



## RAR #44: Magic & Fear in Children's Books, N.D. Wilson

**Sarah:** Hey Clara! Do you know who's going to be on the show today?

**Clara:** N.D. Wilson.

**Sarah:** He wrote one of your favorite books, didn't he? Which book did he write that you love?

**Clara:** Hello Ninja.

**Sarah:** Yeah. Ninjas shop. Ninjas chop. Ninjas like to...

**Clara:** Belly flop.

**Sarah:** They do.

**Sarah:** You're listening to the Read Aloud Revival podcast. This is the podcast that inspires you to build your family culture around books. Well, hello hello! I'm your host, Sarah Mackenzie. So happy to be here with you as I always am. I've got a great show for you today. A fantastic interview with someone who I think is one of today's most talented children's book authors. And it's a really fun day for him because he's releasing his new book today. Not kidding. Today, the day we're airing this podcast, April 19th, 2016, his newest book, *Outlaws of Time*, will be hitting stores all over the US. I'm actually going to take my kids tonight to his book launch party. He doesn't live terribly far from me. Just a few hours. I'm so happy to discover that. So I'm trekking a couple of hours to go to his book launch party because I'm so excited about it. To buy his new book, to have him sign the copies, and to hang out with a bunch of excited readers. So anyway, we'll get into all of that fun stuff in just a second. It was a great interview and my 12-year old daughter, Allison, actually helped me with it. So she asked some of her own questions and I think you're going to like that a lot.

Before we get into today's interview, I want to remind you that you can do us a lot of help by heading to iTunes and leaving the podcast a rating or review. iTunes has this mysterious algorithm that nobody can puzzle out. But we do know one thing. We know that when people rate and review the podcast in iTunes and when they subscribe in iTunes, it helps us climb the rankings. And when we climb the rankings, iTunes shows our podcast to a whole lot more people. So then people who are coming to iTunes to look for podcast on parenting, on education, on what to do with their kids, on how to connect with their kids, the Read Aloud Revival will pop up for them there, which is exactly what we want so we can help them build their family culture around books. So you could help with that by going to iTunes. Search in for the Read Aloud Revival, leaving us a rating, a review, and hit the subscribe button. A word on the street right now is that hitting that subscribe button does wonders for rankings. I would absolutely love to test that theory and see what happens if a bunch of us hit the subscribe button on it. It just really helps us get the word out about the work we're doing here and we just appreciate everyone of you who take a few minutes to do that.

N.D. Wilson is a master and much-loved storyteller. You might know him best as the author of *100 Cupboards*, the whole series, or the *Ashtown Burials* series, or because one of you or your children have picked up one of his wonderful books and lost a weekend in his suspenseful captivating prose. Or maybe your little ones often find themselves giggling over his hilarious board book, *Hello Ninja*. You may have even read some of his books yourself. Perhaps *Death by Living* or *Notes from the Tilt-a-Whirl*. He attended a school founded by his father where he studied the classics. Perhaps just as important, his free hours were spent exploring the creek, nearby barns, fields and quarries,



finding fossils and turtles and owl pellets. I think you're just going to love him and I know you're going to love his work. N.D., thank you so much for joining me here at the Read Aloud Revival.

**N.D.:** Thanks so much for having me.

### 3:50 Sarah's podcasting partner

**Sarah:** Well, I have a partner in crime today. I brought my 12-year old Allison here to help me chat with you. Allison, do you want to say hello?

**Allison:** Hi!

**N.D.:** Hi Allison!

**Sarah:** Allison loves your books and so when she found out we're going to have this conversation, she wanted to come along and I thought it would be super fun to have her ask some questions of her own.

**N.D.:** Perfect.

**Sarah:** She's going to stump you a little bit later. Okay, before we launch in, why don't you tell us a little bit more about your family?

### 4:15 A little about Wilson family

**N.D.:** Okay. Well, I married a woman from Santa Cruz, California, who had never been away from the ocean for more than like a week or a week and a half in her entire life. Oh from like the age of 12 on. She was a competitive surfer and she moved to Idaho. She just moved inland with me. I thank her for it. She's amazing. So she's an amazing woman. We have five kids. If I rack off the ages correctly here. We have 13, 12, 11, 9, 6. And we are about to, the day after tomorrow, go to 14, 12, 11, 9, and 6.

**Sarah:** Oh yeah, it messes everything up when they have their birthday.

**N.D.:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** And then when people ask you their ages for like the next two months, you just look at them and go, I don't know. I don't remember.

**N.D.:** Yeah, just wait till I sync up again. So we've got five kids and because we really want to live now as opposed to when it's convenient for us, they're having their childhoods right now. We also have two dogs and two tortoises and two lizards and a snake and it doesn't really stop. So they're an awesome family. We get to the water as much as we can but we live in Idaho so...

