit those ideas--keeping the good and throwing out the bad.

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(olrac.salnac@gmail.com)

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Your picture book *Round is a Mooncake* (illustrated by Grace Lin and published by Chronicle Books in 2000) is a really fun and engaging book of shapes found in Asia (round rice bowls, square name chops, rectangle inking stones, etc.). I love it! What inspired you to write *Round is a Mooncake*?

It was the eve of the Moon Festival in Hong Kong, where I lived and taught English for 14 years. I was shopping in my local neighborhood, when I noticed the full, round, harvest moon, round lanterns, round mooncakes, round baskets of round fruit. I was suddenly inspired by round shapes. I grabbed my pen and an old electric bill I had in my purse, jotted down a rhyme that poured seamlessly from my thoughts...

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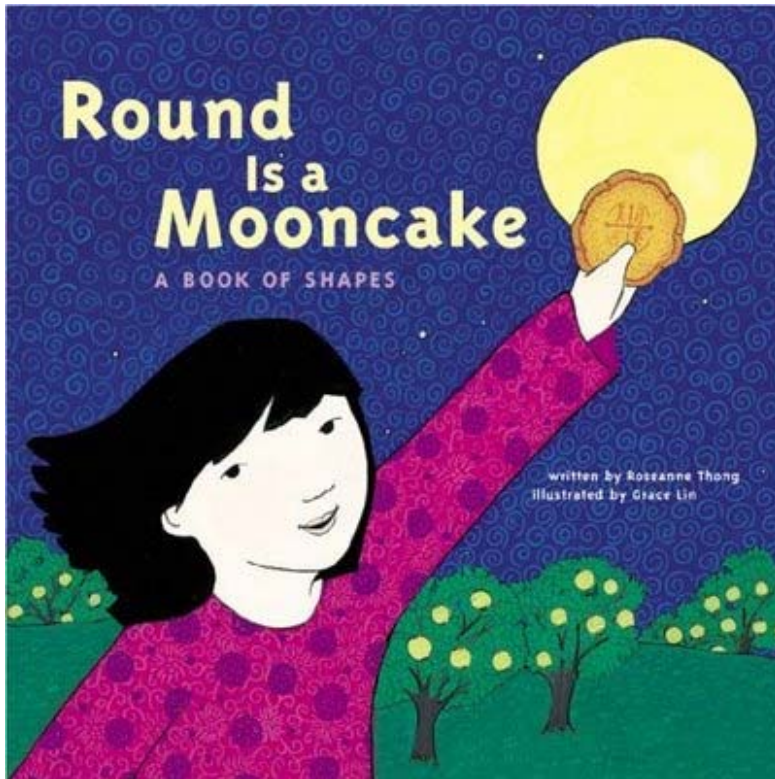
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Round is a mooncake
 Round is the moon
 Round are the lanterns outside my room...



The Wishing Tree (illustrated by Connie McLennan and published by Shen's Books in 2004) is based on a real wishing tree in Hong Kong. It's a touching and inspiring story about a boy named Ming and his grandmother who every year make wishes using the tree. What inspired you to write *The Wishing Tree*? Do you often make wishes on Chinese wishing trees?

When I lived in Hong Kong, my family and I would make a wish every year at the local Wishing Tree.

But this book was inspired by several questions that I'd been thinking about for years, not necessarily related to the wishing tree...."What purpose do wishes play in children's lives, and why do some children wish for things that can't come true?" My own daughter always wished for a dog, but we could never have one...I'm terribly allergic to animals, and we lived in a small apartment without a yard. As I explored questions about wishing, I developed a male character in my mind named Ming, who also wished for something that could not come true. I guess my daughter was the inspiration.

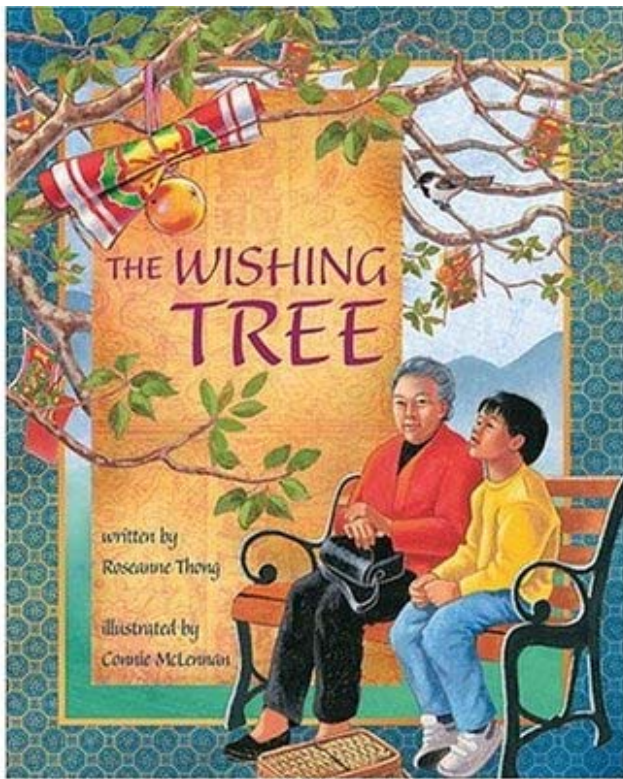


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I also love *Gai See: What You Can See in Chinatown* (illustrated by Yangsook Choi and published by Abrams Books for Young Readers in 2007)! It's an absolutely delightful picture book about the things one can see at a Chinese street market, from songbirds to velvet shoes with pearls and beads, to dragon fruit and sticky jellies. What inspired you to write *Gai See*? What are your favorite things in Chinese street markets?

