



RAR 53 – Linda Sue Park

Sarah: You're listening to the Read Aloud Revival podcast. This is the podcast that inspires you to build your family culture around books.

Hello, hello, Sarah Mackenzie here. Thanks for tuning in, you've got episode 53 of the Read Aloud Revival podcast. To say I'm excited about today's interview is the understatement of the Century. I am a mega-fan of today's guest. You'll figure out why in short order. It's a great show today. I'm so excited to share it with you. First, have you seen the new goodies in our brand spankin' new Read Aloud Revival shop yet? We have the most beautiful hand thrown pottery, made in the USA for Read Aloud Revivalers mugs that you're just going to love. It's funny because we ordered several of these mugs just as tests before we had our own Read Aloud Revival ones made, and they quickly became our own family's favorite because you can stick them in the microwave and they don't get hot on the handle, you can throw them in the dishwasher, they're also incredibly gorgeous, so I can't wait for you to see them. We also have book bags and oh gosh, just other really fantastic stuff for you. You know, we work really hard to keep the Read Aloud Revival podcast free of ads for you, our listeners. One of the ways you can support the show and continue the conversations we have here about how to build our family culture around books is to visit the brand new Read Aloud Revival shop, so head to ReadAloudRevival.com and that will get you there. You know, when this podcast airs we may not have the shop open quite yet, but we are celebrating the opening of our shop by giving away lots of good stuff. So the best way to find out where we're giving things away is to get on the email list so you don't miss out on all that fun. That's the best way for you to stay up to date

when the shop opens, when we have any kinds of discounts or holiday sales, and when you sign up for the email list, we give you free instant access to our carefully curated read aloud list, so win-win, right? Sign up for that email list at ReadAloudRevival.com and pop into the shop and take a look around while you're there. Look, it's hard to connect with our kids in today's busy, noisy world, but reading aloud gives us a chance to be fully present. At the Read Aloud Revival we have a membership program that equips and inspires you, the parents, to make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through stories. Enrollment is only open for a limited time though. We'll be closing registration on membership later this month and then it won't open back up until 2017, so be sure to check that out before doors close. Again, you can just head to ReadAloudRevival.com, click on the Discover Membership button to learn more.

Today's guest shares something in common with many of us. Her favorite thing to do as a child was to read, but she also loved to write. In fact, her first poem was published when she was just nine years old. A few years later Linda Sue Park is the author of more than 20 books including some of my favorite novels and picture books. In 1999 she published her first book, *Seesaw Girl*, and since then she has published several others including Newbery Award winning book, *A Single Shard*, that won the Newbery in 2002. It's an incredibly beautiful, powerful story, easily one of my favorites. And she also wrote a new favorite of mine which is, *A Long Walk to Water* which moved me in such a deep and profound way. She believes that reading makes us better writers and that through reading we can change the world. So today she's here to talk with us about just



that. Linda Sue, thank you so much for joining me on the show today.

Linda Sue: Thank you for inviting me.

3:30 A little about Linda Sue's family and work

Sarah: Well, before we launch into our conversation, do you want to tell us just a little bit about your family and your work?

Linda Sue: Sure. I live in Rochester, New York, which for non-east coasters is not near the same as New York City, it's all the way on the other side of the state.

Sarah: We all think New York is the city, right?

Linda Sue: Right, right. But I actually grew up in the Chicago area, so I'm a transplanted mid-westerner. I'm married, and I have two grown children. And I have two grandchildren who are, of course, the most beautiful, smartest, cleverest, wonderful babies in the whole world.

4:50 The wonder of libraries

Sarah: Of course. Well, you gave this beautiful, beautiful Ted talk where you talked (we'll put a link to that in the Show Notes, so if you're listening to this podcast and you haven't heard Linda Sue's Ted talk, you're going to want to watch that, it's really moving), and in that Ted talk you talk about your father, a Korean immigrant, and how astounded he was by the public library system in America. So tell us a little bit about that?

Linda Sue: Well, when you think about it, as I say in the Ted talk, a public library is a really strange idea. You walk in, you get yourself an arm full of books and you walk out without a paying a cent. And the librarian says, "Take each of them back when you're done." You cannot do that with

anything else, I think there's a few tool libraries now, but you can't do it with clothes or when there were videos back when you had to pay for them, it's an astounding idea. And my father, especially, thought it was the most amazing thing about this country, and of course, he raised us all as faithful library patrons, and I'm still at my local library easily twice a week, sometimes more.

Sarah: That's so great. So tell me, how did that shape or influence your writing, do you think, as you were growing up?

Linda Sue: Oh, I'm definitely a writer because I was a reader. There's absolutely no other reason. I mean, I think people have a lot of different reasons for writing and the reason that I am a writer is because I read so much when I was young. So, I just basically read my way through the whole Parks Worth Public Library in Parks Worth, Illinois. Of course, I was fortunate that I lived and grew up in my school years during an era where most schools had a library as well. So, that meant even for me who was growing up in a family that didn't have a lot of money at the time, I could read as many books as I wanted. And that's an amazing thing.

