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*PHOTO CAPTION: Latimer Lane Elementary School students are intrigued by a manual typewriter similar to the one used by author Pamela M. Tuck's father, a civil rights activist and storyteller, and the inspiration for her award-winning book *As Fast As Words Can Fly*.*



PHOTO CAPTION: *During a writing exercise, author Pamela M. Tuck encourages a Squadron Line Elementary School sixth grader to use body language to convey happiness, which his classmates then translated into words.*

Author Pamela M. Tuck Inspires Young Writers in Simsbury

SIMSBURY, CT—As part of a celebration of Black History Month, and due to the generosity of the Squadron Line, Tariffville, and Latimer Lane Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs), author Pamela M. Tuck spent the week of February 20th visiting three Simsbury schools to share her writer’s journey and to incite in elementary school students a passion for writing.

Tuck’s award-winning historical fiction book *As Fast As Words Can Fly* (Lee & Low, 2013) is based on her father’s experience during desegregation of the public school system in the 1960s in Greenville, NC. Determination, courage, and a “can-do” attitude are traits of the protagonist, 14-year-old Mason Steele, but as Tuck unfolded the tale of her own life, it became clear that she shared these same traits, traits that had propelled her on her quest toward becoming a published author.

After winning a poetry contest in second grade, Tuck knew her destiny was to be writer. But as a mother of 11 children, wanting to be a writer and having time to nurture her talent took some

doing, and at times Tuck said she was ready to give up her dream. While attending a writer's conference in 2007 with her husband Joel, who was babysitting their youngest child in the basement of the building, she was dismayed to hear other writers attest to spending five hours a day working on their craft. Tuck lamented to her husband, "I have a life that does not fit! I can't be a writer; I have to change diapers!"

Fortunately, Joel gave his wife the inspiration she needed to keep going. "You don't have to write on someone else's schedule," he said, "you *are* a writer."

After that moment of self-doubt, Tuck dove into research and developed her own writing style by modeling hers after the styles of other authors that she admired, including Paula Yoo, who penned *Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds: The Sammy Lee Story*. Yoo's book had been the winner of the 2005 New Voices Award, an honor that Tuck herself coveted. And in 2007, *As Fast As Words Can Fly* earned her that award.

Although her path to success may have been unconventional, Tuck achieved her goals. With a grin, she offered some "southern-style" advice to students. "Whatever you want to do, find the right way to do it, and do it right!"

After several more honors and awards for her work, in 2017 *As Fast As Words Can Fly* was chosen by SAG-AFTRA Foundation to be presented on Storyline Online, and to Tuck's utter delight, read by actor Dulé Hill.

Perhaps the most meaningful honor came at Tuck's lowest point, when her beloved husband passed away two years ago. She told students, "I wasn't sure I should share this with children, but I hope that you can be inspired by my ability to move forward. There are things in life that you'll view as a setback and make you lose your inspiration. When my husband died, I didn't think I would ever write again. Then I got an email from a librarian in New York City who told me that the fifth graders had selected my book for the 2015 Martin Luther King 'Living the Dream' Book Award."

Said Tuck, "I knew I just had to keep writing." Gesturing to a group of Squadron Line School students, she said pointedly, "I write for *you*."

In addition, said Tuck, “I want to thank all of the readers, teachers, librarians, and students for taking the time to read and connect with authors.”

Tariffville Elementary School library media specialist Marty Heagney had been the catalyst for Tuck’s visit to Simsbury all the way from her home state of Pennsylvania. In a letter to the Tariffville School community, Principal Scott Baker acknowledged the PTOs for sponsoring such events, which provide such enrichment for student learning. Said Baker, “This is just the kind of event that may light a fire in some of our students to become professional writers!”

For more information about Tuck and her work, visit www.pamelamtuck.com/. To watch the video of Dulé Hill reading Tuck’s book, go to <http://www.storylineonline.net/fast-words-fly/>.

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