

# **Evidence of Things Not Seen**

## **Q&A With Author Lindsey Lane**

**Q: Evidence Of Things Not Seen is an unusual title. How did you come up with it?**

**A:** The title comes from a quote in the bible: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) I have my editor Joy Peskin and associate publisher Angus Killick to thank for coming up with this perfect title which captures the notion that all of us, every day, must live with faith because we have no idea what might happen from one moment to the next. When Tommy goes missing, it tips the world of this town off balance so that everyone has to grapple with mystery and faith in their own lives.

**Q: What was the inspiration of this book?**

**A:** I woke up from a dream where I saw a child standing in the middle of a pull out. I got up and wrote a story, which later became the section Comic Book. I got fascinated by this pull out by the side of the road, how random that patch of dirt is and yet so many people know it by name, stop there, use it, etc. That’s when I started exploring the world of that pull out. Who came there? What were their stories? In an early version, I wrote a section about Tommy disappearing and realized it had a bit more heft to it. I revised the whole novel so that Tommy’s disappearance—he was last seen at the pullout—became a connector for all the threads. I have to say that Kathi Appelt’s *Kissing Tennessee*, Sandra Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*, Cynthia Rylant’s *The Van Gogh Café*, Janet S. Fox’s *Sirens* and Norma Fox Mazer’s *The Missing Girl* were also inspiration for me in terms of structure. Writers who step outside the traditional narrative structure allow us to pad along behind them.

**Q: Speaking of structure, you weave first person point of view with and third person. Why did you do that?**

**A:** I have to give you a long answer so bear with me. First, I have a theatre background. I graduated from Hampshire College with a BA in Theatre Arts. I wrote and produced several plays after I graduated. Dialogue is my first language so the first person voice of these kids talking to the sheriff about Tommy came very naturally. Also I wanted these sections to be more immediate and visceral. Second, I had an advisor at Vermont College of Fine Arts, Julie Larios, who suggested that the way I wrote was very reminiscent of Alexander Calder’s mobiles: light enough to catch air but well balanced, forming a whole structure. I love that Julie gave me permission to go with my natural inclination of writing sparsely. Probably each of the third person point of view sections could be novels but that wasn’t what I chose to do. I kept them lean and sharp. I leave a lot of white space so the reader brings her own emotion and connection. Last but not least, I’ve been

noticing how movies and television shows are weaving more and more and story lines into a main arc. I feel that readers are getting more sophisticated in terms of being able to hold lots of plotlines in their head, make connections and appreciate the weaving. I took a risk. I hope it works.

**Q: Do I need to understand physics to read this book?**

**A:** Omigosh, no. The way physics is talked about and interpreted in the novel is through Tommy's fascination with it. No science lessons. I think the ideas and theories in physics are a total mindblow for kids. For a bright kid like Tommy, physics sort of set his brain on fire.

**Q: Where is Tommy?**

**A:** Out there. Somewhere. I went to see the documentary Particle Fever recently. It's about the Large Hadron Collider and the discovery of the Higgs Boson Particle. Fabulous movie. I kept wanting to pause the movie so I could scan the crowds of scientists and see if Tommy was somewhere there.

**Q: What genre is Evidence of Things Not Seen?**

**A:** It is a young adult novel of contemporary realistic fiction.

**Q: Can you give a one-sentence description of the novel?**

**A:** Okay, I'm not very good with the elevator pitches but here goes:

Evidence of Things Not Seen is about the events that occur in a small Texas town during the year after a boy disappears; it explores themes of connection, loneliness and faith and asks readers to consider what role we play in creating our own realities and how we deal with this mystery called life. Oops, I had to use a semi colon.

**Q: How long did it take you write this novel?**

**A:** Well, that dream which resulted in the section called Comic Book happened in 2010. I began sending out the novel to agents in February 2012 but I pulled it back a few months later when I figured out the ending had a major flaw. After I fixed it, I signed with Erin Murphy in March 2013 and she sold it to Joy Peskin at Farrar Straus Giroux (BYR) two months later.

**Q: Did you have to revise it after it was sold?**

**A:** Yes and no. I didn't have to revise what I had written but I added 25,000 words. Gulp. The hazards of being a spare writer. Young adult novels really need to be about 60,000 words, otherwise they look a little slight on the shelf. I have to say it was fun to go back into the world and expand it.

