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*The Official Publication
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A CAREER GONE TO THE DOGS

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Jen Reeder discovered her niche
and passion for pet writing.*



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»» Market Report | BOYS' LIFE

Boys' Life may not be the only single magazine to have published the work of Isaac Asimov, Van Wyck Brooks, Bruce Catton, Bobby Fischer, Alex Haley, Jeff Kinney, Gary Paulsen, Ernest Thompson Seton, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Henry Winkler. But it's certainly the only magazine to do so that also employs its own mailburro. That would be the fictional Pedro, who in 1947 gave up a cushy life at Philmont Scout Ranch for an equally cushy job responding to readers' letters and annoying The Boss.



The juxtaposition between serious writing and occasional silliness is one reason Boys' Life is still in business 106 years after its first issue appeared. It also helps explain why readers named it the hottest kids/teen magazine in Adweek's 2016 Magazine of the Year awards. (It bested J-14, National Geographic Kids, Seventeen, Sports Illustrated Kids, and Teen Vogue, the magazine Adweek's editors selected.)

Boys' Life is the official youth magazine of the Boy Scouts of America, but the content is not limited to Scouting topics. As Managing Editor Paula Murphey explains, "BL's mission is to entertain and educate America's youth, promoting literacy and helping to create the leaders of tomorrow, all through a proven content mix of information, instruction, and inspiration."

While most subscribers are either Cub Scouts (boys in elementary school) or Boy Scouts (boys in middle school and high school), only about half the content relates directly to Scouting. In fact, the magazine focuses as much on promoting literacy as it does on promoting the BSA. "Whether it's comics, jokes, and fiction or articles about adventure, technology, science, nature, entertainment, games, cars, sports, etc...whatever compels a youth to read is what we'd like to feature in our magazine," Murphey says.

Of course, what compels a seven-year-old to read is quite different from what interests a 17-year-old. For that reason, Boys' Life (unlike its competitors) publishes two different editions each month: one for readers ages 6 through 10 and one for readers ages 11 through 17. "Generally, there are about 12 pages of content that vary between the two versions," Murphey says. "You need not pitch for a specific edition; our editors will determine which is appropriate for your piece."



Murphey says her staff works four months in advance and schedules major features and fiction a year ahead. Special issues include an annual holiday gift guide (December) and a biennial fishing issue (April).

Major articles run 500 to 1,500 words, while departments run up to 600 words. Most of the magazine is open to freelancers, although you probably shouldn't mess with Pedro. (After 70 years at the magazine, he has plenty of job security.) Also, fiction is by assignment only, so there's no reason to query or send an unsolicited manuscript.

The key to breaking into this market is to submit a specific query with some sort of news hook. "We get a lot of queries for 'isn't it interesting?' stories," Murphey says. "There should be some kind of newsworthiness or timeliness behind the story—a recent discovery, a new application for something, etc. Not just a story about firefighting gear, but one about the latest and greatest tech-loaded firefighting gear. Not just a 'didjaknow' about the giant squid, but a feature driven by the latest discoveries associated with the giant squid."

It's also important to think from a kid's perspective. Don't profile a chef at a famous restaurant; profile a chef for a winning pro sports team. Don't write about the latest advances in Doppler radar; write about a former Scout who drives into tornadoes to learn more about them. (Actually, don't write about that topic either; it's been covered recently.)

As the roster of past contributors shows, Boys' Life is interested in seriously good writing—even if the subject matter isn't always serious. "There should be an element of reporting: Conduct interviews, get original quotes from the experts and key players, do your homework," Murphey says. "Don't just do 'term paper' research and Google a piece into shape."

It's also important to get the tone of your writing right. "One challenge of writing for children's publications is getting on the reader's level without being condescending," Murphey says. "In other words, don't be too sweet, too cheery, or preachy in tone. Youth don't want to be patronized or lectured. Avoid lots of '!!!' and '???' in your approach, and don't be afraid to use sentence constructions other than simple. We want to approach readers with brevity, clarity, and simplicity, without being simplistic."

Finally, if all else fails, you can always submit a joke for the Think & Grin department. You won't get paid, but you will receive an Official Boys' Life Contributor patch if your joke is used. But don't head to the website for opportunities: Although Boys' Life has an active website, BoysLife.org, most original content there is generated in house.

BOYS' LIFE AT A GLANCE



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Whom to query:

Features: Paula Murphey;
Departments: Clay Swartz

Address queries to the
appropriate editor at:

Boys' Life
Boy Scouts of America
1325 West Walnut Hill Lane
P.O. Box 152079
Irving, TX 75015-2079