

# • Meet the Author •

## April Halprin Wayland

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).

Grades  
3–5



Photo from [www.aprilwayland.com](http://www.aprilwayland.com)

**April Halprin Wayland** is a farmer turned folk musician turned author. Her work has been called “dazzling,” “honest,” “heartfelt,” and “utterly fresh and winning.” Her critically acclaimed novel in poems, *Girl Coming in for a Landing*, her picture books, and her poetry have garnered numerous awards including the Lee Bennett Hopkins Honor Award for Children’s Poetry and the Myra Cohn Livingston Award for Poetry. April has been an instructor in the UCLA Extension’s Writers Program for over a decade. She lives with her family and a gazillion animals (including a cat named Snot) by the beach in Southern California.

**Your author’s note tells us that Tashlich is a favorite Jewish ceremony of yours. Can you tell us about your childhood experiences with the ceremony?**

**AHW:** Tashlich was not part of the Jewish experience when I was growing up, and even my very religious friends say they didn’t participate in this celebration. It’s apparently come back into common practice fairly recently.

**How many of the situations in *New Year at the Pier* were drawn from your own experiences as a child or those of your children?**

**AHW:** This book was drawn from my experiences as an adult! I fell in love with Tashlich when we moved to the beach, and began dragging friends and family to the pier where our local synagogue celebrates it. The windy, salty outdoors and the wonderful sense of community singing and spirituality intertwined completely intoxicated me.

**What is it about Izzy’s number four “sorry” that makes it the most difficult of the four? How did you decide what it would be?**

**AHW:** In early versions of the story, Izzy was a minor character, the little brother. His older sister, Miriam, was the star. Her issues were those of an eleven-year-old girl. When my editor suggested we make the protagonist younger, I had to think of problems a five or six-year-old might encounter. I put myself in Izzy’s shoes. When I was little, I sucked my thumb, but I didn’t want friends to know I did. I imagined how awful it would have been if my best friend had told my secret.

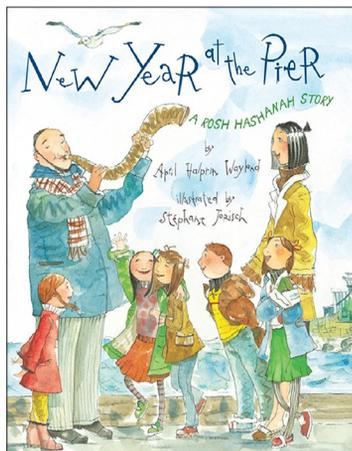
I also wanted to show how his mistake impacted someone else... and how hard it can be to apologize. He agonizes over whether he needs to say anything or not.

**What do you hope that children will understand about the nature of regret and forgiveness after reading *New Year at the Pier*? What sorts of discussions do you hope your book leads to in the library and classroom setting? Do you have any suggestions to facilitate that discussion?**

**AHW:** When I work with student groups, we talk about how apologizing feels, how it feels to be apologized to, and how you can’t always fix something completely by saying you’re sorry.

There’s a famous story I tell them about a man who goes to his rabbi because he’s done some-

## Meet the Author



thing wrong to a neighbor and he wants the rabbi to help him make everything right again. But the rabbi says he can't make everything right, can't erase the mistake completely.

To demonstrate this, the rabbi slashes a feather pillow with a knife and scatters the feathers all over the yard of the synagogue. "No matter how much you'd like to fix this pillow—you'd like to erase any trace of the hurt you've caused your neighbor—there will be feathers you cannot find, and though sewn-up, the pillow will never look the same." With the youngest students, I tell them that as I was writing this book I learned a true apology has three parts: 1) I'm sorry. 2) It was my fault. 3) How can I make it better? We practice the three parts of apology together. With older students and adult audiences, we talk about forgiveness and the reconciliation process in Rwanda. Would you be able to forgive someone who murdered one of your family members?

**You have published a young adult novel in verse as well as your picture**

### books. How is that writing experience the same as and different from your picture book writing?

**AHW:** My first love is writing picture books. I love the dance between words and illustrations. I love getting a character or a scene written and then figuring out the story around it. I can wrap my arms around the whole story right away. Then I rewrite and rewrite and rewrite the entire piece dozens of times.

It's harder for me to get my arms around a longer book. And a novel in poems means that there's lots of white space—I can't write a long description of the courtroom, or how her favorite teacher looks, for example, as a writer of a prose novel can. I have to toss out hints. Each word has to count for more. I spend more time weighing each word and arranging words on the page. Writing a novel in poems feels as if I'm typing with one arm tied behind my back. But I love it. And I love throwing in different poetic forms. My new favorite form is called a trimeric. I've been playing with this and other forms in my current work-in-progress.

I also like that through picture books and novels and through my poetry I can speak to widely diverse age groups. It's very exciting; it's an honor to reach different ages.

### How can readers learn more about you?

**AHW:** They can start at my website, [www.aprilwayland.com](http://www.aprilwayland.com). I love the critters that

decorate the home page! [Readers] can subscribe to the blog I share with five other children's authors who also teach writing:

[www.TeachingAuthors.com](http://www.TeachingAuthors.com).

I post every other Friday; we participate in "Poetry Friday" in the kidlistosphere. I usually include an original poem and poetry prompt, too.

[Readers] might want to watch this 29-minute interview (warning: after I watched it I immediately cut my bangs and vowed never to wear that dress on camera again!): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SYaUxZ1cuo>, or they might want to look at our solar roof here: <http://www.aprilwayland.com/about-april/weve-gone-solar>.

❖ ❖ ❖

**Toni Buzzeo**, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of fourteen picture books, most recently *Lighthouse Christmas* (Dial, 2011) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).

