

August 1, 2014

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For Immediate Release

Award-winning Alabama Poet Seeing Stars with Book Set on African Savanna

Birmingham – In her first collection of poetry for children, Irene Latham garners starred reviews from *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus Reviews*

An author never knows until a book is released whether it will strike a chord with readers and/or be embraced by readers. That means each book-- each sentence and the time it takes to craft it – is a risk. For author Irene Latham, the risk has paid off in her first collection of poetry for children *Dear Wandering Wildebeest: And Other Poems from the Water Hole* (illustrations by Anna Wadham, Millbrook Press/Lerner, ISBN: 978-1467712323).

“Children's poetry is one of the toughest markets out there,” said Latham, who has previously published three poetry books for adults and two novels for children. “Book publishing is a business, and poetry typically does not generate huge sales – which means fewer presses are willing to accept poetry. It also means those presses are extremely choosy about the projects they do accept.”

Wildebeest was rejected by four publishers before finding a home. In a starred review, *Kirkus Reviews* said, "Latham's finely crafted verse, at once humorous and serious, dazzlingly opens the imagination to the wilds of the world." *School Library Journal* also awarded the book a star, citing "well-crafted poems... charming illustrations... a strong choice."

*Welcome wildebeest
and beetle,
oxpecker and lion.
This water hole is yours.
I offers you oasis
beside its shrinking shores.*

Spend a day at a water hole on the African grasslands. From dawn to nightfall, animals come and go. Giraffes gulp, wildebeest graze, impalas leap, vultures squabble, and elephants wallow.

Praised for the simple, emotive quality of her writing, Latham was named 2006 Alabama Poet of the Year and has served as poetry editor for *Birmingham Arts Journal* since 2003. Known for her adult poetry, she is often asked why she decided to write poetry for children. It evolved out of her work with kids since the release of her children's novels (*Leaving Gee's Bend* and *Don't Feed the Boy*), Latham said.

“The words I first fell in love with were poems by Shel Silverstein, and my first works were love poems for my mother, written when I was a child. It just makes sense that I should be writing poems for kids.” She has two more children's poetry books under contract and scheduled for publication in 2016.

Latham invites the public to help celebrate the book's release Thursday, September 4, at Emmet O'Neal Library, 50 Oak St, Mountain Brook, AL. 3:30 - 4:30 Inside the Water Hole: "mask" poems workshop for kids, 4:45 - 7:00 Reception featuring safari fun, friends, poetry, books and CAKE! Free admission.

For more information about Irene Latham or her books, please visit www.irenelatham.com. To schedule an interview or photo with Latham, please contact her at 205-999-8167 or irene@irenelatham.com.