



Smeagull the Seagull

A Love Story on the Wing

by RONA MANN / Photos by Mark Seth Lender & Illustrations by Valerie Elaine Pettis

This is a love story.

When you first look at the cover, it may appear to be just a children's book, and it is, but more than that, it is a love story with widespread demographic appeal - a story of faith, trust, and unbridled respect. It is a story you will read again and again, and one you will never forget.



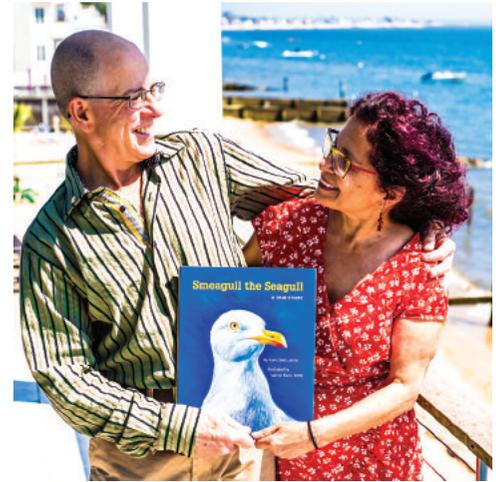
The book begins with charming verse that completely draws the reader in, not only with its clever turn of phrase, but by painting a whimsical picture:

*There's a house
Near a seawall
Facing the shore,
And that house
Has a porch
With a sliding glass door.*

*And the people who live there,
Valerie and me,
Stand by that door,
And look toward the sea.*

*Because Smeagull the Seagull
Knows that we know,
He comes in the rain,
He comes in the snow,
He comes in Summer,
I'm telling the truth,
He comes when icicles hang from the roof!*

*He comes in the Spring,
He comes in the Fall,
He comes when it's cloudy
And there's no sun at all.*