**Sarah:** Yeah, not too far from me but pretty far inland for your surfer wife girl.

**N.D.:** I tell my wife we have very large, slow dirt waves.

**Sarah:** Very slow.

### 6:05 N.D. Wilson—the cheater

**N.D.:** Yeah, very slow. Very large. Very dirty. All our kids are readers and I love writing for them. I love writing to them. I love reading to them as I write. I'm running story ideas by them. Just this last week, I have a draft of a next book and I printed it all out and I gave it to some of my kids and some of my nieces and nephews and I had a focus group of ten readers read a draft. And then I met with three different groups of them and just asked them questions to see what they're getting and whether they're missing stuff or what they're picking up on. Yeah, I cheat. I totally cheat.

**Sarah:** That is totally cheating.

**N.D.:** To my advantage. Yeah.

**Sarah:** So what do you do if they come back to you and say, "I don't get it." Or do they ever do that?

**N.D.:** Oh sure they do and it's really, really helpful to know when something's confusing or to identify which personality types something's



confusing for or isn't confusing for. I love it. So I'm not looking for them just to say, "I like it, Dad." I would like for them to actually ask questions and I want to probe how much they got, how much they understood, whether I need to make things more clear. Do I need to make things more mysterious? That kind of thing. I don't ask them what to do. I just watch their responses and that tells me what to do to get the effect that I'm hoping to achieve.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I love that. Okay, do you read aloud your books to them? Or do you just hand them and let them read them and then give you their feedback?

**N.D.:** I've done both. So with my book that's coming out on I guess the day this airs, April 19.

**Sarah:** Yes, yes.

**N.D.:** The book that's coming out there, I read the whole manuscript to them first draft. And I tend to not want to do that because it changes so much from first to final but I read them the whole first draft. Then with Book 2, the follow up to that book, then I actually just printed it out and gave it to them. And I'll send them off to read it over one Saturday basically.

**Sarah:** That's the second book in that series.

**N.D.:** A year from now. The one that I'm working on, that one is going to come out in a year.

## 7:10 The brand new book, Outlaws in Time

**Sarah:** Right. Okay, so he's talking about Outlaws of Time. We're so excited that when it comes out today, April 19th, my kids and I are going to be at the book release party there where N.D. Wilson lives and we're really excited for the book release.

**N.D.:** Woohoo!

8:00 Magic in children's books

**Sarah:** Okay so I want to talk about magic in children's books.

**N.D.:** Yes, please.

**Sarah:** We've been talking a lot recently here at the Read Aloud Revival about how fantasy is a powerful genre, probably the most formative to developing the soul of the reader. And also how it can create some problems because there's a real danger in blurring the lines of right and wrong and inverting archetypes and doing all of that in a very casual and almost subconscious way. But you write magic and fantasy brilliantly. And your books to almost always have a magic element. So I want to talk about it. How do you manage to write fantasy books without crossing that line and just tell me more about what that's like as a writer.

**N.D.:** So, I grew up loving fantasy. But the fantasy I love was Lewis and Tolkien. And I was always chasing other fantasy writers to try to find the same thing. But I try to find a similar thing to what they were doing. And I really never could. And I've found some that were fun but it was never the same. And then as I transitioned into writing my own stories and imagining my own stories which started around like sixth grade, I wanted to imitate them and how they do it. Now, one of the most distinctive things about those two guys is that they don't think they write fantasy. And they would both say, I mean they know the literary genres. So they say yeah it's fantasy. But the reason why it's fantasy is because the world is.

## 10:00 God's fantasy

So when you have somebody who believes that the world is fundamentally boring, is fundamentally a grinding machine, or worse, just a big accident. If somebody believes that it's just this big chaotic accident, when they write fantasy, they're trying to escape from it. That's



why they're trying to get away from. They're trying to find some little rest in some place where they can get away from the world. I think a huge amount of fantasy is written out of resentment or boredom with the real world.

When I write fantasy, I'm actually trying to go deeper into the world and understand the world more and specifically God's world, God's fantasy. Because I think that we're living in this intricately crafted, amazing piece of art that spans millions of miles, thousands of years, and is designed to really glorify the Creator, the Father and the Son, the Son, the Father, and so on. It's this community of creation. So there's this community of creation to please and honor and glorify that which is ultimately the most beautiful. So when I look at ants on the sidewalk or I look at maple trees or I look at the sun, I'm seeing something magical. And when I try to write fantasy, I'm trying to wake people up to the fact that the world in which they live is in fact a fantasy. This is a magical, magical place.

## 11:00 One of the most common questions from kids

So when I tell kids, I do a lot of school visits. I've done, I don't even know how many over my career now. I've been doing this, my first book came out in 2007. Since that time, I don't know many kids I've talked to in classrooms. But one of the most common questions to a writer or to a reader is if you could go to any magical world, in one of these books you read, like if you could go to any of them, which one would it be? And my answer is always, "This one." Like this is the one I want to be in. This one. This is the time in which I want to live. This is the place. This is the moment. On this rock of mostly lava and water flying around this star in this world. This is where I want to be.

