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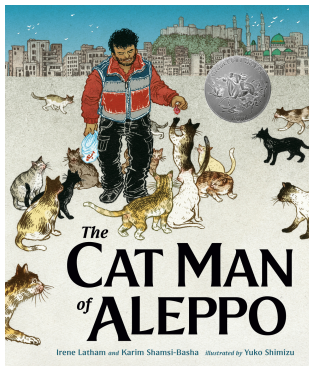
Hello, Friends!

It's my 50th Birthday!

Well, not *today* today, but almost!

As one who was "born older," I still don't feel my body is as old as my soul... but I am getting closer! Which is why I decided to celebrate this milestone birthday with a year of "Fifty Firsts." Fifty things I'm doing, trying, creating *for the very first time*. Basically it means I'm inviting a new experience into my life about once a week... trying new food, activities, art. Visiting new places. You get the idea! (New books don't count—I read a TON of those no matter what year it is!)

Seems do-able, right? This week marks about the eighth week of the year, and so far I've added ten Firsts to my list, and I'm excited to share a couple of them with you today. Here's hoping I can keep it going for the rest of 2021!



7. Caldecott-Joy!

Number 7 on my list isn't a First I engineered so much as it is something that *happened*: [THE CAT MAN OF ALEPPO](#) was awarded a Caldecott Honor! (Click [here](#) to learn about all the winners.)

Picture book authors always hope for an illustrator to bring magic to our words, and wow, [Yuko Shimizu](#) did just that! [Karim Shamsi-Basha](#) and I couldn't be more thrilled

to see Yuko's unique and beautiful work honored. The best part is that this sort of recognition means many more people are learning about [Alaa, the Cat Man](#), and his work with animals and children. Truly, this story inspires kindness, hope, and love...and I'm grateful to have connected with so many of you over this news. Thank you!!! Special thanks to [Alabama Booksmith](#) and [Little Professor](#) for helping us celebrate. Books bring such hope and cheer!

10. Book Trailer for D-39: A ROBODOG'S JOURNEY

How long has i-movie been sitting on my computer? I've used

it to make some very simple poem videos—my narration + one art image, like ["Two Cows,"](#) inspired by [Maud Lewis](#). But I wanted to make a book trailer, and I wanted to do it myself. That's what Klynt, the main (human) character in this middle-grade dystopian verse novel would do. And hello, kids who will be reading the book come May 18, 2021, can do it, so why not me? I was further encouraged after hearing from educators that ANY additional media is helpful in getting readers excited about reading.



So I wrote a script, and I asked (begged?) my dear friend [Jim Reed](#) to lend his glorious radio voice. (He said YES!) I scoured free video and photo sites for appropriate files ([Pixabay](#) is my favorite!). I tried out at least fifty free music tracks... and I did it! I made a one-minute book trailer! For FREE. All by myself! (Well, almost. Sweet son [Eric](#) added a little spit and polish at the end.)

**Show Me This Magnificent Made-by-Irene D-39 Book Trailer
RIGHT NOW!**

I'll be back in May to celebrate D-39's release. :) Meanwhile, I'll be virtually visiting some schools around the country and also presenting with some other amazing authors at [Michigan Reading Association](#) conference: "Nature as Storyteller and Story Starter: Impact on Narrative and Identity" with [Heather L. Montgomery](#) & [Traci Sorell](#); and "Sit. Stay. READ: The Everlasting Power of Dog Stories with debut authors [Reese Eschmann](#) & [Megan E. Freeman](#).

April 12-15 I'll be hanging out virtually with my Mississippi peeps at [Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival](#)—one of my most favorite book events of the year!

For you poetry fans out there, be on the lookout for my workshop sponsored by [Read Aloud Revival](#) entitled "The Divine Number Nine: How to Write Nonet Poems," inspired by [Nine: A Book of Nonet Poems](#), of course!

May 10 I'll be presenting "Diving into the Wreck: How to Revise Poetry" (after the [poem by Adrienne Rich](#)) for [the Writers Loft](#). Among other things, this will include me offering revision strategies for attendees' poems *on the spot!* It's going to be FUN. [Registration coming soon!](#)

And I'll be celebrating poetry during National Poetry Month (April) in all sorts of ways, including my annual postcard tradition and with the continuation of my 2021 [ArtSpeak: FOUR SEASONS](#) art-poem project. You can receive these weekly poems in your inbox. Simply click the ["Follow by email"](#) button.

Finally, here are a few things that have made me happy lately, and perhaps they'll bring you smiles as well:

[making zines](#)

[Texas turtle rescue](#)

[The World I Leave You: Asian American Poets on Faith and Spirit](#)

the words [dervish](#) and [kumquat](#)

[Naomi Shihab Nye](#) talking about positives during the pandemic

[garden-dreaming](#)

Thank you so much for sharing your time with me today. And remember: "The older you get the better you get, unless you are a banana." - *Betty White*

Love,

Irene

P.S. Do you have a birthday story to share? Or a recent First? I'd love to hear about it!

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