Sarah: Yeah.

Linda Sue: It really is an amazing thing. I mean, the public library makes it so that most people, not everybody because I know there are many communities that do not have access to libraries, but most of us can become readers, especially if there is a caring adult in our life who will teach us about the library.



6:30 Practice in dealing with unfairness

Sarah: Yeah, that's right. So, one of the things you said in your Ted Talk that I thought was so moving was about how books give us practice in dealing with life's unfairness. Can you talk about how books do that?

Linda Sue: Well, I think that books, for young people, are an incredible gift because they're a safe place to practice their life. And what I say is life is very complicated and bewildering at times and all of us need practice at it. So, how do you do that? How do you go about practicing at life? You see it in very young children a lot, they play, they do make-believe, they do pretend. They're practicing. And as we get older that becomes less acceptable or something, you know, a less usual part of our lives, but we can all still practice by reading stories in books. Probably the easiest example is that for young people, or children who have never lost a loved one, now how does that feel? Well, you read a story whether it's a story about a beloved dog that died. Lois Lowry talks about how *The Yearling* affected her, so it might be a pet or it might be a person, *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, and you feel such incredible sadness when a character in a book that you've come to know and love meets with tragedy, and that's preparing our hearts for when it happens to us in real life. Not just that this sadness is something that I've experienced or practiced before, but also that whoever is affected by the tragedy in the book usually goes on, "This is awful, it's terrible, I feel terrible right now but I will go on." You know, "I can go on."

Sarah: So, it gives us, basically, a model for overcoming.

Linda Sue: Right, right. For both facing and dealing, and overcoming. So that's just one of about a million examples.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah.

Linda Sue: Where it's not going to be a carbon copy of your own life in the circumstances, or the details, but the emotional resonance in a very good book is going to be true and universal.

Sarah: I also like how reading books is sharing a really beautiful story. OK, I'm thinking of *A Single Shard* and I'm thinking about how in the story Tree-ear has his bowl of food that the potter's wife gives him every day for lunch, right?

Linda Sue: Right.

Sarah: And, he only eats half of it because he wants ... the first day he eats the entire bowl and he realizes that when he goes back under the bridge with Crane-man that he didn't save any for his beloved friend who would not have done that, he would have, of course, Crane-man would have saved him food, so he has this shameful moment where he realizes what he's done and then going forward he always saves half of his meal, even though he knows he could eat the whole bowl ... I'm skipping around so much because I love this book so much. I don't want to give away too much, actually, because some of our listeners may not have read the book yet, but when you read that book, Read Aloud Revivalers, think to yourself of what this does to us? I know in myself when I was reading this book, I'm asking myself, 'Would I have done that? Would I eat the entire bowl every single day once I knew it was going to be filled up again?' You know? I don't know. It is just that it inspires this heroic virtue in the reader where we have to, kind of, ask ourselves questions. What am I going to do when I face something, even if it's not the same thing? I'm



not going to face that particular situation. But when I'm facing a situation where I have to be generous and kind and thoughtful and selfless will I be able to do it like Tree-ear?

Linda Sue: Right. I mean, what would I do? You know, what is good for me? That's huge, because that's what leads to the creation of empathy and recognizing the humanity in other people, especially those who may not be exactly like us.

10:00 Diversity in children's literature

Sarah: Right, exactly. OK, I would like to shift gears just a little bit because one of the things that's really on my heart right now is diversity in children's literature, and how important it is for us to read books, for all of us, to read books about people who don't look like us, and then for our kids to be able to see themselves in the characters they're reading. And, so for example, I read an article not too long ago, I think it was on Slate, I'll find it and put it in the Show Notes for all of you who are listening, where they're talking about, it's really important for there not just to be diverse books but for there to be diverse books where kids are doing ordinary things. So, if the only time that an African-American child sees himself in a book, it's in a book about Civil Rights or slavery or some historical, how come there aren't stories about this child just living normal, everyday, like all the other books? So, of course, my team and I gather around, we're like "No, we need to come up with a list of books that have diverse characters that are living ordinary days" and it was really hard to do. And so, we did come up with a list, I don't have that published when we're recording this but I will by the time it's airing, so if you're listening to this podcast, you can go to the Show Notes, we'll have a link to the

list we've assembled of diverse books that, kind of, are just ordinary day books. Not 'ordinary day' like there's no problem, but ordinary in that this isn't about that particular ...

Linda Sue: ... you know, for example, where ethnicity is identity in that issue.

Sarah: So, anyway, this has been on my heart a lot. I've been thinking about it constantly. And when I was perusing your site, I know that's something you feel really passionate about, is that we need diverse books, and I love that you have highlighted The Reading Without Walls Challenge (which we'll also link to) which encourages kids to read a book about a character who does not look like them or live like them, but talk to me a little bit about what's on your heart when it comes to diversity in children's books.