So whether it's metamorphosis or photosynthesis or gravity, the mystery of gravity, all of those things - those are the things that I want to wake kids up to. So I hope that kids who read my fantasy and get hungry for more like it like I did when I was young. I hope they find more like it in the Old Testament, in dragonflies in their ponds. They'll find those things to be magic in the same way that my stories are. So I'm trying to go into this particular magical world. I'm not trying to escape from it. I'm trying to wake people up from sort of a modern, numb nap that a lot of kids are in.

## 12:30 The powerful setting of 100 Cupboards

**Sarah:** Okay so one of the things that strikes me about your writing and I'm thinking particularly of 100 Cupboards here, you used setting in an unusual way I think. First of all, I can picture Henry, Kansas like it's another character of the book. It's just so well done but not just that. Henry, Kansas is a very normal, like I can imagine being there because it feels very much ordinary, very much like my own hometown kind of feeling. And what struck me the first time I read 100 Cupboards was that you could have placed the characters anywhere but you put them in this very ordinary kind of Podunk town in the middle of the country and then the fantastical tale comes from there. So what I'm hearing from you is like this appreciation for or what's the word I'm looking for, amazement with God's creation in the whole world, as our life, as fantasy coming out from the very ordinariness of our lives. And I can see that. I can see that in the 100 Cupboards. I can see it in the setting that you chose for that story.

**N.D.:** Awesome. That's the point. And so with the character in 100 Cupboards, Henry discovers the magic in this world. He discovers that he lives in a magical world. He's out at night as the dew is



starting to condense on the grass and he's looking at the stars and he's realizing that this is in fact a magical world. It's when he realizes that, that all these doors start to open to him. So he has at first discovered the magic here before there's magic anywhere. Because I didn't want it to be an escapist, "Oh if only I could find the magical place." And it doesn't really matter which kind of school group I'm talking to, whether it can be a big homeschool conference or I could be in Boston by Random House just to random public schools somewhere, I'm going to talk about the magic of this world. I'm going to talk about how my world is more magical than Middle Earth. It's like that's what I'm going to push. And that's what I hope my stories do. And I hope that kids go home and look at beetles differently and respond to them differently than they would have otherwise.

## 14:40 The fear factor in 100 Cupboards

**Sarah:** A lot of your books are scary, like totally creepy in the best use of the term. My kids read 100 Cupboards before I did and when I started reading it, I was like, Did you have nightmares after you've read this book? It was this totally creepy. And of course, they have these delicious grins on their face. "No! So good." But I'm curious to know how you navigate that line between too scary and just enough thrill and why there's this element of fear. Fear is not the right word but the creepy thing.

**N.D.:** Sure, I think fear works. And it's evil, fear, threat, danger, anything like that. But the answer's very similar to the last one. So the real question is why does God work with that? Why there are many people who, Christians, it doesn't really matter who they are but there are many people, many Christians who refuse to make any attempt at all to imitate the taste of God. So why did God make spiders? Like why? Why did He

have to do that? Why did He make maggots? And why on earth do people assume that they won't be any in heaven? Just immediately automatically. Like He obviously likes insects and huge portions of our population just say, "I don't." I will make no effort to like what he likes. He obviously likes snowflakes. He obviously likes bunny rabbits. He obviously likes other things too. And we like just the cute and the fuzzy part. But he loves making falcons which hunt. Job talks about he takes pleasure in feeding the lion. He made the lion hungry. God works with darkness. God works with pain. God works with fear. And that's when courage arise.

So what is courage worth if it hasn't been tested? What is Job's faith worth if it hasn't been tested. It's proven. So when I write a story, you asked how I do find the line. I try to make sure that no matter what, my light is always more powerful than my dark. When I use dark paints in my painting, I'm always going to make sure that the light is stronger, the light is dominant, and the light will win by stooping. Pride is destroyed. Service is honored. Laying one's life down is the bravest form of love and will in fact triumph and be honored. I'm looking at the rules of God's narrative. I'm acting like a literary critic including the natural world. I get scripture, special revelation, whether it's the proverbs and patterns of stories and go to the ant, you sluggard, there's all these different things that are there and I'm using all of those. So when I write with creepy, I will say I never get as creepy as God does. And when I write with dark and I make things scary, I never make them as scary as God has. And I make sure that my light is also up the task of totally overcoming it. That's really what I go after. So when I decide what to do with the villain, I'm deciding how scary to make them or creepy to make them, I'm also making the same decision at the same time over what kind of grace and light will exist in this world. What



kind of courage will this character have to find to overcome it and so on.

## 17:20 Thinking through fear with David and Goliath

So if you think about Goliath, in order for the story to work, every single man of Israel has to be scared. Every single one of them has to be frightened. And only one, a boy, isn't. Now, if 900 of them weren't frightened, it doesn't have the same story. Goliath had to be frightening enough that they really revealed who had the most courage and who had the most faith. So when you push it further, that's how God uses it. That's how God tells us stories. Now, just a kick against my own genre for a little bit, when you talk about fantasy, I think a lot of what bothered me when I was young was that fantasy authors tend to have good magic, bad magic, as if it's like a speed limit. Well, good people go slow or bad people don't. Or it's a human covenant or a human authority or the constitution or something. We've agreed that this kind is bad magic and this kind is good magic. I can't stand that. I really cannot stand that. So if you look at scripture, the first, and I tell this to school kids everywhere, the first wizard duel in literature is Moses versus the magicians and pharaoh. And he is the precursor to Gandalf and all these other wizards where the authors consciously imitated what Moses was doing. An old man walks out of the wilderness with a big beard leaning on a stick.

