



by Kara Sibilia

resident talent blooms

# GARDEN STATE AUTHORS & ARTISTS

As a New Jersey resident, avid reader and arts enthusiast, it has never surprised me that so many great authors and artists are from right here in the Garden State; I love supporting my fellow New Jerseyans!. In subsequent columns I will interview new and emerging authors and artists from our state and spotlight their work, including info on personal appearances, book news and art projects.

Young adult author and Short Hills resident, Ofer Aronskind knows a thing or two about camping. Growing up, his family owned and operated summer camps in the Berkshires of Massachusetts. “My summers were spent in the country--fishing, canoeing, raiding girls’ bunks, overnight camping trips, campfires, waterskiing...that was my childhood,” says Aronskind. **It’s these camp memories that he transformed into a sleep-away summer camp series.**

A lawyer and real estate investor, Aronskind added “young adult author” to his repertoire when his three sons started sleep-away camp. “The first book, *Summer Sleep-Away*, came about when my boys first went off to camp and asked me to spend my free time that summer writing down all the childhood stories I had told them over the years about my adventures at camp.” He then went on to write three more coming-of-age books: *That Same Summer*, *Escape from Sunday School* and *The Celebrities of Summer School*.

**Having three sons, Aronskind targets his books toward boys in an effort to get them reading more.** Something, he says, that is becoming increasingly difficult in today’s society, “with video games, computers, texting and all the other distractions in kids’ busy lives.” He feels that his books are popular with boys because the themes are relatable. “The feedback I’ve gotten from both kids and parents alike are overwhelming.” Parents have told Aronskind that their sons, who don’t like reading, couldn’t put his books down. “To me, that’s everything,” he says.

Aronskind’s *The Celebrities of Summer School*, about a thirteen-year-old boy who creates and posts a video on YouTube in a quest to find his missing dog, was inspired by an experience of one of his sons. “He and a few friends made a short clip and posted it on YouTube. Within days they had become local celebrities at their school.” He says the message in this book is simple, “you don’t have to be a great athlete or brain or cool kid or any of the other easily defined groups the kids unfortunately have in their schools. You can just be yourself and pursue your own individual interests. Will Ryerson, my narrator in the story, does just that and finds himself on greater social footing than he ever imagined.”

## LOCAL AUTHOR INSPIRES BOYS TO READ

Recently, HQ had the opportunity to speak with Aronskind about his work as a writer:

HQ: When did you first consider yourself a writer?

OA: I was an English major in college and did a lot of creative writing. I wrote a screenplay in my senior year and then took a year off between undergrad and law school and went out to LA to try to peddle my screenplay. It didn’t quite work out and I ended up coming back East to law school, but that year out in LA I truly felt like I was a writer.

HQ: What was one of the most surprising things you learned in writing your books?

OA: What most surprised me was to find out just how much I loved writing. When I sat down to write [my first book] I couldn’t believe how fast the story came out of me and onto my laptop. I had a working first draft in two months. My love affair with writing began. Since that day, I try to find time every day to sit and write. If I can get a page (maybe two) every day...in a year I have a book.

HQ: What is the hardest part of writing?

OA: The blank screen. Facing that blank screen is difficult, that’s why I try to finish each day in the middle of something; a thought, a paragraph...so that the next day I can pick up where I left off rather than trying to start a new chapter and build up momentum all over again. Writing isn’t always easy, but the payoff at the end is well worth the effort.

HQ: Do you have any advice for other writers?

OA: Yes, just write. Don’t think about it. Don’t wait for divine inspiration. Don’t try to come up with some ingenious, never-been-done-before idea...there aren’t any. Just write what you like. Write for yourself. If you want to read a good book you need to write one, because everyone knows what they like to read about. I write for no one but myself. If someone else out there likes it...all the better.

HQ: What are your hobbies when you are not writing?

OA: I play soccer in a men’s league twice a week. I enjoy playing tennis and snowboarding with my boys. I love taking our dog Sammy (a Husky/Shepherd mix) for a long walk on the reservation. I love to sit in front of the fire with a cup of tea and...what else...read.

**Contact the Author**  
For more information or to arrange an appearance, please visit [sleepwaysummercamp.com](http://sleepwaysummercamp.com)

**Upcoming Local Appearances**  
The author is doing a reading of *The Celebrities of Summer School* on March 26th at Words bookstore, 179 Maplewood Avenue in Maplewood, New Jersey, 07040.

Aronskind is currently working on the last book of his young adult series titled *This Side of the Street*. He will also appear on Lifetime’s **The Balancing Act** morning show this spring.

Freelance writer and Chatham resident, Kara Sibilia ([kara@hometownquarterly.com](mailto:kara@hometownquarterly.com)) enjoys writing about the arts, beauty, fitness and health. Her work has appeared both online and in national and regional magazines.

## DO YOU HAVE THE “WRITE” STUFF?

If you have always wanted to be reincarnated as a writer, by all means email me! Unleash your hidden talents with your own column and share your views/expertise with the local community! [Denise@hometownquarterly.com](mailto:Denise@hometownquarterly.com)