Linda Sue: Well, I think that there is a natural – I don't know, the word might have been natural – but that there is an evolution or a process or a progress and it is not a straight line, of course, and it sometimes acts like a pendulum or a yo-yo or whatever, it's not a beautiful bell curve or anything like that, but so when we initially got books, I'm going to talk in this case about books about ethnicity and race, we began with issue books. And, for many people feel we should be moving on. And there are many authors and publishers who have. And somehow, the needle gets a little stuck. So we need more books about ordinary kids with ordinary ... and I hear you when you say that they are hard to find, and yet they exist out there, and they're not, somehow, getting the kind of love or air time or space in our minds and imaginations and on our lists and on the internet that they ought to be getting is truly a goal. So, for example, I'm thinking of ... and many of these books have gotten a lot of praise



and so forth, and so that it's like I'm getting a little bit tangled up here, but it's like when people say or do still say, "Oh the Newbery Medal never goes to a funny book," well, actually yes it does, but this you see comes a truism stuck in people's heads.

Sarah: OK.

Linda Sue: Now, the Newbery doesn't often go to a silly book, which is what I think people might mean, but if you look over the list of the past 10, 15, 20 years of Newbery's, lots of them have humor, and there not silly and that's slapstick, but they're funny.

Sarah: Right.

Linda Sue: So, for example, I'm thinking of Karen English's book, of Sundee Fraizer's books, even some of Christopher Paul Curtis' books are about character of color where their race is not the issue. Lisa Yee, of course, writes about Asian-Americans where their Asian-ness is definitely part of their lives and part of their identity but it's not their story.

Sarah: Right.

Linda Sue: So, they do exist and if people start looking, I think they'll find, they'll be surprised that they can find more than they think are out there. But it's a great question you're asking. You know, 'Why are these books not better known? If this is what we're saying we want, why isn't there more press for them? So I'm very delighted to hear that you are making that list.

Sarah: Yes, we are assembling a list and one of the things that I've just, that's just really important to me is I know that we have people in our Read Aloud community who say, 'You know, my kids are ... what I noticed about the booklist that I originally assembled for our community, is they

said, 'My kids don't see themselves on any of these pages. And I was astonished at my own lack of awareness when I put together that book list that I made them all books that look like my children, and I thought, 'Oh my goodness, I didn't even realize that about myself, and I told my Community Director, 'Wow, I'm having a moment of shame here, because I was, kind of, hanging my head realizing that's what we've done inadvertently. So, anyway, I think Awareness, of course, is the first step, and then we can take small steps to change it. I will make sure I include a link to that Reading Without Walls Challenge and to WeNeedDiverseBooks.org so that people can find more resources.

Linda Sue: Wonderful. Another really wonderful hashtag is Ownvoices (#Ownvoices) ...

Sarah: OK.

Linda Sue: Yep, and my blog, which highlights the Reading Without Walls Challenge has a couple more resources that I really like, so that's the great thing, and yes, awareness is definitely, it's something that I think about, obviously for parents but as well for teachers, take a look at the books that you've been reading aloud to your classroom for maybe many years in a row and they're probably wonderful but how about changing it up a little?

Sarah: Yeah.

Linda Sue: How about looking for an equally wonderful book that might have kids who look a little different in it, and not just it is because you have kids that look like that in your classroom, obviously that's the mirror thing, we want them to see each other and to feel that they are important enough to be in books, but even if your classroom is all white or mostly white, you know that's where it becomes windows and doors.



Sarah: Right.

Linda Sue: They need to see characters of color in books so they know the same thing; that people of color are in important enough to be in books.

Sarah: Exactly.

Linda Sue: I have had wonderful and well-meaning teachers and librarians tell me, “Oh, I would love to order more of your books for my library but I don’t have any Asians in my school.”

Sarah: Oh, interesting.

Linda Sue: And we wanted to say, “Well, actually, that’s why you do need more books ...”

Sarah: That’s why you need to order a whole bunch.

Linda Sue: Right, right.

16:30 A Long Walk to Water

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. Let’s talk about one of your books. Let’s talk about A Long Walk to Water and maybe, could you just give us a little overview, for those of our listeners who haven’t yet had the pleasure of reading this book, which hopefully after this podcast everyone will run out to get it, but could you give us a little, maybe summary of it, and then we can talk a little bit about some of the ways you’ve tackled hard issues in the book.

