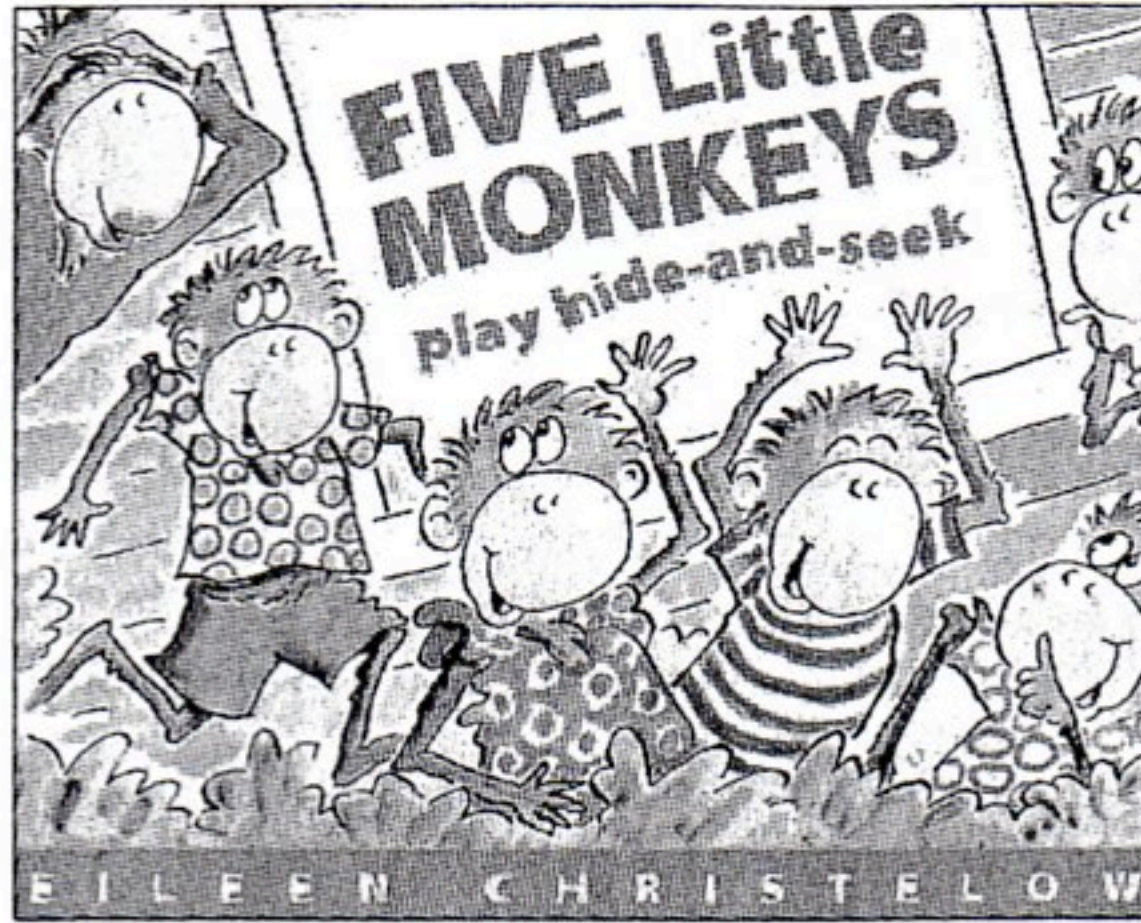