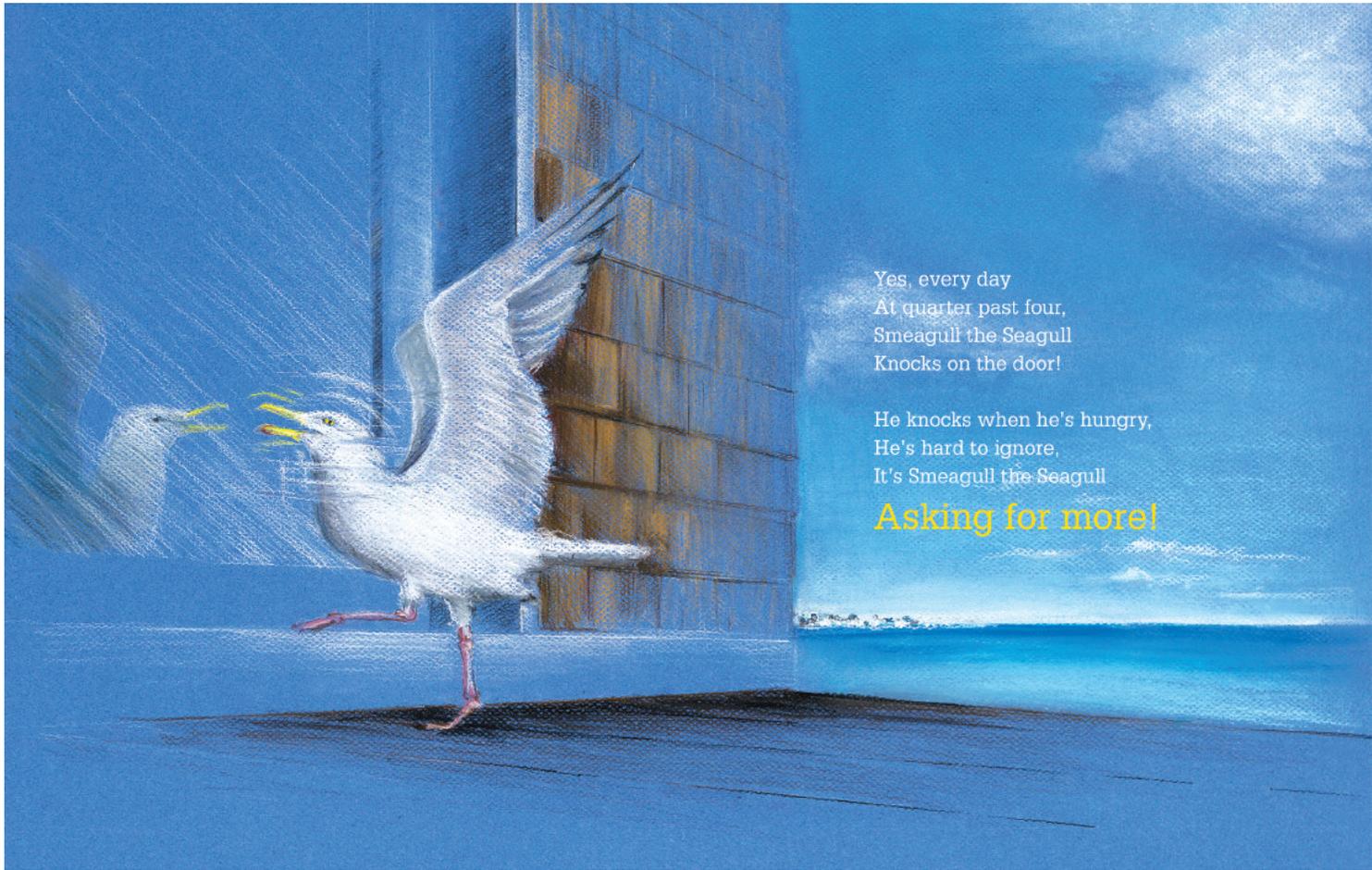


*Yes, every day
At quarter past four,
Smeagull the seagull
Knocks on the door!*

*He knocks when he's hungry,
He's hard to ignore,
It's Smeagull the Seagull,
Asking for more!*

But the real story here is, well, the real story. Mark Seth Lender, a writer, broadcaster, and producer of wildlife content for PRI public radio and his wife, Valerie Elaine Pettis, a





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world renowned artist, illustrator, and designer, live on the Connecticut shoreline. They live in a house overlooking the ocean, and unlike many for whom sea and beach expanse is just acoutrement, they truly appreciate the sights, the sounds, and the wildlife that abound outside their door. They realize that the creatures under the waves and high up in the skies are the true inhabitants of the area; and they, the humans, are really just visiting.

Lender grew up in Boston and from an early age, "I had a great love of wildlife. I love all animals, although I am highly allergic to cats. It was actually my allergy to them that made me seek wildlife on a much larger level." That he did with travel virtually all over the world, learning about polar bears and whales and every animal he could meet. His interest in writing began in high school, yet he admits, "I wasn't very good at it. It takes a long time to get good at writing – to polish it. It took decades, but now I write. I write every day. I can't help it or stop it, it comes from within."

Yet this story, the story of Smeagull the Seagull, was somehow different. It came from

without. Lender felt that living right on the shoreline he had an obligation to feed migratory ducks. One day after putting out the birdseed, he noticed a wild herring seagull eating discriminately, only taking certain parts of the seed, while eschewing the others. It was clear this bird was not only highly



intelligent, but knew exactly what he wanted and wouldn't settle for less.