Linda Sue: Sure. That book was what I call gift book because I certainly never had any intention of writing a novel set in Sudan and South Sudan. It happened, actually, through my husband who was a journalist for many, many years, and interviewed a young man back in the early 2000 who was doing some pretty amazing things, and he came home and told me about it, and I, sort of, we became friends, and I was thinking about

him for a long, long time before I finally had one of those smack on the heads moment, like duh, I want as many people to know about his story as possible, and I especially want young people to know about his story because it is so amazing and incredible and inspiring and why don’t I just write a book about him? I did have to get over the hump that I had not written about a place that I had never been to, and it is normally a deal-breaker for me, but I decided to go against that just this one time, and I do mean just this one time, because his story was so extraordinary and because I had access to both him and my husband. My husband, at the time when I originally wrote the book had been to Sudan with Salva once, and had since been back, and of course, Salva now lives there and I had access to him whenever I needed it. So with those two primary sources that’s why I decided to go ahead and write the book. You know, since then people have asked me, “Are you going to write about this topic, or that topic?” and it has to have that, as with any story, has to have that very personal connection that you just feel like you cannot not write this story.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. I was floored. I was floored. I was making dinner right after I finished reading it and I was reading it to myself because I was going to read it aloud to my kids but I wanted to preview it first just to find out if I needed to gather more information at all before I read it to my kids and I read your book, I finished it, and I’m making dinner, and my husband walks into the kitchen and I’m not usually an overly quiet person and he said, “Why are you so quiet?” and I just pointed to the book, “You just need to read it” and he said, “Just tell me what it’s about.” I’m like, “No, no, you just have to read it.”

Linda Sue: Wow.



Sarah: It was so moving to me. The story of these lost boys of Sudan who were forced to travel. How long did they travel, remind me?

Linda Sue: Oh, months, months. Different groups took a different amount of time to get there and Salva actually traveled twice, so the first time it was a couple of months and the second time it was a year and a half. Yeah, incredible.

Sarah: Yeah.

Linda Sue: They were refugees from a war, and they had to make their way to safety which was usually a refugee camp. So that's one story and the other story is what Salva's doing now, which I decided to do by telling a second narrative about a girl who's life is changed by Salva's current work.

Sarah: Yeah. I should have seen it coming, but I didn't. And the way you wove those two stories together was just really masterfully done. So tell me, when you wrote that book, just for example, do you have in mind 'this is the message that I want to get out into the world'? I guess with this one because it was based on a true story it was probably different than with A Single Shard but do you usually have an idea, like an overarching theme that you want to start with and that you want to write a story to tell that theme, or is the other way around- does the theme, kind of, emerge as you're writing?

20:00 Emerging themes in writing

Linda Sue: Well, I guess I definitely have things that I'm interested in exploring, let me just put it that way, but I don't think about themes, and so I think that if a book is really good, it will have a slightly different theme or maybe a radically different theme to every reader who reads it

depending on what they need to get from that book at the time. So for something like A Single Shard I really clearly remember one teacher writing to me and saying, "OK, we've come up with three possible themes and we want to know which ones is the right one?" So, one of them was perseverance, one of them was art, and one of them was family. You know, think about A Single Shard, right? They are all right, they're all right. What's the most important to you at the time you read it. And if it's a really good book you can read it at age 10 and again at age 30 and again at age 50 and it's going to say something slightly different to you each time.

Sarah: That's so true, yeah, absolutely.

Linda Sue: That to me is what defines really good literature. Right? So, for A Long Walk to Water there was something that stunned me about Salva's story besides all the amazing things that happened, and that is something I knew intellectually but that I didn't fully grasp emotionally until I learned and got to know Salva, which is that if you don't have water you have nothing. There is nothing else you can do your entire life without getting water and this is no matter who you are or where you live or when you lived in history. I mean, I suppose air is a little more basic, but if you don't have water you don't have food. You know? It's that basic a need. And, so therefore you can't even talk about things like women's rights and education and disease unless you have water first, so this hit me like a ton of bricks, even though it was something again you say and you know on the one level, right?

Sarah: Right.

Linda Sue: So, I mean, my husband and I have been thinking about where we wanted some of our charitable dollars to go and our energy and



so forth, and of course, I try to do some things related to literature and especially children's books and children's reading and literacy, but when we met Salva we were like "Whoa!" all of these troubled troubled spots of the world, so much of it begins in a fight for resources.

Sarah: Yeah.

Linda Sue: And there are direct links between, for example, land which can't be farmed because there's no water and the rise of terrorism. So there's these connections that were kind of mind-blowing, and so that's when we decided that we would really like to support Salva's work because there's just nothing more basic to human need than water.

23:15 The lasting impact of A Long Walk to Water

Sarah: I love how the work of your book has actually made a tangible difference in how many people have access to water in Sudan. That's amazing. So tell us a little bit about that, the after affects of what's happened since you've helped raise awareness from this.

Linda Sue: Right. That was also like a huge gift because what I was hoping that the book would do would be to let young readers know a little something about other parts of the world that seem so remote. Salva, and I hope Nya are, I hope very relatable characters, they have emotions like we do, they have hopes and dreams like we do, and yet they live the daily lives are so very different. And so this is all I was hoping for. Well, these young leaders and their teachers, their school administrators, their librarians, they were so compelled by Salva and Nya's story that they began fundraising and donating money to Salva's organizing Water for

South Sudan, and it's turned into wells and water for literally hundreds of thousands of people who never had it before. These Stephenson Schools have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars. In fact, they're nearing the two million dollar mark that they've given. You know, with bake sales, with penny collections, with wishing wells in the lobbies of their schools, that was just astounding to me, I never anticipated that it would move them to that kind of action. So, I hope that it's something that stays with these young readers. It may not stay with all of them, but I hope it stays with at least some of them that idea that you learn a little bit, you explore a little bit, and then you can be part of changing the world, in an incredibly significant way.

