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## Linda S. Wingerter: The Light Within, By Katherine Pierpont

*The luminous work of this multitalented, multifaced illustrator transforms books into treasures*

This may have been the first time an illustrator had ever invited us into her attic. As we picked our way through a fascinating hodgepodge of dress forms, neatly ordered stacks of magazines and old mystery-filled trunks, we were given just a small preview into the myriad of things from which artist Linda Wingerter draws her inspiration. When Linda graciously invited us into her studio, we looked from the haphazard collection of sapphire-colored bottles on the windowsill to the circa 1960s pillbox hat/wedding veil laying across her desk and realized that this was not your ordinary attic-cum-purgatory for cast-off items at their last exit before the trash. Instead, Linda Wingerter's attic serves as a haven for found objects and a place where inspiration lies in what others often overlook.

### Between the lines.

One of the reasons why there are so many things in Linda Wingerter's attic is because there are so many sides to Linda Wingerter herself. She is clearly a passionate artist whose forte is communing with things that exist between the lines – both in the books she illustrates and life in general. When we sat down with her this past August at her home in West Haven, CT, Linda radiated a lovely, introspective calm and a genuine warmth. We were pleased to discover that there's also a impish side to Linda that delights in the idea of chance connections and synchronicity. She had us utterly spellbound by her expeditions with "bookcrossing" (the practice of leaving a book in a public place to be discovered by someone, who in turn leaves a book to be "caught" by someone else) and a recent cross-country trip where she inscribed 21 stones with Latin phrases and left them at stops along the way so they could be discovered by random strangers. Deeper into the conversation we learned that in addition to being the enormously talented illustrator of books such as *One Grain of Sand* by Pete Seeger (Little, Brown and Company, 2002), *What Could Be Better Than This?* by Linda Ashman (Dutton, 2002) and *Magic Hoofbeats: Horse Tales from Many Lands*, retold by Josepha Sherman (Barefoot Books, 2004), Linda is also proficient in the ancient art of fire twirling, a skilled puppet creator and puppeteer, a "jammer" on a women's roller derby team and can play a pretty mean version of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" on the musical saw. "Anything I can do to change someone's expectations, I love," she said.

### A certain shade of blue.

Much like Linda herself, each of her books exudes a unique, serene quality; just by turning to the first page, the reader can see that this is a book to be lingered over and savored. When we remarked about how each of Linda's books seem to include paintings that appear to be lit from within with distinctive, jewel-toned shades of blue and purple, she smiled to herself. "I have this really strong memory," she told us. "When I was little, my mom used to drive me a lot because my father died when I was young. She'd shuttle me back and forth to my grandmother's house and I remember the blue of the high beam light on the dashboard. I was transfixed on that for so long – I loved to get in the car at night just to watch that blue light. So, I think in every book I'm trying to capture that glow."

In addition to that specific hue of nighttime blue, Linda Wingerter's paintings also hold a wonderful depth and texture, thanks to a technique that Linda developed after experiencing major frustrations as a watercolor artist. "You have to plan ahead with watercolor and I'm not good at doing that," she said. During one particularly aggravating night, she became so angry, she layered the painting with acrylics and began to distress it by using furniture-distressing techniques. "I thought it was really liberating that I could be destructive and let things happen on their own. That element of chance and not planning ahead so far was just so pretty," she said, "So that night I switched from watercolor to acrylic and never went back."

### Take your time.

As someone who relishes steeping in the minutiae of life, Linda is an artist who deeply ruminates on her latest project at hand, sometimes taking two years to finish her illustrations for a book. "I need a long time. I can't really think about two books at once," she said. She showed us her preliminary sketches for an upcoming book about Tibet and played us some Tibetan music she had been listening to while working. "I usually know I'm going to do a book for a year in advance and I can start collecting objects about it for a while. It becomes my life. I spend my whole time thinking about it!" Even so, Linda is dedicated to the illustrator's process of taking an author's words and reading in between the lines. "I love the game of it, the challenge of finding my own personal things," she said.



Linda shows us one of her attic treasures – Teddy, a marionette that once belonged to her grandfather.



Linda surrounded by her attic treasures. "I was literally four years old when I decided I wanted to be a

**Just do it.**

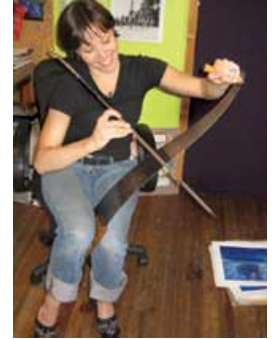
As someone who hails from a family of artists, Linda Wingerter has always been fine-tuned to look closely at life's smaller details. Her great-grandfather painted church murals in Russia, her grandfather was a puppeteer who had his own puppet theatre, her grandmother was a miniaturist, her father was a graphic artist and her mother is a book designer. "I was literally four years old when I decided I wanted to be a children's book artist," she said. "My mom would buy me the most beautiful books and say, 'You can do this.' So I would illustrate my own little books for her," she said. When it came time for college, Linda looked specifically for a school where she could study children's book illustration and landed at Rhode Island School of Design. "There was never a deviation from illustrating, which had its ups and downs," Linda told us. "It's hard when you feel like it's not going to work and it's your whole life."

children's book artist."

**Blue roses.**

Luckily for us and for her, it worked. And to make sure she never strays too far off her path, Linda belongs to a wonderful network of fellow female illustrators and authors called the Blue Rose Girls. The group, which meets mostly via the Internet through their blog ([Blue Rose Girls \(http://web.archive.org/web/20140716215416/http://blurosegirls.blogspot.com/\)](http://web.archive.org/web/20140716215416/http://blurosegirls.blogspot.com/)), is comprised of Linda's good friend from college and fellow illustrator Grace Lin, illustrator Anna Alter, authors Libby Koponen and Meghan McCarthy and editor Alvina Ling. What began as a support group to help each other with business details such as how to contact an editor and the art of self-promotion, has become a healthy competition of sorts, as each Blue Rose Girl's career is now off and running. "I think we made it because of each other," Linda said. She's also hoping to one day write a children's book of her own as well. "There's a beautiful story that a woman I met from Tibet told me that's in my head every day," she said.

One thing is for certain: Linda Wingerter is an artist who has dedicated her heart and soul to her craft. And while she may one day fully recapture that stunning indigo glow from her childhood, here's hoping she never, ever cleans out her attic.



And on musical saw, Linda Wingerter, illustrator. "My mom would buy me the most beautiful books and say, "You can do this."

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Katherine Pierpont, former senior editor *Teaching K-8 magazine*.