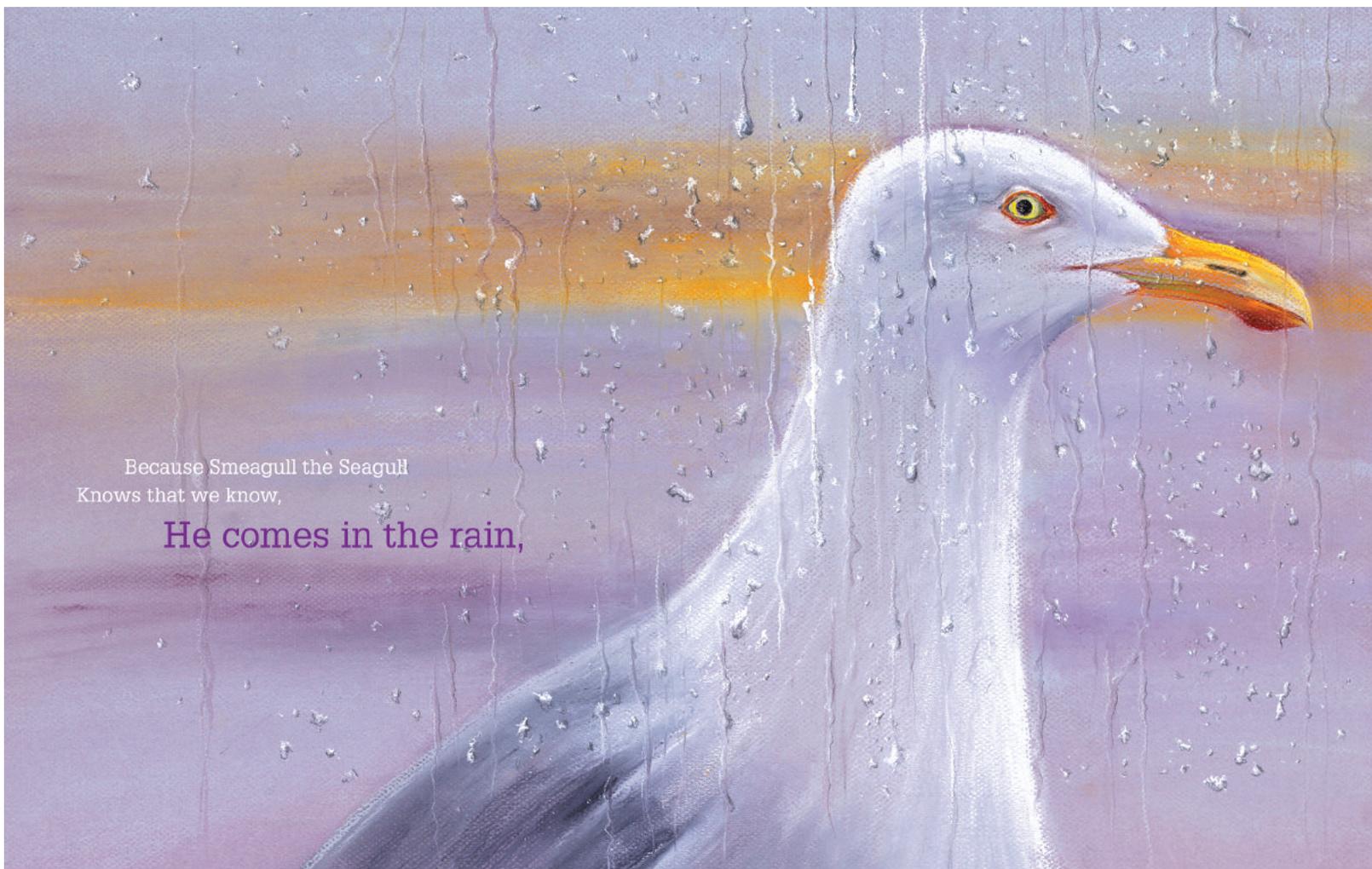
Intrigued, Lender paid a visit to the local fish market and brought home fish scraps. This pleased the gull who then began eating out of his hand. Before long, Mark and Valerie

noticed the bird studying the glass on their sliding door. "He spent a long time checking it out," Lender said. "He knew glass had transparency and solidity, and before long he learned to knock on the window. He doesn't peck at it, but he knocks, just like a human. He's both Einstein and neurotic."