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**N.D.:** And then he comes and he has a wizard duel. Now the thing that's amazing is that Moses is the one who calls down the angel of death. Moses is the one who turns the river to blood. And in any fantasy book, that would be black magic. It's like immediately, that's on the wrong side.

**Sarah:** Right.

**N.D.:** He turns his staff into a serpent and it's like is he a black magician? Is he Voldemort? It's like, "No, he's not. He's the prophet of God and he's been giving us authority to do this." And the difference between good and bad is, has God given it to you or have you stolen it? Is it a task and a burden, an authority, or did you climb the wall and thieve it? Are you manipulating your way into this and conniving or is this something that Elijah receives? Or Elisha receives in double portion? And the thing you see through scripture when all these guys are heroes and really superheroes, when they're all precursors of the Messiah. When they get given what they're given, it comes with authority and it's always a burden and it's always a curse. It is not fun. Do you think it was fun to be Moses? Like no. Not even close. And it wasn't fun to be Elijah and it wasn't fun to be Elisha. Do you think David had a great life? Even without the sin and the fall at the end of his life when he was older, he's hunted in the wild. He's got all these issues. Joseph at Egypt, the thing about his brothers and that whole situation. It's like when God chooses someone and gives them the authority and says you are my chosen one, what does that mean? Well, it means you're going to end up on a cross. That's what it means and some version of it. So with greater light, comes greater responsibility and so on. So you'll be judged according to it. So when you have a hero and they're given authority, it's a burden. It's painful. And they're given the grace to sustain underneath it and they're doing it for others behind them. So they take on the burden of the power, of the authority, and they should be laying themselves down by means of it for those in the rear, for those others behind who are too scared.

So when I write and I use magic or I use fantasy, I'm always thinking where did this come from? Where did this power come from? By whose



authority is it being used? Is it an invitation of the same way that Samson got his...and so on. And then when you're faithless, do you lose it? And really try to govern closely by the patterns of the real world and by God's storytelling.

## 21:20 Alison's debut!

**Sarah:** I have my 12-year old here who would love to pepper you with some questions. Are you up for those?

**N.D.:** I absolutely am.

**Alison:** Okay. So what is the scariest kid's book you've ever read?

**N.D.:** Ever read. I think probably the book of Exodus. You know, the Passover, the whole thing. In scripture, it's really quite scary. Any accurate telling of the story of the flood, that's incredibly frightening. But as far as like other things that people have written, Harry Potter 4 probably.

**Alison:** Okay. I loved 100 Cupboards. Where did you get the idea to have a place like Endor?

**N.D.:** You mean like a dead place that's been drunk-dry, like everything drained? Honestly, it's from looking at the quest for immortality ultimately turns everything into a graveyard. The graves are open. There's no true immortality the way that man tries to steal it, is no gift at all. It's a curse. So when man steals eternal life, it turns him into a demon. You successfully stole it. Congratulations. Now you're just one of the lesser fallen angels. That's it. When you're given it, it turns into something completely different. Endor was part of that discussion, part of that shift. What happens when you steal power or steal life versus what happens when you are given it? And so the fact that they all survived by stealing the life of others, they're always stealing and they can't die. So when they run out of life to steal, they just sort of dry up and their

husks just waiting for the next living thing to come past them.

## 23:00 Childhood influences on N.D.'s writing

**Alison:** Did you get the idea to have a character floating on styrofoam in Leepike Ridge from your childhood? I want to hear about that.

**N.D.:** I do. Okay. Yes. A buddy of mine and I, he lived in this old farm house with this massive barn and his house is as much a part of my childhood as my own house because my parents loved cutting me loose over there because there's so much scope. And we were over there in the spring one time and so the creeks were high and running fast. Late spring. And we found a big chunk of Styrofoam. But I found out incidentally that I couldn't save Styrofoam in my book when I wrote about it because it's trademarked.

**Sarah:** Really. That's funny.

**N.D.:** Yes. And it's a very specific definition when we think Styrofoam, it's actually a little different than what the technical definition is. But anyway, so we're over there. We find this big block of Styrofoam. We're on our baseball uniforms waiting for his mom to take us to a baseball game and we thought we had time to have a little adventure so we threw the Styrofoam in the creek and he climbed up at first because he was much smaller than I was and then I climbed onto the back and it was very wobbly, floating and the water was fast and so we started moving. We started moving pretty quickly and down this muddy spring wash, and we had all the ways downstream. And we started to sink, the nose of it went under. We're sinking in our little baseball uniforms and I watched my friend dive for this rock in the middle of the stream that was covered with slick, gross, scum. And he just jumped and hugged it. I think we



were third grade, third or fourth. And he dove and threw his arms around the rock and then just slid down out of view. I was watching him slide down the rock below the surface and I dove the other direction and barely reached the bank and grabbed two big fistfuls of thistles and dragged myself out into a thistle patch and then turned around and watched him kind of swim and make to the bank a little further down. And his mom found us a little while later. She was driving all over looking for us. We're dilly dallying down the country road, walking back, squelching back in our shoes and our wet baseball uniforms. We ended up sitting on the porch in our underwear while she threw our uniforms in the dryer before she took us to our game.