Sarah: Yeah. So tell me some of the other books that you've enjoyed that are like A Long Walk to Water, are world changer books, books that inspire us to act.

25:00 World changing books

Linda Sue: I give a couple of examples in my Ted talk. One of them is Crenshaw by Katherine Applegate...

Sarah: Oh yes, that's on my night stand. I haven't started it yet but I love Katherine Applegate.

Linda Sue: That's about being homeless here in the United States and has inspired schools and students to collect food for their local homeless shelters. A book that I think is incredibly important is All American Boys.

Sarah: Oh you know what? I just ordered – I think you mention that in your Ted talk and I just ordered it this morning based on your recommendation.



Linda Sue: Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely, and that explores the question of race relations in this country which is, of course, incredibly important and could literally be a life-saving book, depending on how readers both young and old embrace it, and if you have a particular part of the world, a particular cause, and I say this is the Ted talk too, a particular movement that you're interested in there is probably a wonderful children's book or novel that will illuminate that in a very moving and heartfelt way. There are picture books for younger readers. There's a book called, One Plastic Bag by Miranda Paul which I really like, and it's about how a woman in Africa did amazing things with one plastic bag.

Sarah: Have you seen the book, Boxes for Katje by Candace Fleming?

Linda Sue: Yes, I have, that's another wonderful one. So, I, actually, have come round to this pretty slowly because originally I still believe one of literature's primary missions is to change the individual not the world.

Sarah: Oh, love that. OK.

Linda Sue: This was a surprise to me, that it would have this kind of activism component, and then I was like, 'Well, that's a good thing, right?' So, my local community, Rochester New York has a couple of wonderful children's book festivals, we're really lucky. You have the Rochester Children's Book Festival every November, and we have the Teen Book Festival in April. And both of them are terrific events but this year the Rochester Children's Book Festival is having its 20th anniversary, a wonderful and amazing event, and they have decided to commemorate A Long Walk to Water with this year's festival...

Sarah: Oh wow!

Linda Sue: ... the theme is Books Change Readers, Readers Change the World.

Sarah: I love that. Yes. I love that. I love that at the end of your Ted talk too when you say it's not that children's books change the world it's the people who read them.

Linda Sue: That's right.

Sarah: You also had another quote in your talk where you said, "In order to find yourself in a book, you first have to lose yourself in book." So, tell me the kinds of books you lost yourself in when you were a child.

27:30 Losing yourself in a book

Linda Sue: Oh, I was such a reader. I was such a reader, I was pretty indiscriminate, you know. I read the Nancy Drew mystery series and all the mass produced young people's fiction at the time. I read the more critically lauded and reviewed books, like the Newbery list and so forth, and so I was just such a reader that there was almost no book I met that I really didn't like, but I do have incredible admiration then and now for the writers who are, you know, the feeling that I mean, that you begin reading a book and an hour goes by and you think it's five minutes, or you think, 'Oh just one more chapter, just one more chapter' and then you just don't want to come out of that story world, and so I don't if I'm always successful but that is always what I'm trying to create in my own books; that feeling that you just don't want to do anything else...

Sarah: Yeah!

Linda Sue: You just want to finish this book...

Sarah: Yeah.



Linda Sue: ... and at the same time you just don't want it to end.

Sarah: Yeah, that's like the mark of a good book, right?

Linda Sue: Right.

Sarah: I know a really good book was the one that I'm enjoying so much just along with my kids; I enjoy it just as much as they do, so I don't want it to end. I think, 'One more chapter.' You do like them, "One more chapter." We know we've hit a good one when I'm here saying, "OK, one more chapter."

Linda Sue: I do need to have state this because it's been a while since I've been there but on my website there's a page called Reading, and it has several lists of my favorites.

Sarah: Oh, perfect.

Linda Sue: But I probably did that more than 10 years ago, so since then there has been, of course, many, many wonderful books published that are not on there.

Sarah: Yes! Oh, I see it. Perfect. I'll make sure I link to this on our Show Notes. I see some of my favorites right away, like Edward Eager's *Half Magic* and *All-of-a-Kind Family* by Sydney Taylor, oh my goodness, fun. OK yes, oh and *Rain Makes Applesauce*. We're going to have a blast with this list so I will make sure I link to this on our Show Notes as well so people can go peek at it. We have a lot of young aspiring writers in our Read Aloud Revival community, and I am sure they would love to hear from you on what you would suggest for them as they're trying to grow into their writing.

