



Vol. 34, No. 9 • November/December 2002

an Alaska Press Women publication

Graham Biddle:

A man of few words

by Emily McKenzie

You may not know it, but you've seen a lot of work by Graham Biddle.

He has been creating marketing messages for over 20 years. As vice-president and Creative Director of the Nerland Agency he is part of all creative production, whether it is coming up with an advertising concept or producing print, broadcast and interactive productions. One of Biddle's favorite jobs is building state-of-the-art computer graphics equipment. He oversees an eight-person department, along with editing, mixing music, filming, and script writing.

Biddle spoke at APW's December meeting about writing. "I'm a copywriter. It's good to talk to other writers. We all have something in common. Our palette is a blank sheet of paper. People who don't write don't understand what facing a blank piece of paper is like."

Do you remember the ACS ad with different colored cell phones lined up like popsicles on a stick and one big word at the top "YUM"? That was Biddle's work. Remember the CIRI presentation that ended with, "... In the words of a learned elder, buy low and sell high." That was Biddle's work as well.

Fairbanks Memorial Hospital turned to the Nerland Agency to attract nurses to Alaska. Instead of nurses participating in dog sledding, Biddle developed a theme of the "warmth" and the close bonds of Fairbanks. Now warmth is not an adjective you'd associate at first thought with Fairbanks, especially in the winter, but the warmth of a close community and the spirit of that community have helped Fairbanks recruit nurses looking for just that.

Biddle feels that for a creative person, Alaska is a good place to be because a lot of work can be created and produced by the individual from beginning to end, whereas in the Lower 48, it is usually more of a team effort by a wide variety of people. Advertising needs to fit the client. Different companies have different personalities. Working for a variety of clients allows the creative designer a full range of styles and approaches.

Most important, Biddle says, is identifying what he calls the "Free Beer" issue for each ad. What is going to grab the reader, the viewer, or the listener? What invites further attention? "A good ad needs to be relevant. Nobody opens a newspaper or looks at TV to see the ads. I have 3 seconds to grab people. Find the



Graham Biddle speaks at Alaska Press Women's January luncheon.

"free beer" hook. Be honest. Make it short."

When Biddle was a freshman in his last required English course, he thought he was through with English, but his instructor called him aside. She told him he was a pretty good writer and he should be taking more courses in writing and literature. He took her advice.

But he says there is a difference in his writing style from college to the present. "I used to write short stories in college. Now I write a couple of lines and I'm done." In the advertising world, if it's good, it's short and memorable. Graham Biddle is good.

Remember! APW Communications Contest! Do you have something to enter?

Deadline: February 7, 2003 -- or bring your entries to the February 6 luncheon. Rules, categories and entry form are at <http://www.akpresswomen.com>

Children's book illustrator talks about her first project

by Carolyn Rinehart

Slim and youthful, with close-cropped blond hair and an easy, sincere manner of speaking, Amy Meissner might pass for a young fashion designer—which she once was—or even a college undergraduate with exceptional poise.

But she isn't. She is a budding children's book illustrator on the way to her first success with "Ollie Jolly the Rodeo Clown." How she was chosen for the job and her experiences doing the artwork and marketing the book were topics of her talk to the APW November luncheon.

After months of working on the project, including nights and weekends—"Ollie Jollying," as her husband called it—and with the actual finished book in hand, she was ready for the book-signing circuit. An event just before Halloween at a local bookstore was billed as a "Cowboy Ice Cream Party," in keeping with the book's theme. A prize awaited the child with the best costume.

The store representative who met Meissner at the door, however, wasn't happy. Instead of cowboys and cowgirls, only witches had shown up. Gamely, she went ahead and started reading "Ollie Jolly" to a coven of 12-year-old witches.

Mid-reading, she said, a little cowgirl finally entered, in full regalia complete with a singing hobby horse. The store people descended on her, quickly pronounced her the prizewinner, "and really ticked off all the witches."

Meissner hasn't always been an illustrator/writer. She told how she spent 10 years designing and creating wedding gowns for the very rich, having earned undergraduate degrees in art and textiles. "My heart wasn't in it," she said.

A good friend's death in 1999 made

her realize she had only one shot at life, and she determined to make it her best. Right then she bought a sketchbook and started drawing her own material.

She moved to Alaska in 2000 to begin a new life. Besides her illustration work, she is completing an MFA in creative writing at the University of Alaska Anchorage and is assistant editor for *Alaska Quarterly Review* literary magazine. She wrote two short stories that won prizes in the *Anchorage Daily News*/UAA Creative Writing Contest.

She spent a couple of months sending illustration work to New York publishers, only to be rejected. Deciding to try closer to home, she met Sara Juday (a former APW member) at Northwest Books in the spring of 2001 and showed her portfolio. "We hit it off right away," Meissner said.

When Juday called and asked her to try illustrating the "Ollie" manuscript, she said, "I tried to be noncommittal, but after I hung up I was screaming and dancing with the cat."

She sent sketches, and within a week she had a contract. That, however, left her nervous and drove her to start reading about the theory of children's illustration.

She concluded that illustrations should function as counterpoint to the text, possibly offering clues to the story, and not just duplicate the text.

The true story of the author-illustrator relationship, she said, is usually different from what most people think. When asked, "How do you work with the author?" her answer is "You don't."

The publisher's goal is to find a perfect author-illustrator match, she said—one that sells books. Most publishers won't accept an illustrated

the Prez Says

DIANE WALTERS

I hope you all had an enjoyable holiday season and are ready to get back into the swing of things. It's hard to believe we're in 2003 already. It seems like just yesterday we were panicking over Y2K and all the potential horrors it was going bring to our technological lives.

On a sad note, I want to express my condolences to Carolyn Rinehart, whose mother passed away the day after Christmas. She was 91.

On a happy note, congratulations to Doris and S.E. Thomas on their 30th wedding anniversary Jan. 6.

It's a new year and with it comes New Year's Resolutions. Some of mine for APW include:

- Updating the board member information on the APW Web site
- Getting my president's notebook in order
- Finding a Communicator of Achievement chairperson
- Finishing our mission statement
- Increasing our membership

If one of your New Year's Resolutions is to volunteer more, consider helping APW. We still have a number of positions that need to be filled including the Communicator of Achievement chair mentioned above, historian, and workshop coordinator. We will also be looking for people to serve on the nominating committee. Please contact me or one of the other board members if you're interested in helping out. The more members we have involved the better we are as an organization. And, if you haven't renewed your membership yet, now's the time to do it.

Here's to a great 2003.

Diane

cont. p. 3

Meissner cont.

package.

At large publishers, the writer works with an editor and the illustrator with an art director, she said. At Graphic Arts Center Publishing, where "Ollie" was published, she and the author shared an editor who was also working as an art director.

Some writers must accept as part of their contract that they have no say as to the illustrations, Meissner said. On a picture book, the writer and illustrator usually split the royalties 50-50.

Though she didn't know the author when she illustrated "Ollie," she now communicates with her frequently by e-mail. The book's first printing had a run of 10,000 copies, half hardback and half paper.

Meissner has three other illustrated children's books in production at Graphic Arts, including one about two dogs, Salt and Pepper, who switch owners at the Pike Place Market in Seattle.

Next luncheon: February 6

Gary Cohn, Atwood Professor, will speak about investigative reporting

Luncheons are held the first Thursday of every month at 11:30 a.m.

Golden Lion Hotel
36th and New Seward
Anchorage

\$15.00 members
\$16.00 guests

Reservations: 274-4723

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published monthly by Alaska Press Women
(an affiliate of the National Federation of Press Women)

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