So when it came time to write Leepike Ridge, the concept of a boy who found this piece of foam, this packing foam they sneaked off and floats away is straight out of my childhood. Although he does more than getting rebuked by his friend's mom. He actually finds a bunch of treasure and an awesome adventure. So his whole story went a little better than mine did.

**Sarah:** He didn't end up on the porch in his underwear huh?

**N.D.:** Yeah, exactly.

## 26:00 Movies from the books?

**Alison:** Would you like to see your books made into movies?

**N.D.:** You know there was a time when I didn't and it's been pretty interesting because there's always been interest and then somebody will come along and I'll say sure and then they'll write a script and I read the script and think I can't do this. I cannot say yes to this. This is horrible. There's a tension there because yes, I would love to see it because even a bad movie helps a good book. So I really don't care much for the Narnia movies. I'm really not a fan. I don't

even like The Lord of the Rings movies. Lots of people really do. I really cannot stand them. But what I appreciate about them is that they have doubled, tripled, and quadrupled sales of those books. So more people have read the Narnia Chronicles, the original books than they would have otherwise. And so for that, I'm grateful. But ultimately, a movie goes away. A movie goes away much more quickly than a book does. And you can see that by how quickly Hollywood remakes movies. And you don't ever have somebody say, hey I'm going to write your same story but I'm going to write the novel differently. I want to use all different prose but the same story. Like once it's written, it's written and that's kind of... so yes to answer that question but a nice, long-winded answer. Yes, I would like to see it and if it's bad, I'd be grateful it got made and I probably won't watch it.

**Alison:** How would you know it's bad then?

**N.D.:** I'll ask somebody I trust. I'll tell them, don't tell me just tell me whether I should see it.

## 27:20 The trailer for Outlaws of Time

**Sarah:** Well, we watched the trailer to your new book Outlaws of Time today. And my son said, "Oh I hope they make this one into a movie too." Just based on the trailer alone.

**N.D.:** Yeah, that's a really fun trailer. That was fun. They actually use animation. It was very, very enjoyable. Long, painful, and difficult but really fun.

## 27:30 Wanting to write even as a young boy

**Alison:** When did you know you wanted to be a writer?

**N.D.:** Sixth grade. Fifth grade, I decided I had to learn everything I needed to know. I just thought



I'm done. That's it. Thanks everybody. Thanks for all the help. I've learned it's sufficient now and I tell people I was homeschooled at school because my dad helped start the school and he was there all the time teaching. My mom was there teaching so like the whole family went to school in the morning. My mom was teaching English. My dad was teaching Latin and logic and other stuff. So I was up there at school and then fifth grade, an amazing teacher, grade 5th teacher. And I just tapped out. I stopped. I quit doing all of my work. One day, that was it. And he was a good teacher so he got in touch with my parents and said, "Nathan has quit working." And so my parents talked to me and said, "You have to do your homework." And I said okay. It was very easy. So I did my homework and I took it to school and I threw it away. About a week went by in which I threw away all my math and my Latin and everything else. So when my dad found out and he sat me down and said, "What's going on?" And I said very sagely, "You told me I had to do it. You didn't tell me I had to turn it in." So after two weeks of flunking, we had sufficient words that I was re-motivated, shall we say, euphemistically. I was re-motivated to engage with my work and I believe it involved an old weathered belt with a Winchester belt buckle. So then, I started doing my work and I would do it all but I would complain. I would just complain. And about the books I had to read, I hate this book. I hate that book. This book's stupid. And I'd do it at the dinner table. My dad told me I was not allowed to complain anymore. I could make creative suggestions. So if I didn't like a book, I had to be able to tell him what I would do to fix it. What would make it a good book? What would turn it from a bad book to a good book? And so that engaged me in a completely different way in fifth grade. And so I would read a book and I would always be reading it, putting myself in the author's chair thinking,

no don't do that. Take it here. Add pirates. Kill everyone. Because I was in fifth grade.