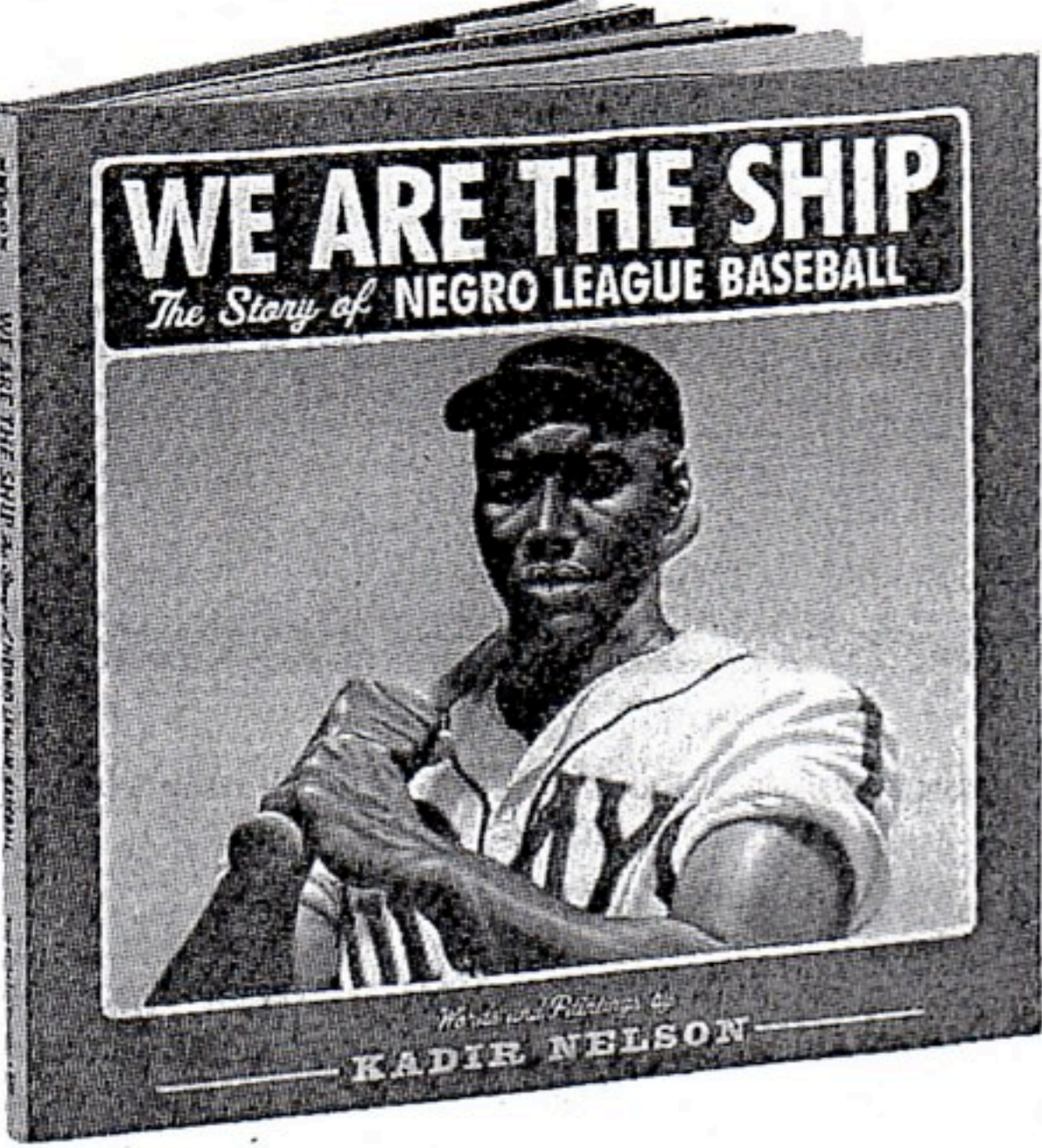