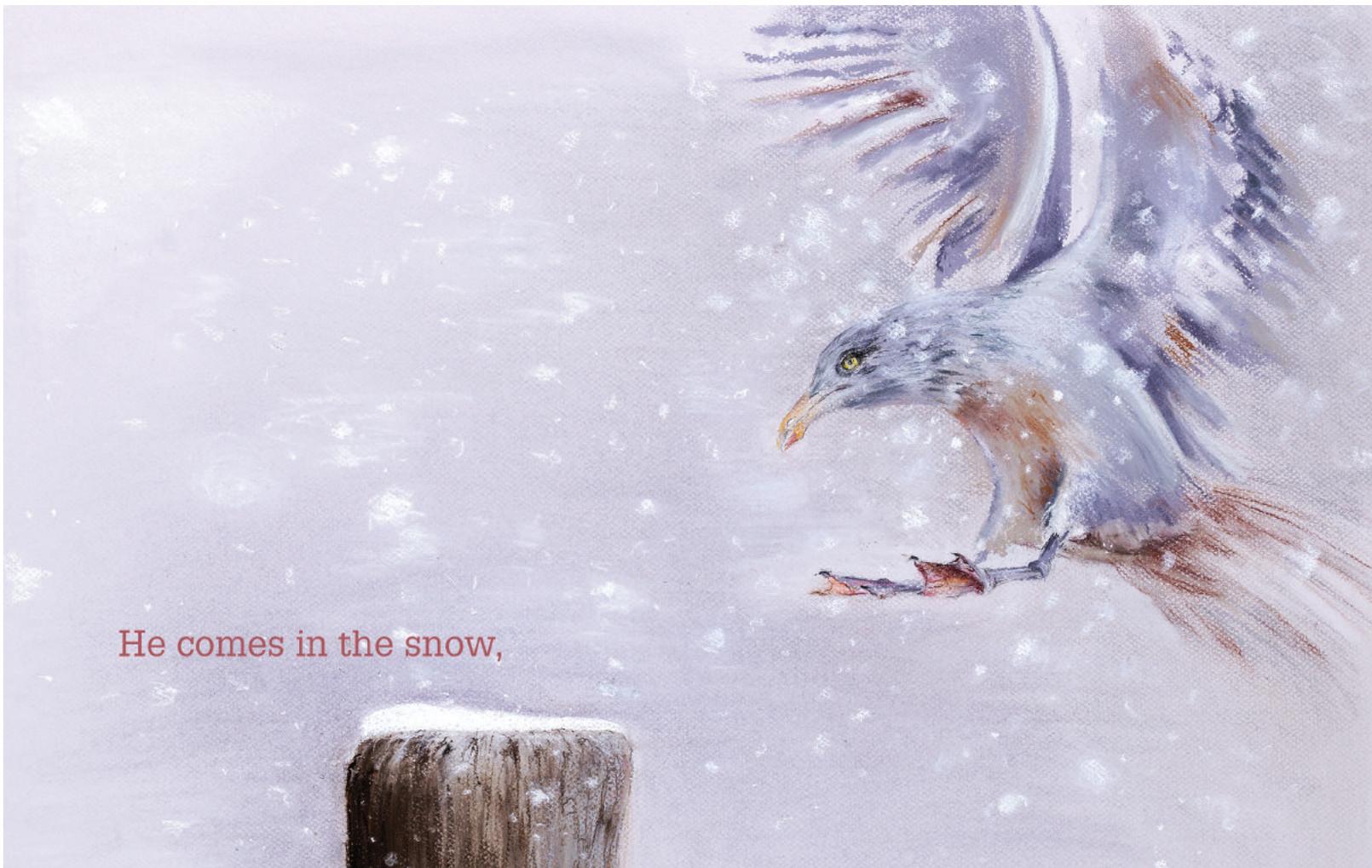
The gull, whom Mark and Valerie began calling Smeagull, was inordinately bright.

Seagulls are, as a species, much brighter than most other birds and more intelligent than humans give them credit for. They are clever, learning and remembering behaviors, and developing sophisticated patterns of communication including an entire range of bodily movements and vocal patterns.

"Smeagull soon became aware of all our habits. He knew the sounds of each of our cars. He knew the kitchen was where his food came from. He taught us which foods he preferred by spitting out what he didn't like and then looking at me like, 'I should eat this?' If anyone's trained, it's me and Valerie."