**Sarah:** She has a fifth grade brother so she's very much understanding.

## 30:05 The pleasures of re-reading

**N.D.:** Great. I had all sorts of wisdom about what should have been done to some of these books but it changed my whole perspective on reading. And so instead of where at that time I would go re-read over and over and over again. I'd re-read the same books I liked. And I hated starting a new book. I hated reading a new book. I didn't want to waste my time if I might not like it. And so I would just go and re-read the old classics. And that shifted my brain and took me into a different place. And so I started reading a lot more broadly. And I was interested in reading more broadly because there were stories to discover that actually weren't in the book. So that the book would make me think something and I enjoyed the process of thinking and creating and all that stuff. So by sixth grade, I announced to my family, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to write books. I'm going to write novels. My sisters, I have two of them, who had just witnessed my fifth grade performance were both a little dubious. They're both justifiably dubious that I would actually write a novel ever. And so I told them I'm going to do it and I'm going to write under my initials because my favorite authors are all dead. And I didn't really put together the fact that they were all British and I lived in Idaho but...

**Sarah:** Details, you know.

**N.D.:** Yeah, details, details. But at least I get to imitate the initials. So when I got my first book deal and I was thinking am I going to Nathan Wilson or what am I going to be? At that time,



why miss an opportunity to make your sisters wrong?

**Sarah:** One of your sisters is one of my favorite writers too.

**N.D.:** Oh she's amazing. Both my sisters are amazing. And incidentally, in their defense, they both will say will you tell that story it sounds like we're so unsupportive. No they weren't. By the time I was writing, graduate in college and writing stories and they were like all in, reading my first drafts, all about.

**Sarah:** Yeah, they sound like sisters.

**N.D.:** I'm just saying. They were totally justified. Coming off of my fifth grade year, they were totally justified in thinking that I was never going to amount to anything.

**Sarah:** And for our listeners, I'll put his sister, Rachel's books in the show notes of this podcast too since I just mentioned that two of her books, *Fit to Burst* and *Loving the Little Years* are wonderful books on motherhood that you should definitely not miss. So we'll put those links in there too.

**N.D.:** Awesome.

## 32:00 Favorite characters... favorite children

**Alison:** Okay, what is our favorite character of all your books?

**N.D.:** Hoo! Man that's tough. Ask your mom which of her kids is her favorite.

**Sarah:** She told me that you're going to say that. I could though depending on the day.

**N.D.:** Sure. Honestly, it really depends because there are characters with whom I relate, you have to relate to everybody. But there there are characters to whom I relate very, very easily and profoundly where it's like... I actually look up to

them. Either characters like I can write and create and put in a story and I could admire them and look up to them as if they weren't some guy just made up because they aren't. Because I've stolen their attributes and their virtues from all over the place, from all over God's very stories. So I can look up to them the way I'd look up to somebody in the Old Testament. And so in each book, there's kind of somebody like that. There's a character like that whether it's Reg in *Leepike Ridge* or Caleb in the *Cupboards* trilogy and Uncle Frank in some ways in the *Cupboards* trilogy or Rupert Greeves in *Ashtown* or Mack in *Boys of Blur*. There's a strong father figure that I always try to shape in those different stories.

As far as kids go, Cyrus Smith in *Ashtown Burials* is very similar. I relate to him because I actually stole some of the story I just told you about fifth grade. I just took some of the same attitude and just gave it to him. He's one of the only characters where I never I've ever just stolen stuff from myself to put into the character. But right now, I really, really am enjoying working with Sam Miracle and Laurice Spalding who are my new characters in *Outlaws of Time*. And part of that is because I think that the transition from someone who is broken and cast off to being given strength that he's expected to use and he's expected to use it to his fullest. So I think that transition is most stark in this book in *Outlaws of Time*. And the nature of it being a hardship and a curse was also overt. So he's given this, it's liberating a little bit, but it's mostly just a massive burden and a massive strength that he's expected to use. He's expected to use himself up and spend himself in defense of others. So I really, I like Sam a lot. And I hope others will as well.

**Alison:** Okay, last question. What's your favorite books that's not your own?



**N.D.:** Favorite book that isn't my own, probably The Two Towers. And also, that really kind of depends though because That Hideous Strength C.S. Lewis's, That Hideous Strength is absolute favorite of mine and I was big Lewis fan back in that fifth grade, sixth grade era. And I read it for the first time then and did not enjoy it because it wasn't written for me at all. And then when I cycle back to it, I mean luckily, I knew it wasn't the book's fault. It was my fault. I just wasn't at that reading level yet and when cycled back in high school, that hideous strength just shocked me with how much I loved it. I also back in fifth grade, my mom when I was refusing to read other things, she sat me down, she read me a chapter from King Solomon's Mines. She sat me on the couch. She was an English teacher and a very wise woman and I was doing something like, "Ah! There's nothing to read. Lewis is dead. He doesn't have any new novels. Why couldn't he have written more?" And she sat me down and she found this old brown copy of King Solomon's Mines by Haggard. And she flipped through a chapter in the middle of called The Witch Hunt and she read it to me and it was insane. And there's all these Zulu warriors all lined up with their armor and there are these clumsy white explorers and these noble brave Zulus and this witch comes out and everybody's beating the drums and this witch is dancing around. And she actually is going to denounce any of these soldiers that she wants as witches and they're immediately executed on the spot. And she's dancing around and the drums are beating. And all these guys are staying there and she's pointing the guys. They'd just grab and pulled out and executed and she's dancing. My mom was reading this to me. I'm 12. And she just stops. And she sets it down and does, "Yeah but you don't like old books." And she just left.

