

BREAKING IN

Debut authors: How they did it, what they learned, and why you can do it, too.

BY CASSANDRA LIPP

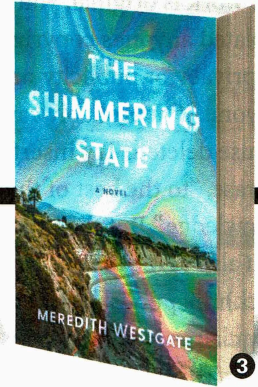
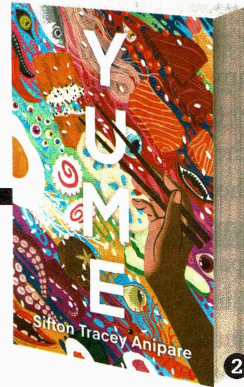
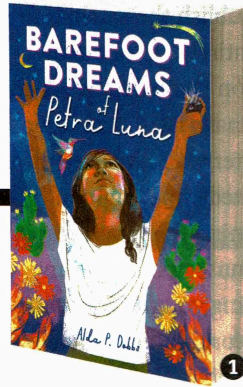


Alda P. Dobbs *Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna*

(MG historical fiction, September, Sourcebooks)

"Inspired by the author's family stories and set during the bloodiest year of the Mexican Revolution in 1913, 12-year-old Petra Luna, a poor peasant girl, will stop at nothing to get her family to safety."

WRITES FROM: Montgomery, Texas. **PRE-PETRA:** As a child, I had a love-hate relationship with English, my second language, but I had a passion for storytelling. I studied physics in college and worked as an engineer before a move to Italy pushed me to pursue my dream of writing. After several rejections on my first novel—an anthropomorphic story—I continued to hone my craft by writing and publishing articles for *Highlights* and other magazines. **TIME FRAME:** *Petra Luna* started as an idea for a children's magazine article in 2013. I embarked on a research journey to prove the accuracy of a family story that'd been handed down from my great-grandmother. I struck gold when I found a newspaper article that confirmed my great-grandmother's tale of survival. I decided to turn my article into a picture book, and at a conference in 2015, an agent insisted I turn it into a



novel. In the five years that followed, I wrote an enormous manuscript that turned out to be two books.

ENTER THE AGENT: I met Ammi-Joan Paquette (Erin Murphy Literary Agency) at a conference in 2016. She encouraged me to keep in touch, and it took three years before I submitted to her. She signed me within a month and sold the book in our first round.

WHAT I DID RIGHT: I found a trusted reading partner (my husband) and signed up for professional critiques at conferences. I read and studied craft books, as well as fiction books in and outside my genre. I attended workshops, subscribed to *WD*, and joined SCBWI. There, I found friends and mentors who guided me throughout my journey. **WHAT I WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY:** I would have taken more breaks. One hour of "loss" from walking/running (without my phone) actually increases my energy, output, and creative juices! **PLATFORM:** I began a newsletter where I give sneak peeks of my work, announce events, share writing/publishing tips, and give shout-outs to fellow authors. I've also signed up to give webinars on writing and on researching family stories. I'm

a member of Las Musas and SCBWI, where I have opportunities to volunteer and network with many marvelous authors. **ADVICE FOR WRITERS:** Learn not to take rejection personally, no matter how much it stings. Step back and analyze rejections constructively so that you can discern the given feedback and know how to apply it to your work. Remember to be grateful and always pay it forward!

NEXT UP: A sequel to *Petra Luna* is slated for 2022. This story follows Petra's life at a refugee camp at the Texas border and then on to San Antonio along with 30,000 other refugees. **WEBSITES:** AldaPDobbs.com



Sifton Tracey Anipare *Yume*

(Literary urban fantasy, September, Dundurn)

"Yume is a tale of demons, dreams, and a Canadian expat trying to teach English in Japan."

WRITES FROM: Toronto. **PRE-YUME:** Before moving to Japan, I wrote for fun when I could squeeze in time between high school and university