As with *Round is a Mooncake*, *Gai See* was inspired by a walk through my local Chinese street market or "Gai See" in Cantonese. I noticed the unique sounds, textures, smells, tastes, and visual stimulation, and then presented myself with a question that turned into a book...

What in the world could you possibly see at an old Gai See beside the sea on a hot and steamy, melt ice creamy summery Saturday morning?

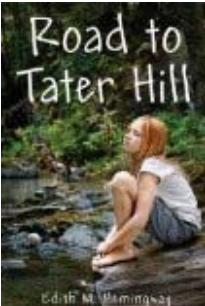
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The Class of 2k9



Class of 2k9

Middle Grade




Road to Tater Hill

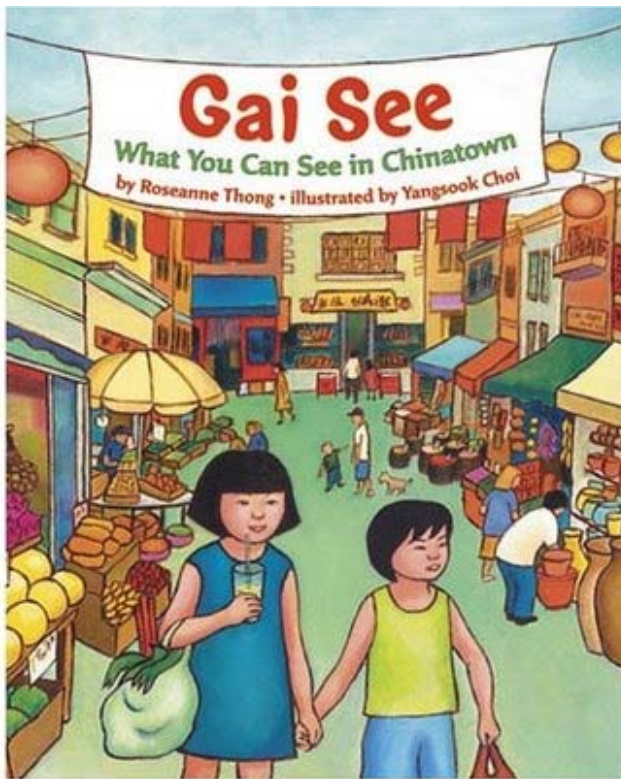
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What are the challenges and rewards of writing Asian-influenced children's books?

The biggest challenge of writing an Asian-themed book is being culturally accurate, both in text and with illustration. Sometimes, the illustrations are not appropriate: they might show a Japanese item, rather than a Chinese one, or colors or numbers that are culturally offensive or even foreign to Chinese. I also worry that I might not have understood customs or traditions fully. Therefore, I run my text past 3 or 4 'experts'...librarians, teachers, and others, who can make sure the text sound authentic.

What are your favorite Asian or Asian American children's books? What Asian or Asian American children's books are you reading now?

Wow...there are so many good ones. Just a few that come to mind are "Baseball Saved Us" by Ken Mochizuki, "Monsoon" by Uma Krishnaswami, and various books by Allen Say, Paul Say and Minfong Ho. I'm currently re-reading "Farewell to Manzanar" for the 5th or 6th time.

What are some of your favorite experiences from living in Asia for more than 15 years?

Asia is an incredible place. While there is always something new and unexpected around every corner, my favorite experiences are

the mundane...the chirp of cicada (like crickets at a soccer match) on a warm summer day, the beckoning taste of dragon fruit, star fruit and mangosteen, the call of street hawkers, and warm, humid air from the South China sea.



(Roseanne with her daughter Maya at Victoria Peak, Hong Kong)

You are American and your husband is Malaysian-born Chinese, so your daughter enjoys a very rich mixed

heritage. Does your family celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month? How are you celebrating it this year?

We celebrate everything that comes along...it makes life more exciting! A few times a year, I take my daughter to the bookstore (her idea of the proverbial 'candy shop') and let her pick out two books on a particular theme. We'll celebrate by delving into the newest Asian-American authors and books.





(Roseanne and Maya at dragon boat races in Hong Kong)

What are your upcoming books for children?

My latest is a book entitled "Wish" (Chronicle Books, 2008), it is a book of international wish-making traditions. It recently was named "Best of the Best Book" from Chicago Public Library, and was a "Notable Book" recommended by Smithsonian Magazine.

Another book called "Fly Free" will be published later this year. It is a book about Karma, written in a way that young children can grasp. It takes place in Vietnam, though the concept is universal...that good karma or good deeds generate goodness.

Thank you so much Roseanne for taking the time to answer my questions today. And I thank you for writing books for children that are great introductions to Asian culture!

Posted by Tarie at 1:55 AM

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