**Sarah:** I love it.

**N.D.:** So for me, you asked me what my favorite book is. King Solomon's Mines isn't my favorite book but it has a very sweet nostalgic memory with it when I read it. I can't shake that moment with my mom when I was 12 and what that actually ended up doing for me. It was a very important moment. I grabbed the book. I finished the book and then I started reading all sorts of other old books and just broadened out. And so I really liked the book for that reason and because I know my mom used it.

**Sarah:** That reminds me so much of, I was going through this big Chesterton phase a couple of years ago. I mean I'm always kind of been in Chesterton phase.

**N.D.:** As you should be. Yeah.

**Sarah:** Yes, exactly. But it was like really intense and my kids were like oh great, because I had gotten a Nancy Brown's Chesterton Readers... Father Brown Readers and they were like, "Great! Mom's going to foist Chesterton craziness onto us. And they're complaining and grumbling and they never grumbled about stuff that I read to them. But so I just read the very first page and you know Father Brown mysteries are just... We just opened it up and we described the villain and the scene and I get to the bottom of the second page and I shut the book and went, "Oh never mind. You guys don't want to listen to this anyway."

**N.D.:** Yeah, forget Chesterton.

**Sarah:** Yeah, everyone, "No mom! You have to read it. We have to find out what happened." It was awesome.

**N.D.:** Is it right to the point where somebody's dead?

**Sarah:** Yeah, exactly.

**N.D.:** And then you stopped.

**Sarah:** Exactly.



**N.D.:** It works. It works every time.

## 37:50 Favorite read-alouds in the Wilson family

**Sarah:** Okay, so I would love to know before we go. What kinds of books you read to your own kids, some family favorites that you've read together?

**N.D.:** Well, one of the things that I really enjoy is because we always have like a youngest trickling along behind the others and my youngest is six now. And my wife is actually starting to read her through my books and watching that process is really, really fun. Because that's an anomaly. It's not quite an answer to your question but getting to watch a little 6-year old engage with Henry and Henry, Kansas for the first time, and then come talk to me as if he's somebody that I might know. She wants to talk to me like, "Do you know what Henry did?" When she'd tell you about Henry, Uncle Frank. She's going to tell me all about Uncle Frank. And talking to any reader at all, any kids about my characters as if they're a mutual friend, instead of there's somebody who exists a part of me and we both know them, I love that. And doing it with my kids is especially fun.

Right now, I'm finishing Return of the King with my whole gang and after that, I promised them something after that. I don't remember what it is. They're all in different ages now and so I love handing my son a book who's 13 and having him read it and come back and we have a conversation about that book that I couldn't hand that book to my 9-year old. But I'm going to hand my 9-year old a book and we're going to do the same thing. So right now, we're on Lord of the Rings. And like that's dear to me for obvious reasons. And then from there, I might do a little bit of Dorothy Sayers. I'm kind of tempted to do a murder mystery with them.

**Sarah:** Oh fun!

**N.D.:** Just to throw them off because we've done a lot of fantasy so I might just do a total curveball.

**Sarah:** Totally throw them off. We haven't done that yet, have we?

**N.D.:** We'll see what comes after. But I do, I'm really tempted and I don't want to do it if it's just too selfish. But I really am tempted to read to them through all of my books. Like I want to read them like all of them. And I want to actually record it. I just want to like an audio recording. I want to read all my books to them and they always have that. So it's something I could give to grand kids.

**Sarah:** And that's just going to say, yeah.

**N.D.:** But they're getting old enough now that I actually, like they're still little but I can see that next generation. But that's a horrible answer. Like what books do you want to read aloud to your kids. Well, my books.

**Sarah:** No, that's not a horrible answer at all because that's like...

**N.D.:** And I wrote them for them. I wrote it for my kids so that's why I want to do it. And I've read different ones, my books. But not all of them. And I haven't done audio of it which I think would be fun.

**Sarah:** Yeah, that would be fun and it would something they treasure forever and their grand kids.

**N.D.:** Well, hopefully. Come on.

**Sarah:** Oh well, this has been so wonderful. Thank you so much for carving out time. I know you're super busy. I'm excited. We're excited to meet you in real life.

**N.D.:** That would be real fun. Very real fun. And if you want to know as far as scary books go,



well actually scary might be the wrong word, but some creepy book. You saw the trailer for Outlaws of Time. So as far as like slightly creepy goes, Outlaws of Time is up there.

**Sarah:** It looks like it.

**N.D.:** I had a bad fever and I had this dream in which this happens to me. What happened to my main character happens to me. And I woke up and I thought, that's amazing. And it might be too scary and can I really make it not too scary? Like can I write it so it's a little bit funny and kind of undercut it. And so I went downstairs that night, still a little bit sweaty and feverish and told the story to my kids. And I just told them the story about this kid with the messed up arms and what happens and they were so gripped by it. But they all left and waited that day I got drawings from the story from every single one of them.

