

Catherine McCafferty tells a story of The Steel

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the January 2, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on the Arts in Bethlehem* 

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Catherine McCafferty, TUG! Bethlehem: BAPL Books, 2020

Here's Catherine:

The most important aspect of writing TUG! was voice. The idea for a children's book about Bethlehem Steel came from **Josh Berk**, who is the director of the Bethlehem Area Public Library and publisher of **BAPL Books**. He suggested a "Storytime with a Steelworker" as part of the **Last Cast celebration** in November 2020. Knowing that TUG! would be read by a steelworker (Lester Clore) and knowing that TUG, the tow tractor, effectively was a steelworker, I wanted to be sure that his voice reflected his experience. I also had a built-in advantage on this front. As a children's librarian who's done many storytimes, I've developed a good sense of what works as a read-aloud. Beyond TUG's

voice, I used repetition and the call of his name (“TUG!”) to draw readers into the story.

I’m glad to say that the writing came pretty easily for this book. That isn’t always the case, so I’m always grateful when it happens. Mike Piersa, historian at the **National Museum of Industrial Museum**, originated the terrific concept of TUG as a character. When I thought about the book, the first thing I heard in my mind was that shout of “TUG!” Everything fell into place after that. For this book, I did a lot of pre-writing: working out in my mind the tone, dialogue, and pace for the story. Piece by piece, the book followed TUG’s story and, by extension, the story of Bethlehem Steel. Mike helped me fill out the heart of the story with factual background, and Josh served as the editor. I was very pleased that from the first draft to the printed version not a lot was changed.

I was also honored to be part of a book that celebrated the local history of Bethlehem Steel for kids. I grew up in Bethlehem at a time when “The Steel” dominated the city. Even now, as people pick up the book at the library, almost every one mentions a family member or friend who worked there. At the distanced/outdoors book signing in December, a steelworker who had driven TUG at The Steel had a chance to sit in the driver’s seat again. And 93-year-old Rudy Garcia, who worked at Bethlehem Steel for 48 years, connected with both me and Mike Piersa at the event. It’s really gratifying to see TUG!—the book and the tractor — connecting the generations.

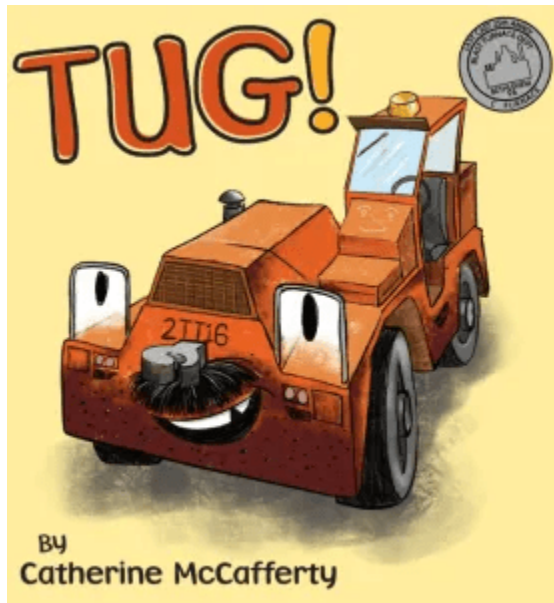
from Catherine McCafferty, TUG! Bethlehem: BAPL Books, 2020:

TUG!

That's what they call me.

And let me tell you, over the years, they called me A LOT.

First time I heard my name, I was a shiny-paint new Tow Tractor weighin' 16,000 pounds.



“TUG!” they said, in voices that meant, “Comin’ through! This bruiser’s strong enough to push back planes!”

But I wasn’t headin’ to any airport. I left the peachy state of Georgia for a place that was paint-blisterin’ hot and bolt-rustin’ damp, all at the same time.

And BIG! This place had its own railroad! The Philadelphia, Bethlehem, and New England Railroad, they called it.

They put a coupler on me, so I could work the rails where they went into the buildings. That’s right. This place was so big, it had trains runnin’ INSIDE. With my help.

TUG! That's what I did, hauling train cars past signs that said Bethlehem Steel.



Catherine McCafferty grew up in Bethlehem when Bethlehem Steel was in its heyday. By the time she left for college in Pittsburgh, the industry was declining in both cities. School and work took her onward to the Boston area and Southern California. Not long after she resettled in Bethlehem, Touchstone Theatre marked the loss of Bethlehem Steel with its 1999 production of *Steelbound*. The “stage” for this Bethlehem Steel version of *Prometheus Bound* was the abandoned iron foundry, and Catherine can still remember her awe at the scale of the production: it opened with a limousine driving into the foundry and starred Touchstone co-founder Bill George as a steelworker telling his story while chained to a 24-ton ladle. In addition to her work as a writer and editor, Catherine has guided tours at Historic Bethlehem and taught at Northampton Community College. She is now happily surrounded by books at the Bethlehem Area Public Library, where she works as a children’s librarian.

Copies of TUG! are available from **BAPL Books**.

While ordering TUG!, consider also the BAPL books by Bob Cohen (see [here](#) and [here](#)) and Matt Wolf (see [here](#)).

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