

# Focus on Faculty

## CJ McNair-Connolly

**Title:** Professor of Accounting

**Department:** Management

**Education:** PhD (1987) and MBA (1983) from Columbia University, NYC; BA (1980) from Drake University in Des Moines, IA

**Courses she teaches:** Financial Accounting, Managerial Accounting, Management Control, Intermediate Financial Accounting, Cost Accounting, and the capstone course (Professional Management Consulting or PMC)

**How long she has taught at the Academy:** Since the fall of 2003



CG McNair-Connolly

CJ McNair-Connolly is putting what she teaches into practice. An expert in cost management and professor of accounting, she recently founded Crosswinds Press, a boutique children's book publisher, with three other small Connecticut businesses Lisa Adams Art, Trish LaPointe Design, and The Racine Company.

The press's first project is the publication of a series of works by McNair-Connolly. The first book, *Wil, Fitz, and a Flea Named T*, recently released, is about a young boy who learns the lesson that nothing of value in life is ever free. The remaining books in the series, *The Boomerang*, *The Bad Enchilada*, *The Lemonade Stand*, and *A Line in the Sand*, are currently in production.

### ***As a professor of accounting, how did you get into writing children's books?***

I have always enjoyed writing, so that is the starting point. When I think about why I chose to write a children's book, my first reaction would be that I was reading so many of them to my grandson. Every so often he'd say, "Grandma, can you make up a story for me?" I would try, of course, and was

always amazed that he seemed to like them. Of course, he was probably a bit biased!

I have also always had a knack for rhyming, so that part of the process came naturally to me. I thought it might be fun and provide a way to entertain my grandchildren. Since it was something I had never done, it was a challenge but it was also fun!

### ***What was the inspiration for Wil, Fitz and a Flea Named "T"?***

At the heart of my motivation was the fact that I had finally come to grips with the fact that my health was deteriorating due to scleroderma. Not one to feel sorry for myself, I instead sat back and asked myself a simple question...if time was to be a bit shorter than I had thought, what should I do? The answer to that came simply—to find a way to leave behind the life lessons I had hoped to share with my grandchildren as they grew. Writing them all down in a book for them to read seemed the best way to do this.

I had actually developed a list of topics I wanted to develop into stories. The

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first on the list was that nothing of value in life is ever free—you have to work for it. That was a lesson my parents had emphasized to all of us. We were a “working class” family and working is what we would need to do to get ahead.

The inspiration for the theme, then, was straightforward. The hard part was trying to decide how to make it into a story that would be fun for a child. The real question, though, was how to “jazz” it up a little, to add the humor and life to the story that I felt was critical. I didn’t want to be preaching to them, nor did I want to put them to sleep (although parents may disagree here). I wanted them to giggle. One day on my way out to my car to go to the Academy, it came to me....a flea, one named “T” seemed right to me. “T” rhymes with a lot of other words, so that was a good start. And, I didn’t think I’d ever seen a flea be the star of the show, so it would be novel. Once I had “introduced” myself to Mr. T, the rest came naturally. He took on a life of his own, became a real being in my mind... every bit as real as Wil and his dog Fitz.