**Sarah:** Oh that's awesome.

**N.D.:** Of all of them and I thought okay, I've got something here. I was going to make sure that it's not too frightening. So I think I made it funny enough but it's still definitely got a little bit of a spook.

**Sarah:** Yeah, we watched the trailer and when we saw the arm transformation, we all went , woah! We'll put a link to the trailer in the show notes so if you're listening to this and you want to see the trailer for Outlaws of Time which releases today, you can go grab a copy. Head to readaloudrevival.com and check out Episode 44.

**N.D.:** Can I tell you one last thing.

**Sarah:** Yes, please.

**N.D.:** I'm starting, some of them I'm doing with this book promotion is I'm actually starting a short video series for aspiring writers for young writers. I'm actually just going to release short video clips. I'll get passwords to kids. Anybody who's bought the book Outlaws of Time and

emails me a picture of the receipt, you can go to the website [outlawsoftime.com](http://outlawsoftime.com) and I'll give them a password as they start watching little video message to young writers, people who are aspiring writers. So little tips on craft, some secrets of the industry, and how to do stuff with characters and dialogue and action and all that kind of stuff.

**Sarah:** Oh fantastic. We have a ton of aspiring writers at the Read Aloud Revival so I may have to chat with you about coming back and doing an Author Access Event because we have a lot of aspiring writers that come to those.

**N.D.:** That would be fun.

## 43:00 Let the kids speak

**Sarah:** Now it's time for Let the Kids Speak. This is my favorite part of the podcast where kids tell us about their favorite stories that have been read aloud to them.

**Cindy:** Hello! My name is Cindy and I am 6 years old. And I live in Georgia and my favorite book is Tumtum & Nutmeg. What I like about it is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 chapters. But I like it is because they go on all three adventures and stories by Emily Beam. There's pictures by Nick Price. Thank you for listening. Bye!

**Edison:** Hello! My name is Edison Harmon. I live in Georgia. My favorite book is Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. I like it because I like wizard books and the characters are exciting and they have adventures together. Bye bye!

**Will:** Hello! My name is Will and I live in Georgia and I'm 6. And my favorite book is Building Our House and I like the Little House because I'm a carpenter and because I love building. Bye!

**Elliot:** Hi! My name is Elliot and I'm 6 years old and I'm from Seattle. My favorite book was Hank the Cowdog. This is why I like it. I don't know what's going to happen.



**Mom:** What's your name?

**Claire:** Claire.

**Mom:** How old are you?

**Claire:** Claire.

**Mom:** I'm two.

**Claire:** I'm two.

**Mom:** What's your favorite book?

**Claire:** It's Peter Rabbit.

**Mom:** What does Peter Rabbit do?

**Claire:** Peter Rabbit... and the bunny... and the scarecrow... and the bike.

**Mom:** Where did they go?

**Claire:** Going to get....

**Anna:** Hi! My name is Anna. I'm 10 years old. I live in Pasadena. I read a book last month called *The Penderwicks: A Summer Tale of Four Sisters, Two Rabbits, and a Very Interesting Boy* by Jeanne Birdsall. It was very funny in the fact they are always getting into trouble. It is very funny how Jane makes up characters like Mick Hart. Skye says stuff she doesn't mean it like when she talked about how mean Mrs. Tifton was to a boy that she didn't know was her son. That is an example of why they always get into trouble. I love this book so much I had to read all of them. And I'm now on my fourth *Penderwicks* book.

**Nora:** My name is Nora. I'm 5 years old in Washington.

**Mom:** What's your favorite book?

**Nora:** My Father's Dragon

**Mom:** What do you like about My Father's Dragon

**Nora:** There a really silly mouse in it.

**Mom:** What's so silly about them?

**Nora:** Because he messed this up and...

**Adler:** My name is Adler. I live in Portland, Oregon and I'm 6 years old. One of my favorite books is *Andrew Henry's Meadow* by Doris Burn. This book is about a little boy that invents things that no one seems to appreciate. He moved out of his house. He moves to a meadow called *Andrew Henry's Meadow* later on and when his friends come, he builds a house that each of them, that's special for each of them. My favorite part is the page where you see the picture of Andrew Henry's small village that he built.

**Sarah:** Okay. I think I could listen to two-year old Claire talk about Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny all day. Actually we did listen to that one all day. My daughters and I listen to that message at least 10 times in a row. All of your messages were fabulous, kids. I love to hear what you're reading. Remember, you can help you child leave a message to be aired on the show. Stuttering, silence, slurring speech doesn't matter. We can clean it up. We just love to hear what books your kids are digging. So help them do that at [readaloudrevival.com](http://readaloudrevival.com). Just scroll to the bottom of the page. Click the big orange button. It's super easy. Alrighty friends, if you haven't yet, head over to iTunes. Give us a rating or review and hit that subscribe button while you're there. We surely appreciate it. And I'll be back in two weeks to talk about our favorite picture books. I'm going to have the whole Read Aloud Revival team here with me and it's going to be fun. Until then, go build your family culture around books.