Because Smeagull the Seagull
Knows that we know,
He comes in the rain,



He comes in the snow,

Smeagull has been visiting Mark and Valerie for about twelve years now, and Mark approximates his age at about 15, which presents a problem. "Seagulls live to about 40, so I have to be very, very careful and take very good care of myself," laughs the middle-aged man.

About four months ago, Seahouse Press, Mark and Valerie's company, published *Smeagull the Seagull*, and it has been taking off on the very wings of the title character. Available in bookstores, the Maritime Museum in New London, and on amazon.com, it has been selling out wherever it's placed. At the moment, Valerie and Mark are having the story translated into a number of languages from Mandarin to Italian, and even anticipate a future printing in Yiddish. Seahouse Press focuses on conservation, teaching both young children and their families that animals have value: they have feelings, needs, and are precious creatures. "Gulls are everywhere," says



Lender. "They're in the Gulf of Mexico, in the Great Salt Lake in Utah, in Iceland; there are few places on earth without seagulls. Smeagull introduces kids early on to the value of wildlife," says Lender, who has several degrees in anthropology and is a fierce proponent of

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Smeagull the Seagull
A True Story
at smeagull.com

keeping our resources pure. "We have to get industries from stripping the sea."

Mark and Valerie want to put this book in the hands of everyone who wants one, so to make it affordable for as many people as possible, they have started a Kickstarter campaign and are

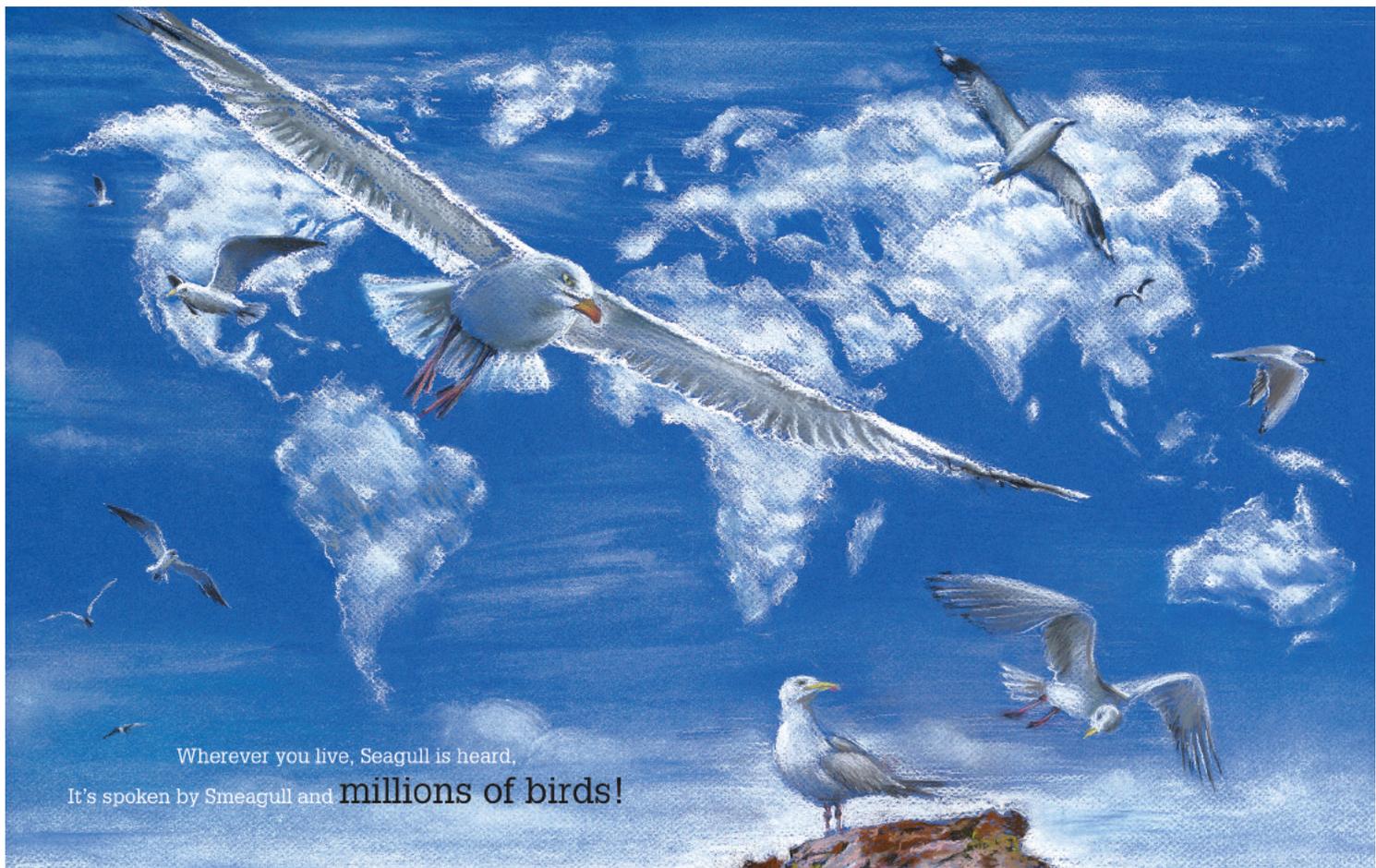
presently working on an animated digital version. To find out more about this, or to contribute, go to: www.kickstarter.com and type in Smeagull the Seagull.