29:45 Advice for young writers

Linda Sue: Right. Well, first of all, of course, read a lot. Reading is training for writers. People ask you, 'How do you write wonderful stories?' or "How do you write good sentences?" and it's because I've read one million of them, so that's the raw material that I have to work with. If you don't read a lot you don't have that raw material. So, the reading a lot is the first, and then the second thing is, I think young readers should aim short. I have often had young readers tell me that they're working on a novel and they often begin with great enthusiasm and they never finish. And that's not a good feeling. To lose interest. So I'm huge on poetry. People can finish poems, young or old, they don't have to be good. And just trying shorter forms—story, or paragraph or two, a letter, poems, and when you're young to try all different kinds of writing. You think that you don't like fantasy, well, write a fantasy story, a short one, or a poem about a unicorn or something. If you think you don't like historical fiction, pick one area of history that really does interest you a little bit and just write a little sketch that takes place then, just keep trying different things, keep dabbling, because you don't know where your strength is sometimes, until you try different things.

Sarah: Yeah, that's good.

Linda Sue: Depending on the age of the young writer, of course, one thing that my daughter very much enjoys, which I had not done as a child, my big thing was poetry. I wrote millions of really bad poems all the way through my childhood.

Sarah: That's so nice for us all to hear because you're writing is so gorgeous.



Linda Sue: My daughter and her good friend about 4th or 5th grade they started this swap journal. They chose one of these regular notebooks and my daughter would write something in it- a story, a poem, or a letter, and then she would give it her friend, Alana, and Alana would write in it, either something new or responding to what Anna had said. There were no rules, the only rule was that you had to give it back in three days with something written in it. And they kept that up for a year and a half!

Sarah: Really?

Linda Sue: Because you have an audience.

Sarah: Yeah.

Linda Sue: You have somebody you know is going to read what you are doing and that really became a thing. “You’ve got to give that back to me tomorrow, don’t forget,” “Oh yeah, I will” and they helped each other both to become better writers.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. That’s so good.

Linda Sue: No grades, no judgment, except you know, “I like that” or whatever, but you knew somebody would be reading what you wrote. So I often give that swap journal idea to young people who want to write.

32:15 Research for writing

Sarah: Yeah, that’s a great idea. Now your books take a lot of research because they’re taking place in certain parts of the world, or certain things that happened in history. What does the research stage of writing look like for you?

Linda Sue: Oh, I have to be disciplined about it because research is reading. I love to read, remember? So, I could just research forever! You

know, it has to come to the point where I say I will never know everything there is to know about this subject, so it’s time to start writing. I do try to do much of my research, I’m going to put an arbitrary figure of about 80% before I start, and as I’m writing, I sometimes have to stop and say that I don’t actually know this I’m going to look it up, but I prefer to have a lot of it done. I read, I take notes, I do tend to buy a lot of the books that I research with because I need to keep them. There comes a point where the overdue fines equal the cost of the book.

Sarah: I’ve tried that most of the time, although it’s very supported, I’m sure the library loves me actually.

Linda Sue: If I’ve checked it out three or four times, if I’ve renewed it three or four times and I’m not allowed to anymore then I do tend to buy it, it means it’s a useful book to me.

Sarah: Yeah.

Linda Sue: Then I’m able to stick post-its in so that most of my research books bristle with post-its, and then, eventually I do have to say it’s a rabbit hole, you go down it and never come out again because it’s so fun. And sometimes, not always, but sometimes depending on how this particular story idea has come to be, I might have a deadline that is big encourager on stopping research and starting writing.

Sarah: Yeah. Yes, a big, exactly! A finite amount of time.

34:00 What Linda Sue is writing now

Let’s talk about that actually. What are you writing now? Can you talk about what you’re writing now?



Linda Sue: Sure! I have a few things going on. I am actually working on Book #3 of the Wing and Claw trilogy; Book #1 Forest of Wonders came out last year, Book #2 Cavern of Secrets is due out in February, and so that means right now I'm working on Book #3, the last book of the trilogy, which would be out in February or March 2018.

Sarah: OK, so I haven't read any of these yet, so give us a little taste of what these are about.

Linda Sue: Well, this is a young boy named Raffa who is a member of an apothecary family, so it's set in a pre-technology fantasy world, and apothecaries take things like roots and leaves and berries and try to make medicines to help cure and heal people. So this is something that very much appeals to me because of the fantasy world, it's kind of a real mash up ethnically, and every culture in the world throughout history have used apothecaries, so that appealed to me for that reason. And Raffa loves to experiment. He wants to make something new, something that people have never used before. His father is a very skilled apothecary and he's chasing at his father because his father insists that Raffa learn the basics, and Raffa is tired of the basics, he's tired of the same old same old, he wants to make something new and he accidentally stumbles on a formula that enables animals to talk.

Sarah: Oh.

Linda Sue: So this sounds awesome, of course, and very exciting, and of course it's a very common fantasy trope talking animals, and I wanted to give it a little bit of a twist and explore it in ways that are less common. So there are terrible ramifications to animals talking in this book...

Sarah: Interesting.

Linda Sue: Yes, right. So that's one thing I wanted to explore, to give it my own ...

Sarah: Now, has it been hard thing to write a trilogy because I don't think any of your other books have sequels, right? Is that right?

Linda Sue: Correct.

Sarah: OK. So how has that experience been different?

