

New Year, New Look, New Book!

Dear Friends,

I love a new year, don't you? All those fresh, white pages in my calendar combined with the stark, bright beauty of winter sunshine rustling the lake... inspiring! Since 2008 I've selected One Little Word to be my guide and companion for the year. It's a practice that continues to nurture me, and I invite you to join me! Read about my 2019 OLW [here](#).

Meanwhile, you may have noticed this newsletter has a new name and a new look. Like all writers, my identity continues to shift and morph as I continue to write and publish. In fact, it was Agnes, the shape-shifting heroine of my book [LOVE, AGNES: POSTCARDS FROM AN OCTOPUS](#) who helped me discover the one thing all my books have in common: *imagination*. I love looking at that octopus avatar (whose name is Thea in honor of her creator [Thea Baker](#)) and wondering what stories she and Hector (the Yellow Bird) are sharing. Perhaps they are whispering about a fictional boy named Frank and a real elephant named Miss Fancy, the main characters in my newest book [MEET MISS FANCY](#) (illus. by [John Holyfield](#)), which releases TODAY!

Yes! I want to MEET MISS FANCY today!



MEET MISS FANCY by
Irene Latham
illustrations by John
Holyfield G. P. Putnam's
Sons/Penguin Random
House 978-0399546686
for K and up

About MEET MISS FANCY

A charming and significant story set prior to the Civil Rights Movement about a boy who finds a way to challenge segregation laws. *Inspired by actual events.*

Frank has always been obsessed with elephants. He loves their hosepipe trunks, tree stump feet, and swish-swish tails. So when Miss Fancy, the elephant, retires from the circus in 1913 and moves two blocks from his house to Avondale Park (Birmingham, Alabama), he's over the moon! Frank really wants to pet her. But Avondale Park is just for white people, so Frank is not allowed to see Miss Fancy. Frank is heartbroken but he doesn't give up: instead he makes a plan!

Advance Praise

Illustrated by renowned painter [Holyfield](#), Meet Miss Fancy should be savored for its joyous, vibrant renderings of Avondale's African American community and families, so full of movement and light that they often resemble stills from an animated film. This is a gem of a story. - *Booklist* / **STARRED**

"Quality storytelling and beautiful art allow a likable protagonist to shine." - *Kirkus Reviews*

"Author and artist together take a small but memorable anecdote from Birmingham history... and create a window into the Jim Crow South while also telling a compelling tale about a boy and an elephant." - *Horn Book*

More About the Book:

This is my 8th book for children, and it brought me back to Excellent Editor Stacey Barney (G.P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin Random House), who helped me bring forth my debut historical fiction middle grade novel [LEAVING GEE'S BEND](#) in 2010. What joy to work with Stacey again!

I first learned about Miss Fancy from an [article by James L. Baggett](#) in *Alabama Heritage* magazine. I wrote SO MANY drafts of this book! But every time I sent them to my amazing agent [Rosemary Stimola](#), she said, "not there yet." I almost gave up. And then I found it: my story. It came from a snippet of research about Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church's 1913 petition for the congregation to have a picnic in the park with Miss Fancy. That's when the muses offered me Frank. Big thanks to my friend Pat who kept asking, "how's that Miss Fancy story coming along?" Even a nudge as small as that can help keep a writer going!

This is not the first time my books have featured an elephant. Both [DON'T FEED THE BOY](#) and [DEAR WANDERING WILDEBEEST](#) include elephants. That may be because one of my most beloved books as a child was HORTON HATCHES THE EGG by Dr. Seuss. Plus my poem "[Let's Celebrate the Elephant](#)" appears in [THE POETRY FRIDAY ANTHOLOGY FOR CELEBRATIONS](#).

My favorite spread in [MEET MISS FANCY](#) features Frank's mother imparting some important words to Frank. These were the toughest words to get right in the whole manuscript! Just like Frank's mother, I believe change can and will happen; it just takes hope, determination, imagination, love and *time*.

Perfect for:

... classroom and family read-alouds, readers who love animals, readers who want to make a difference, Black History Month celebrations, Alabama's bicentennial celebrations... and more!

Birmingham friends, please join me at [Avondale Public Library](#) January 13 (poster

below!) or at Homewood Public Library January 24 for a Meet Miss Fancy [Birthday Party](#).

Win an Elephant Book Pack!

I love you guys! And who doesn't love elephants?! To thank you for being a newsletter subscriber, I am offering an Elephant Book Pack that includes the following 11 books:

[National Geographic Readers: Elephants](#) by Avery Hurt
[Meet Miss Fancy](#) by Irene Latham (personalized and autographed)
[The Magician's Elephant](#) by Kate DiCamillo
[The Story of Babar](#) by Jean de Brunhoff
[Horton Hatches the Egg](#) by Dr. Seuss
[Dear Wandering Wildebeest](#) by Irene Latham (personalized & autographed)
[Chained](#) by Lynne Kelley
[Cousins of Clouds: Elephant Poems](#) by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer
[Eavesdropping on Elephants](#) by Patricia Newman
[Don't Feed the Boy](#) by Irene Latham (personalized & autographed)
[An Elephant in the Garden](#) by Michael Morpurgo

To enter, simply [click to enter Elephant Pack Giveaway](#). Check the box that says "I'm a subscriber." You can earn more entries by sharing with someone about this book. Rafflecopter will do the rest.

I'll notify the winner and post on [my blog](#) Monday, January 14. THANK YOU!!

Finally, here is a Happy quote for you: "Happiness, not in another place but this place...not for another hour, but this hour." - *Walt Whitman*

Wishing you happiness this hour and all hours!

Love,
Irene



P.S. The whole [CAN I TOUCH YOUR HAIR?](#) team continues to be humbled and delighted by the recognition the book is receiving. Most recently the book was included as a [CYBILS Poetry Book Finalist](#) and a [Nerdy Book Club Best Poetry Book!](#) It was also selected a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) [Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction Honor Book](#). We are so grateful, and it is our sincerest hope that this means more adults and children will make the brave choice to engage in honest, vulnerable conversations about race, mistakes, and friendship. #startaconversation

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