Smeagull is more than a charming little story. It's a solid lesson for both children and adults, a kind of wakeup call to alert everyone to the responsibility each of us

has for conservation. Most of all, Smeagull himself teaches us about consistency, about permanence, about friendship, and about trust. Yet he also gives warning about the fragility of life and the need to appreciate it and preserve the moments.

Like a knock on the window. Sometimes if you answer it, you might just find someone eating out of your hand.

Look for *Smeagull the Seagull* at R.J. Julia in Madison, Breakwater Books in Guilford, the Maritime Museum in New London, amazon.com, or order directly from the website: www.smeagull.com



Wherever you live, Seagull is heard,
It's spoken by Smeagull and **millions of birds!**

Find Seagull at the following fine booksellers

R.J. Julia Booksellers

768 Boston Post Rd, Madison, CT 06443 | 203.245.3959

Breakwater Books

81 Whitfield St, Guilford, CT 06437 | 203.453.4141

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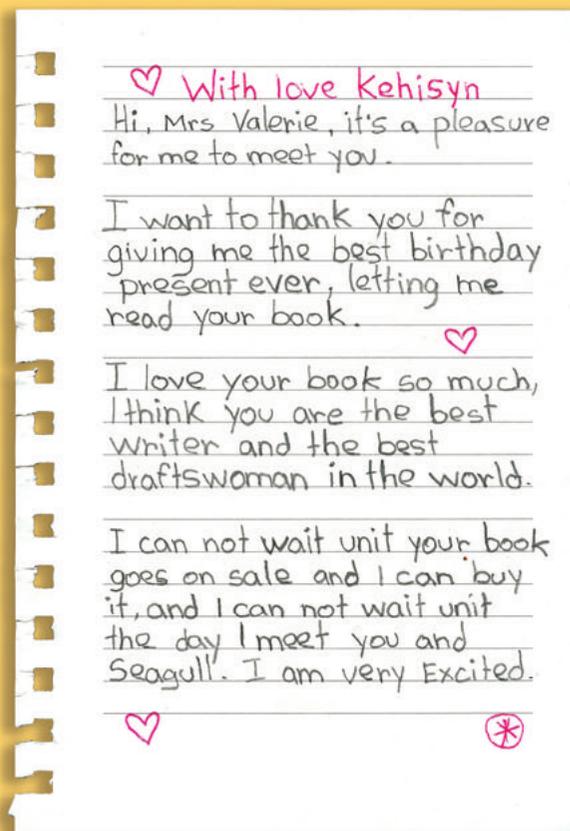
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Smeagull the Seagull

A TRUE STORY



By Mark Seth Lender

Illustrated by
Valerie Elaine Pettis

