



An Author, an Agent, an Alliance

TWO WOLVERINES JOIN FORCES IN THE LITERARY WORLD

by Lara Zielin

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, their paths should have crossed sooner. Lilly Ghahremani ('99, J.D. '02, M.B.A. '09) studied at Rendez-Vous Café on South University every day. Jon Yang ('00) worked behind the counter slinging espresso, shift after shift. But they never met.

It wasn't until 2003 that the two were introduced by a mutual friend while living in San Diego. The friendship burgeoned when they discovered a mutual love of literature. "Lilly devours books like me," Yang says. "We started a book club together."

The friendship soon became a relationship—but not a romantic one. Rather, Ghahremani became Yang's literary agent.

"Jon told me about this blog he was writing," Ghahremani says, "so I went online and started reading it. And the whole time I thought, 'this guy is gifted, he's hilarious.'"

Ghahremani had just started her own agency in downtown San Diego, Full Circle Literary. She was acquiring titles and thought Yang had a jump-off-the-page voice and was a natural author. The only problem was, he didn't have a book she could sell.

Not that it stopped her.

At a publishing conference, she struck up a conversation with a contact at Rough Guides, a travel guidebook and reference publisher, and pitched him a book about blogging that "a client" was writing. Rough Guides was immediately interested.

"Then I had to call Jon and tell him I'd just pitched a book he wasn't writing," Ghahremani

says, laughing. "But he was all for it."

The Rough Guide to Blogging was published in 2006.

But what Ghahremani did next was about to challenge Yang even more.

"I have a twin sister and I'd grown up doing everything my twin had done," Yang says. "I shopped, I read *Sweet Valley High* books, I flipped through her copies of *Us Weekly*." Knowing that Yang understood how to get into the mind of a girl, Ghahremani asked him to get inside the mind of a sixteen-year-old girl by writing a young-adult novel.

The result was *Exclusively Chloe*, published by Penguin/Speak in 2009. In the novel, the protagonist Chloe-Grace is the adopted daughter of A-list celebrities, and she gets a "make under" to see what life is like in the so-called real world. The light-sounding novel has plenty of meat in its treatment of adoption and parent/child relationships.

And on the dedication page are six simple words: "To Lilly, my agent, my life."

Ghahremani says she was shocked when she saw the words. "It was the greatest moment of my career."

"I trust her one hundred percent," Yang says of Ghahremani. "She's believed in me from the beginning."

Exclusively Chloe was part of a two-book deal that Ghahremani negotiated with Penguin/Speak. Yang's second book, a companion piece to the Chloe story, will hit bookshelves in 2011.

After that, she's not sure what will come next. But she knows one thing. "I will definitely be involved in Jon's career for a long time."

Yang agrees. "She's just awesome. I don't know what I'd do without her." ■

While students in Ann Arbor, Lilly Ghahremani and Jon Yang crossed paths numerous times at Rendez-Vous Café but they never met. It wasn't until they'd both moved to San Diego that a mutual friend introduced them. Within months of their first meeting, Ghahremani had become Yang's literary agent.