

Lindsey Lane

Writer

In a way, it's an old story: A parent, deeply in love with their child and immersed in reading them every picture book in the library, writes a book, sends it to a publisher and suddenly becomes a picture book author.

Except that story is but one moment in the whole history of one writer's life. There have been many such significant moments in my life as a writer.

There was that rainy summer day at the beach. I was 12. I was in my bedroom. Rainy days at the beach in the summer can make anyone feel a little bit out of sorts, but I was feeling particularly odd because nothing felt right. Playing dolls was starting to feel too babyish. I'd redecorated the blanket fort in my room about fifteen times. I'd read every book and comic book in the house. When I went to see what my mom and dad and three older sisters were up to, they were doing adult stuff and I didn't fit in there. So I went back to my fort, found a blank piece of paper and started writing. The world was going to be re-explained by me so that people could see it from my perspective.

Or eight years later, enrolled at Hampshire College, I decided to take a playwriting class at Smith College from a professor named Len Berkman. Long grey hair, tied in a pony tail, sitting cross legged on the floor, he was the one that opened the door to the writer's tool shed. (I had thought it was a secret club that Norman Mailer asked you to join.) With Berkman, I learned about character motivation, conflict, building scenes and denouement. That was the moment I decided to graduate by writing in theatre arts. I assembled a committee of professors to guide me in my study of theatre and

theatrical writing. I read what seemed like every play ever written. I wrote scenes, one acts and eventually graduated with the production of a full-length play.

Fast forward five more years. I am living and working in Austin, Texas. The theatre scene was kind of skimpy and pretty conservative. I was doing public relations at one theatre. Then this extraordinary thing happened. In the space of about eight months, six theatrical venues closed. The board members of these theatres had been wheeling and dealing and flipping properties all over Central Texas and suddenly lost their shirts. The banks that had loaned them all their land flipping money were hanging out sheets with name changes. That was the moment that I decided to write and produce my own plays in alternative spaces. Out of that moment came my play, *The Miracle of Washing Dishes*, which ran for a year in Austin, won an award for Best Original script and went to a new play festival in New York.

From that moment came a succession of moments: Being asked to write a lesbian erotic movie, which led to writing a feature article for the Austin Chronicle about that experience, which led to a regular feature writing gig first at the Chronicle (a weekly) and then later at the Statesman (a daily). I didn't have any formal training in journalism but I learned fast and I was really good at interviewing a wide variety of people and telling their stories. Being a reporter led to a trip with a bunch of journalists to Cuba where I fell in love with a Cuban journalist and became a mom.

Suddenly interviewing hookers, cops, wayward millionaires and boxers held zero appeal. I was a single mother in love with her child. Her birth announcement read: "I had no idea this much love is possible." I didn't. I was the youngest of four kids. It was tough

for our mom to do the lovey-dovey snuggly stuff with laundry stacking up and groceries running out.

I fell in love. I fell in love with growing up all over again. This time more slowly and deliberately as her guide. Children's books were a significant part of our love affair. I read my daughter all the Caldecotts. After she went to bed, I read all the Newberys. Of course, as a writer, I tried my hand at a picture book (*Snuggle Mountain*) and, lo and behold, it was published (Clarion, 2003). It was luck. Yes, it was a good idea. Yes it had imagination and plot. But I didn't know beans about the craft of children's literature. And I sure didn't know much about the business. I'm okay with having a bit of luck help me into this world.

Now it's a matter of choice.

I've thought about applying to the MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults program for a while. I first heard of it when I was in a writing workshop with Kathi Appelt in the summer of 2004. I think she had just joined the Vermont College faculty. I thought, "Hmmm, maybe I should do that. Maybe that would help me be a better writer and get published."

Instead I went to more SCBWI conferences, joined a critique group and took classes with local authors as well as online classes with Anastasia Suen. Then fellow Austinite Cynthia Leitich Smith joined the Vermont College faculty and I thought, "Hmmm, Maybe I should apply. Maybe I would really grow as a writer and as a professional in this world of children's literature.

Instead I kept writing, went to conferences and workshops, sent out manuscripts and took my first online class with Uma Krishnaswami. Her class was the moment when I looked deeper, worked harder and crafted a lighter touch than I've ever thought possible as a writer. That was the moment when I said, "I am going to apply. I want to be amongst people whom I think of as my colleagues and learn from them. I want to be the best children's book author possible. I want to be a great writing teacher. I want to be a great writing, teaching, speaking children's book author for the rest of my life.

So yes, I think I am ready to join this program. I welcome direct criticism of my work in the spirit of making me a stronger writer. Other than the usual complexities of life (working single parent, elderly parents and needing to apply for scholarships, loans and financial aid), I do not foresee anything that might prevent me from devoting 25 hours a week to this course of study or corresponding with my advisors.

Yes. I am ready to claim this moment of being a graduate student in the MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults program and weave it into the growing tapestry that is my life as a writer.

Addendum:

I graduated from Vermont College of Fine Arts in July 2010. Without reserve, I can say that going there was one of the best decisions in my life as a writer. Did it lead to the subsequent professional achievements of securing an agent and getting a book contract? Yes and no. No, the folks at VCFA did not call up my agent and editor and recommend me as a hard working and worthy writer. Yes, they did provide me with a

network of colleagues and professional seminars so that I could make my own connections. Best of all, I wrote the first lines of EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN during my tenure there as an MFA student and when I graduated, I had enough tools in my toolbox to craft it into a novel that caught the eye of my wonderful agent who sold it to my editor who loves EVIDENCE as much as I do. Going to VCFA led to this very moment and all the moments yet to come.