Linda Sue: It has been different. Right now on Twitter, what I decided to do to help motivate myself was to tweet my daily progress...

Sarah: Oh, very good.

Linda Sue: ...on writing sequels.

Sarah: Oh ok.

Linda Sue: Yes, so I have a certain word coming to make in order to meet my deadline and so I'm trying to keep up with that, so it's mostly just a word count, 'Oh today I did 500' or 'Today I did [whatever]' but occasionally I will insert something about the actual process. So last week one of the tweets was, 'Oh, I just realized that the 600 words I wrote yesterday are inconsistent with what happens in Book #2,' so I have to go back and re-write that scene, but I had a little bit of experience with that in a different way, in writing the 39 Clue Series. I wrote only one book of that series but that was 10 books each written by a different author, so I had to make my book consistent with the others in the series.

Sarah: Yeah! This is fun. I haven't been on your twitter feed and I'm looking at it now and I'm going to follow you. This is fun.

Linda Sue: Oh good.

Sarah: Watching your progress ...



Linda Sue: Right. And I storify the tweets once a week, so if you don't want to, you can just go to the storify chain once a week

Sarah: Oh cool.

Linda Sue: So, that has been a different experience but I have a wonderful editor for 39 Clues, Rachel Griffith at Scholastic and Wing and Claw trilogy it's Abbey Wranger at Harper Collins, and they do a great deal of work to help me stay on track and keep the plot threads and the characters consistent.

Sarah: Very cool. I can imagine that would be a challenge that you have not had to experience before, since you get to write one book at a time usually.

Linda Sue: Right.

Sarah: And then Yak's Yak, now is this your first picture book?

Linda Sue: Oh no, no.

Sarah: Oh, it's not?

Linda Sue: Actually, I have as many picture books as I do novels.

Sarah: You do? How do I not know this? Wow, OK.

Linda Sue: So that's also on my website if you go also to books you will see a page for picture books and a page for novels, and so my ...

Sarah: Oh yeah.

38:00 Picture book fun

Linda Sue: ... very first picture book grew out of my Korean historical fiction, The Firekeeper's Son was my very first, and since then I've had many others which are mostly out of my love of poetry because I read and wrote poetry for so many

years and good picture book text has so much in common with poetry, and some of them are in fact in verse, but Yak's Yak is a word play book, which is another of my particular interests, and just animals that are also verbs.

Sarah: Yeah, that's fun.

Linda Sue: So, the manuscript was something like 35 words, and it is really Jennifer Black Reinhardt's illustrations that have really kicked it up a notch, as Emiril would say, taken it to another level, and they're just so fun, and there is so many fun details, and teachers I hope will discover it and parents too, for its potential to stimulate conversation about language and vocabulary.

Sarah: Yeah, I love that. I had some conversations recently at our Read Aloud Revival author access events with Mary Cassinova and Candace Fleming and Jonathan Bean and they were all talking about how the illustrator really deepens the narrative because it's like a whole other layer on the story. I was just so interested because before I talked to any picture book authors I thought that the author and illustrator collaborated and worked together, I did not realize that they're basically two separate forces that get woven together and makes it better than it could be.

Linda Sue: Exactly. I am not one of those authors who's interested in interfering or instructing my illustrators. I love being surprised by what they do, I love leaving them as free as possible to do their own thing because I am not an illustrator, I don't have the visual, a good visual sense, I really want them to be just free to do their thing. I have a couple of other projects in the works that I'm really excited about.

Sarah: Yeah!



Linda Sue: I have another picture book coming out. It won't be until 2019 so it's a long time yet but it's called Gondra's Treasure but it's about a little girl dragon, both western and eastern mythology have dragons. They're quite different. In the west dragons have wings and breathe fire and live in caves and hoard treasure, and in the east they don't have wings, they live in lakes or rivers or in the clouds and they breathe mist.

Sarah: Interesting, yeah.

Linda Sue: So this is Gondra who's father is a dragon from the east and her mother is a dragon from the west who breathes fire out of one nostril and mist out of the other, so it's basically a little girl from a mixed race family whose both sides have different strengths, and it also introduces the fascinating, to me, concept that two completely sides of the world both have dragons.

Sarah: Yeah.

Linda Sue: But they evolved into very different mythological creatures.

Sarah: So interesting. Do you know who's going to be illustrating that book?

Linda Sue: That's Jennifer Black Reinhardt again, and then the other project is a complete change, and that actually (when you said Candace Fleming it reminded me because it was her idea, and she had this incredible idea for a YA novel, a young adult/teen novel, it's going to be one male author and six female authors. The male author, each of us will write a chapter of the book from a different point of view. The male author is going to write Henry VIII and each of us is one of his six wives.

Sarah: Oh my goodness. That does not surprise me that Candace came up with that!

Linda Sue: Exactly, exactly.

Sarah: That's fantastic.

