

Book Fair Author Spotlight On...



Leslie Johnstone
and **Shar Levine**

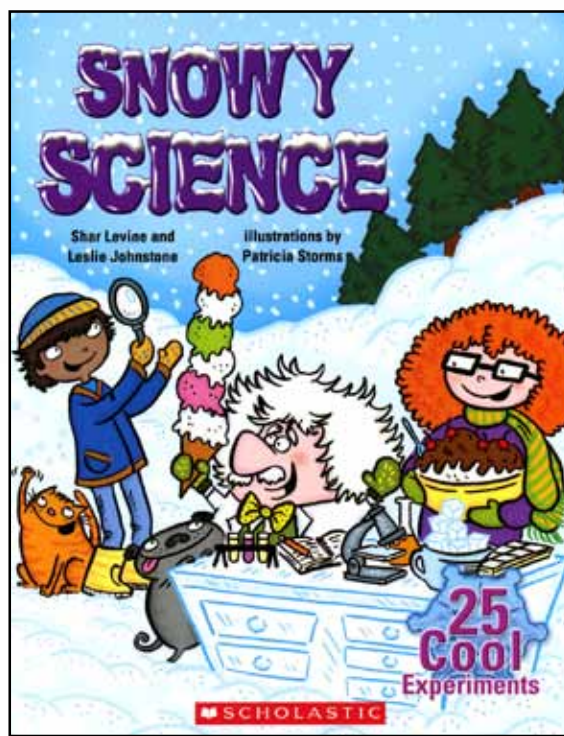
Q What inspires you to write?

Shar: It is sappy to say, but kids inspire me. It's really fun when a child approaches me after a presentation and says, "I loved the experiment where..." When you can change the way that a child sees science, it really motivates me to write cool activities. I also love the adrenaline rush I get from writing. There are two great moments you experience when writing a book. The first is when you open a file and begin to type in the first chapter. The second great moment is when you press "send" and email the completed book to your editor.

Leslie: I'm inspired to write when I discover something new that I want to share. If you have something interesting to say, then writing is lots of fun. When Shar and I first met we spent hours talking about science experiments that we had tried or seen which were different and exciting. That is the sort of thing that I really enjoy introducing to readers.

Q What advice do you have for young writers?

Shar: When you read a book figure out what you like or didn't like about the book. Did you like the story? How about the characters? Did the characters in the book



seem real? Did you think the author did a good job of describing a person, place or thing? If you can figure out what makes a good story, then this will help you become a better writer. Also, let someone read what you've written and get them to review your work.

Leslie: Read. Think. Prepare an outline. Write. Rewrite. Keep rewriting until you have written the best writing you can. Then rewrite some more...

Q What was your favourite book growing up?

Shar: I loved Nancy Drew novels. My friends and I would buy different novels in the series, then trade the books amongst ourselves. My all-time favourite book as a child was *Black Beauty*.

Leslie: My favourite books were *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis. I also loved the children's poetry of A.A. Milne who wrote *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

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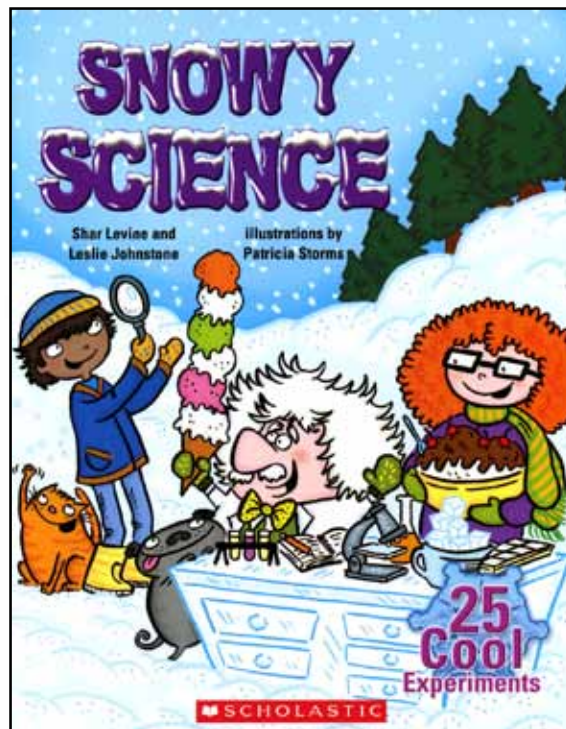
Q What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Shar: I love to cook and throw big dinner parties. My least favourite thing to do when I'm not working is cleaning up after the dinner parties. Of course I love to exercise and shop, so walking in the mall combines the best of both these activities.

Leslie: I love to eat and attend big dinner parties. I also love to ski, swim, run, cycle, travel and read. When I'm not writing I'm usually working as a science teacher.

Q What has been the biggest achievement of your career so far?

Shar: Over the last two years, I have been awarded four international science journalism fellowships. One fellowship was at the National Tropical Botanical Garden in Kauai, another was to the National Centre for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado and two fellowships were to Woods Hole, Massachusetts. The competition for these fellowships was very stiff and I was the only Canadian chosen amongst the hundreds who had applied. There were only a handful of journalists selected and so it was a privilege to attend these intense educational courses.



Leslie: The British Columbia Science Teacher's Association gave me their "Contributions to Science Education Award" and Shar and I were awarded the Eve Savory Award for Science Communication by the BC Innovation Council.

Q It's snow wonder you were inspired by all the crazy c-c-c-old weather we have here in the Great White North! What was your most unexpected discovery in *Snowy Science*?

Shar: Discovering that there was a National Snow and Ice Data Center. Great information and interesting research can be found on their web site.

Leslie: Discovering that someone has found two snowflakes that were identical.