July 18, 2015

To Those At the U.S. Copyright Office,

I am an artist. I have not been traditionally published yet but I am an artist. I write stories and poetry and songs. I take photographs for personal use and what I hope will be business use. I crochet and I knit. I sketch and paint and create in a myriad of formats. I hope to be published someday soon but if the proposed changes in the "Next Great Copyright Act" (NGCA) are brought to fruition I might not publish any of my work. In fact I don't know that I would feel right about sharing any of it.

Right now I own the rights to everything I create but how can I show my illustrations, photos, stories and other handiwork to others without fearing how my visual and written art could be used, if the NGCA takes my rights as a creator away from me? I can't afford to pay to register everything I've ever made. I don't think anyone can. The NGCA sides with copyright infringers and businesses that could exploit my inability to pay. When I create something; whether it is a picture wrought from words or an image painstakingly etched onto paper, canvas or fabric; it is a product of my inner self and I should be able to determine who uses that little piece of me and how. Do you want someone to be able to take something that you or your children or your children's children have made and sell it legally and without your consent because you didn't think it would need to be registered? Your seemingly private family memories could essentially be stolen from you… legally. That's not right. You deserve better, I deserve better, America deserves better.

When, and if, the time comes that I am able to publish my work it is important to me that the work belongs to me. If I go to sell my work and I find out that someone else had the money to register it before me because my work was considered "orphaned," my work would be

undermined. I would lose money and I would lose the potential for people to come to me and ask for my work because of the so called derivatives floating around. This is already somewhat of a concern but the NGCA would be enabling situations like this. As of right now, I've already sent out images that my husband created for one of my stories for test printing through an online printing service and I have queried an agent with a story that uses those images. What would stop an unscrupulous employee from making a copy and saying they got it somewhere else so they could try to use it for their own gain? Right now the law would stop them. If the proposed changes in the NGCA go through I would have no protection.

And what about the work that I share because I want to spread a little happiness but I don't want to monetize it? Right now I can share it and maybe brighten someone's day, but under the NGCA I would have to pay to register something that I don't want sold and that wouldn't be fool-proof because sometimes people lie; and if I didn't register it because it makes no sense to pay to register something I don't want sold, then someone else could come along and register my work for themselves and sell it without having to clear it with me first. How is that right?

Please, for the love of the beauty that art in all its forms brings to the world, stop supporting the "Next Great Copyright Act." Visual art, written art, spoken art… it all requires a safe place within the artist to germinate and grow into a publishable piece before it blossoms in the public eye and bears the fruit of future work. The NGCA takes away that safe place. Please don't let that happen.

Sincerely,

Sara Sánchez-Wolford