Linda Sue: So, I'm working on writing Wife #5, Catherine Howard, and I was actually thrilled to get her, because I knew relatively ... Anne Boleyn is the famous one, right? But I knew relatively little about Catherine Howard and she was actually the only teenager, so I got to write the only young person in this whole scenario.

Sarah: Oh yeah. Can you tell us who else is working on the project?

Linda Sue: Yes, let's see. Candace is going to be Catherine of Aragon, Wife #1, she'll set up the whole thing for us. Henry is M. T. Anderson, who is one of the greatest writers of historical fiction. He's going to be amazing.

Sarah: Awesome.

Linda Sue: And let's see, who else? Deborah Hopkinson is writing one of the wives, Jennifer Daley, Lisa Ann Sandell, Stephanie Perkins, I think that's all of them.

Sarah: Fantastic. That'll be really good. And when does that one come out, do you know?

Linda Sue: I'm not sure yet if there's a publication date. I think the original date they were trying for fall 2017 but I think that's not going to happen now, it's probably going to be spring 2018.

Sarah: OK, OK. Very good. This is so interesting.

Linda Sue: The working title for that is Fatal Throne.

Sarah: Fatal Throne. OK.

Linda Sue: Not a great thing to be a wife of Henry VIII.



Sarah: Oh, so good. Well, we'll make sure we link to your books page on your website so everybody can find all of your novels and your picture books, and we'll definitely be keeping an eye out for whatever you come out with next, because your work is changing readers, and they are changing the world, and that is such a beautiful thing to witness, so I appreciate you coming on the show to talk to me today. Thank you so much for joining me.

43:00 Let the Kids Speak

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.

Child1: [Mom: What's your name?] Isaac. [Mom: How old are you?] Three. [Mom: And what's your favorite book?] Ferdinand [Mom: And what's your favorite part?] When he sits on the bumble bee!

Child2: My name is Levi, five years old, . [Mom: What's your favorite part?] When they find out dogs trapped in the forest.

Child3: My name is Caleb, I'm nine years old and I live in Ontario, Canada. My favorite read aloud is Captain Nobody by Dean Pitchford. My favorite character is Cecil because he's always calling small things big emergencies.

Child4: My name is Violet, I'm seven years old. I live in Ontario, Canada. My favorite book is Little House in the Big Woods. My favorite part is when they're at the Christmas party when they get the snow on their plates and their Grandma pour hot maple syrup on top to make candy.

Child5: [Mom: What's your name?] Olivia Bach. [And, how old are you?] Four. [Mom: Where do you live?] Louisiana. [Mom: And what's your

favorite book?] Fancy Nancy. [Mom: Why do you like Fancy Nancy?] Because **[**inaudible**]** [Mom: Yes, she does, good job.]

Child6: My name is Penny and I live in California, and I am five years old, and my favorite book is The Princess and the Kiss because it's beautiful and I like princesses.

Child7: Hi, my name is Greg and I like the Garden in the City. I'm three years old and I live in North Virginia. The Garden in the City is about all of them moving to a new house in the middle of a city **[**inaudible**]**. [Mom: What do you like about the book? What are your favorite parts? Go ahead.] It's so funny. [Mom: I know it is fun, OK, what are your favorite parts?] The snail and the apple tree and the bow and arrows and they have a bonfire, goodbye.

Child8: I'm four years, my name is Aspen, and I live in Washington state, and my favorite book is Seven Silly Eaters and my favorite part is when they make a cake. [Mom: Why do you like that book?] Because it's funny.

Child9: My name is Emily. [Mom: How old are you?] Two and a half. [Mom: And where do you live?] In Washington. [Mom: And what's your favorite book?] Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever. [Mom: Why do you like it?] Because it's so great.

Child10: **[**inaudible**]** [Mom: What's your favorite book?] Cars and Trucks and Things That Go. I like what the pages say. My favorite part is inside the book.

Child11: My name is Scott and I'm 2 and a half [Mom: And what's your favorite book?] Caps for Sale. And what does he say? "Caps, caps for sale."



Kids, you are awesome. Thank you so much for those fantastic messages. That was spectacular. Hey, if your kids want to leave a message to be featured on the Read Aloud Revival, Let the Kids Speak portion, love it if they did that, go to ReadAloudRevival.com and scroll to the bottom of the page. It's really easy to leave a message. What happens is we send you an email about a month or so before your child's message airs so you know which podcast episode to expect to hear your child on, and we air every single message we receive in the order we received it, so you don't have to worry about your child leaving a message and being disappointed. They will be featured if they've left a message, there's no question about that. We love hearing their book choices, it's so much fun. And this set of messages had me giggling, totally a bright spot in my day. Don't forget to visit our brand new Read Aloud Revival shop and check out membership before doors close this month so that you don't miss out on that. We've got so much good stuff happening. Our next year's calendar is up and you can find out what we've got in the works at the Read Aloud Revival for a whole other year. Head to ReadAloudRevival.com, get on the email list so you don't miss out on all this good stuff, and so that we can keep in touch with you. We are so, so grateful to have you as part of our community. Until next time, go build your family culture around books.