For young readers



Children's books stars coming to town

By DOUG RIGGS
JOURNAL BOOKS EDITOR

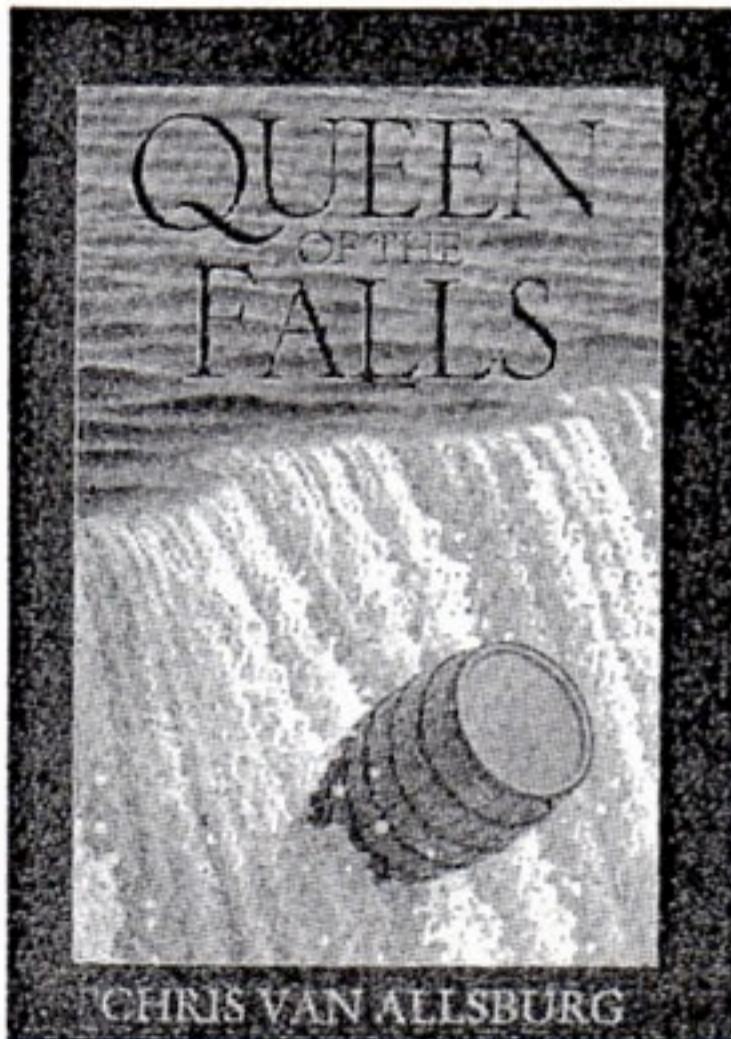
It happens every year at this time. As if by magic, children's books authors fly in to Providence from all over the country — all the big ones, the major award winners — making this the children's literature capital of the nation. They aren't paid a cent. They may sell a few books, but not enough to justify the expense.

A dozen of them are flocking in again next weekend, for the 20th year. They'll be at the Rhode Island Festival of Books and Authors, hosted by Lincoln School, which experts have proclaimed the best in the country. Writers like Caldicott winner Norton Juster ("The Phantom Toll Booth"), Newbery winner Linda Sue Park ("A Single Shard"), National Book Award finalist Deborah Wiles ("Each Little Bird That Sings") and Eileen Christelow ("Five Little Monkeys").

Why do they come? Because a little girl who couldn't read at all until the fourth grade willed it, willed the festival into being just as she willed herself to overcome the dyslexia that still vexes her 50 years later. She is Lisa (Morrison) Van Allsburg, married to her college sweetheart, Rhode Island's own Chris Van Allsburg ("The Polar



Lisa Van Allsburg, the force behind the book fair.



The Rhode Island Festival of Books and Authors runs from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. next Saturday at Lincoln School, 301 Butler Ave. Admission is \$5, proceeds going to the Lincoln's Community Scholars Program. For a roster of authors and schedule of performances and presentations, visit www.lincolnschool.org or call (401) 331-9696, ext. 3135.

Express," "Jumanji"), who is one of the biggest names in children's literature. He'll be at the festival as always, this time with his newest book, "Queen of the Falls."

Aha! you may think: of course, HE is the drawing power. The private dinner at the Van Allsburgs' East Side home that has become a fixture of the weekend must be as irresistible for these writers as an invitation to share a beer with the president at the White House. And indeed that's part of it.

But none of it would have happened without little Lisa Morrison, whose dad loved reading though he never went to college, who marched her down to the library every Saturday to borrow a book, encouraged her faltering efforts to read it, and read aloud the parts she couldn't.

In fact, despite his undeniable talent, the story is told that Chris Van Allsburg would never have happened, either — would not have become the superstar he is, that is — had Lisa not taken some of his artwork to a

children's book publisher and used her formidable powers of persuasion to pitch the idea of his doing a book. Her shy, self-effacing husband likely never would have done that.

"In time, of course, I did learn how to read," she recalled recently. "I love reading, and I think reading is what makes us good writers and good thinkers, and when something is beautifully written ... it's so comforting. It's a great companion."

Her passion is contagious. The 120 volunteers who help out at the festival have caught it. The dozen writers on this year's roster have caught it. And soon hundreds of children and their parents will catch it.

"It's a ritual," Lisa Van Allsburg says. "It's been going for 20 years. People expect it in the fall. They expect the leaves to change, and they expect the book fair at Lincoln School."

Both are brought to us by irresistible forces of nature.

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