

# • Meet the Illustrators •

## Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu

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



Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu have been illustrating together for many years as a husband and wife team. Their career includes various distinguished picture books, including *Sam and the Lucky Money*, *Princess Grace*, and *Jingle Dancer*, which was named a Selector's Choice Notable Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies. Additional credits include *Snow in Jerusalem*, *Alicia's Happy Day/ El Día Más Feliz De Alicia*, and *An Angel Just Like Me*. Some additional published credits of Ying-Hwa Hu include the Sweet Valley Twins series and *Jigsaw Pony*.

Cornelius studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Ying-Hwa studied at Shih Chien College in Taipei, Taiwan and St. Cloud University in Minnesota. The couple has a daughter and son.

**Is there a particular Chinatown neighborhood depicted in these illustrations? If so, where is it and what particular scenes are drawn from that neighborhood? The lion is especially interesting, of course.**

**CVW/YH:** We did not mean for this to be any particular Chinatown because we wanted children to relate to the story more than a specific recognizable place or time. Of course, we live in New York City so most of our references stem from Chinatown in Manhattan. The Lion was created from a hodge-podge of references, mostly pictures friends of ours took at previous Chinese New Year celebrations. We took a head from one picture and maybe part of the lion's body from another and added doses of imagination in between.

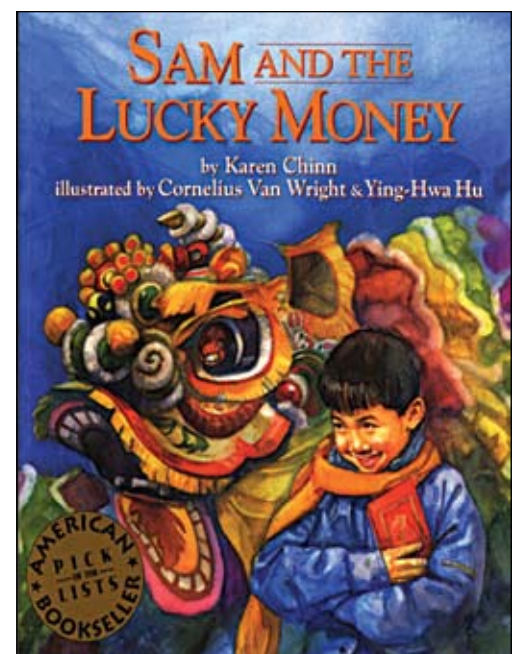
**Did you use live models for the characters in this book? If so, can you tell us more about them or your process for creating characters?**

**CVW/YH:** The characters in the book are mostly friends and neighbors of ours, plus a cameo of Ying-Hwa and our little (at the time) daughter. Sam is the only person who was a model, because at the time we didn't know anybody

who was the right age to play Sam. Some of the incidental people in the book were people in Chinatown.

**CVW:** We got some great shots when I asked a buddy of mine to come to Chinatown with me. We acted like tourists, so I would pretend I wanted to take a picture of him, but instead got great references of store interiors and people shopping. Of course in the drawings we altered the faces of people we did not know, so no one would be offended.

**Many readers wonder, as I do, how two illustrators work on the illustrations for a single book. Can you**



## Meet the Author

### tell us about your process in working together?

**CVW:** Some projects we work on individually and some we work on together. In this book we worked as a team. When we work as a team we try to go with our strengths. I usually start the process of breaking down the story (manuscript) into scenes and creating thumbnails (little black and white sketches to convey what is going on in the scene) to present to the publisher. After the thumbnails are approved we both start researching for references for sketches.

I usually start the initial drawings, and then Ying-Hwa takes it. Her abilities in drawing proportions are more accurate than mine, so she sometimes redraws what she feels is not working or can be improved. The same is true with the final painting stage.

Whether she has the assignment or I or both of us are working on a job, it is nice to have another set of eyes to bounce things off of.

### I have been impressed by the racial and ethnic diversity in the books you have illustrated over the years. Are you particularly drawn to texts that offer these illustration opportunities?

**CVW/YH:** For some reason we both love history and learning things about different cultures. Living in New York City, we are surrounded by friends and neighbors from different cultures. We never intended to go after this in children's books. It just happened. When we have an assignment that speaks about a particular culture or custom we are very serious about doing our homework. We would tap into people we know (of that culture) and find out first hand what we needed to know.

### Have the two of you (or either of you individually) ever considered writing the text of a book that you would then illustrate? Why or why not?

**CVW/YH:** Writing the story for a children's book is the next

big step. It is not as easy as it seems but we know it is a necessary step in our evolution as artists. Hopefully it will happen sooner rather than later.

### How can readers learn more about you both as well as your books?

**CVW/YH:** Please check our Web site, which shows our work as a team and as individual artists.

<http://www.illustratorsonline.com/vanwright/vanwright.html>



**Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS,** is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of eleven picture books, most recently *No T. Rex in the Library!* (McElderry, 2010) 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).