***This book is just the first in a series of children’s books. What ties them all together?***

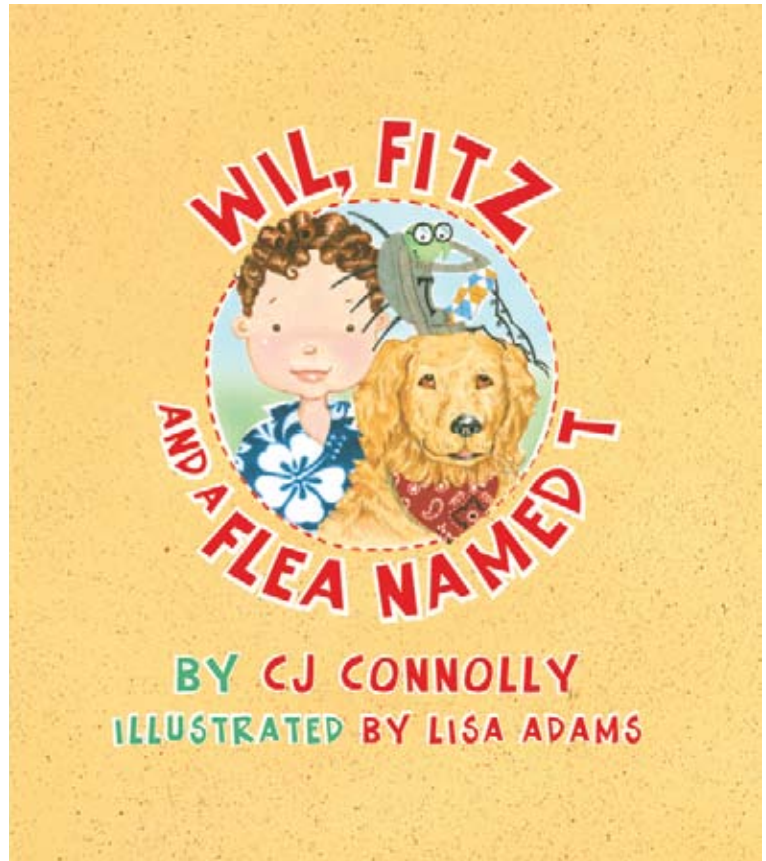
The focus of each book is a life lesson that we all hope to share with our children and grandchildren. Taking responsibility for one’s actions, random acts of kindness, the fact that when we give out positive energy things work well and when we’re negative or angry life can take some nasty turns. In other words, each book brings one lesson to life.

The second way the books are tied together is through Wil, Fitz and Mr. T. They are “stars” in all of the books. What changes, though, are which of T’s relatives come to visit. Since fleas have quite large families, there is no limit to the number of relatives and other friendly fleas I can introduce into the story.

So, each book is a new lesson with at least one new member of Mr. T’s extended family added in to help make the story both funny and different than those that have gone before.

***To publish Wil, Fitz and a Flea Named T you created your own publishing company. Tell me more about this new venture. Why not have an already established publisher publish the book for you?***

This is an easy one for me. I have published nine trade books to date. My experience is that editors edit the life out of the



*The cover of Professor Connolly’s new book*

work which is then published and all support stops there. If you want to sell any book, you have to hit the road and make people aware of the book and why they should buy it. So, you always are responsible for the story and the selling, regardless of who prints it.

A second reason for creating the Press was that the artist gets a very small cut of the profit on a book. So, my husband and I started the Press so we could control the content of the books (editors do not like rhyming books!) and also hope to capture more of the profit in the long-term. I had always wanted to start a business, and this is an industry I know well.

Using all of his organizing and management skills, my husband George was able to create a virtual corporation with local Mystic entrepreneurs: illustrator Lisa Adams, printer George

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*Mr. T. the flea, one of the main characters in Professor Connolly's book*

Racine and The Racine Company, designer Trish LaPointe and her partner Joel, a web designer. Once assembled we were ready to start the business. It's frightening sometimes, given we're funding this on our own since the credit market for small businesses has dried up. But, nothing ventured, nothing gained. And...it's about time that I put what I teach into practice.

***What are the next steps? Will you publish other authors? What is the criteria for publication?***

Our next steps are getting the next four books out. They are written and in various stages of pre-production. Even more important, though, is developing a solid distribution channel and to build a "following" for the series. Marketing is our major challenge right now. We have a lot of avenues we're looking at and using to get the word, and books, out. While George continues to coordinate production, I will be putting my time into Marketing and distribution.

We do hope downstream to attract other authors who want to publish books that rhyme and that are targeted toward the 3-8 year old market, which is our "sweet spot" in the children's book industry. It is the underserved segment in the \$36.3 billion children's book industry, with a few strong players like Dr. Seuss and Mouse Cookies, but little else. While still emphasizing illustrations (so-called picture books), a book for this age group has to have a longer story that has some purpose behind it. And, we won't take the rhymes out to meet an editor's criterion for "proper" English. Where would Dr. Seuss be if he couldn't make up words?

In the end, we hope to keep the fun in the process and to document as many life lessons as we can while I'm still able to write.

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*For more information about Crosswinds Press, Inc. or CJ's books, please visit [www.crosswindspress.com](http://www.crosswindspress.com).*