## **Q&A With Editor Joy Peskin and Author Lindsey Lane**

**Joy Peskin, editor of EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN: How did this book start for you? What inspired you to write about Tommy’s disappearance?**

**Lindsey Lane, author of EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN:** The book started when I woke up from a dream. I saw a boy standing in the middle of this pull out by the side of the road. I remember waking up and thinking, “Who are you and what are you doing there?” The answer became the thread called Comic Book. While I was writing it, I started exploring this weird roadside dirt patch. Bit by bit, I came to know and understand the highway, the high school, the Whip In, the ranch right next to the pull out and that other characters stopped there, too: to kiss, to sleep, to sell watermelons. Everyone had a story. Eventually, I wrote a thread about a socially awkward genius boy named Tommy who went missing one day. When I got ahold of this thread, I knew it could weave through all the stories because, however loosely connected, an event like a missing boy and the speculation of what happened would pull the tapestry together.

**JP: You’re a playwright—did it ever occur to you to write this story as a play rather than a book?**

**LL:** No, I can’t say it did but I definitely heard the first person voices as monologues in my head. I could hear the different ways each of them talked. I could see the characters talking to the sheriff. I definitely think my background in theatre helped me make their voices distinct and their stories clear.

**JP: This is your debut young adult novel. What drew you to writing for young adults?**

**LL:** What I love about writing for young adults is everything is possible. The characters in young adult books are trying out their own cosmology. They’re self involved and idealistic and myopic and visionary all at the same time. They have the energy of their whole lives in front of them and very little context for failure so they try things. They roll the dice. They have high hopes and wild dreams. So does the young adult audience. Those characters are the audience.

**JP: Your ear for characters’ voices is incredible. How did you manage to write from so many different characters’ perspectives so convincingly? How did you keep each character’s voice distinct and unique?**

**LL:** I fell in love with every one of my characters. I longed for each of their longings. I felt their frustrations and disappointments. If I didn’t love them, I couldn’t portray their three dimensionality. I knew Alvin’s love and hatred of his father. I understood Leann’s inability to love someone because of the betrayals in her family. I resonated with Izzy’s

hare-brained idea. I ached for Mrs. Smythe. Yeah, I walked their paths. They're not me. But they are in me.

**JP: A major theme in this book is the existence of all possibilities. Do you believe, as Tommy does, that “All possibilities exist (p. 9)”?**

**LL:** I remember when I was a teenager. Everything was possible. Everything. It's tougher to stay awake and alive to every possibility as you get older but it's possible. Think about it. The sun rises. You have a day planned and a knock comes at your door. Whoosh, something unexpected. Are you going to let that possibility in? It exists. It just knocked on your door.

**JP: Karla's story is probably the most dramatic one in the book. Speaking of possibilities, did other possibilities exist for Karla? Do you think her life could have worked out differently if, as Kimmie Jo says on p. 8, “Like something might have changed if we'd done one thing different before.”**

**LL:** Omigosh, Karla Ray. This is a tragedy beyond measure. If her father hadn't left... If her mother had the skills to have a stable job... If Karla had been born into a family, which allowed her to be a kid... If she had met someone who loved her, who didn't lie to her, whom she could trust, oh my, her life could have turned out so differently. Yes, one little twist of fate can change so much.

**JP: This book is set in a border town in Texas, and you address issues relating to immigration. What made you want to include a character like Maricela, a teenage migrant worker, in this book?**

**LL:** I included Maricela's story because the migrant population in Texas is woven into the fabric of the workforce and “sown” into the landscape. They don't have easy lives but they work hard, trying to make a home. Sometimes after migrant workers start families here, the adults can get deported but their children are left with friends or relatives. It's a difficult and incomplete existence for those kids. People watch over them, sort of. They carry on with their parents' dream, sort of. Protecting Nino gives Maricela a kind of family she needs; it makes her feel stronger.

**JP: Something readers may take from this book is a greater appreciation of the ways in which we are all connected. What connects these specific characters, other than their relationships with Tommy and the things he left behind? I guess what I'm wondering is what drew you to their specific narratives. What unites them for you?**

**LL:** At first, it was the pull out—this roadside patch of dirt—that connected them. It's half way between two towns. People stop there all the time but it's a kind of no man's land. And yet very specific things happen there. Life changing events for some. Simple encounters for others. It is the epiphanies of these characters, which unite them.

**JP: On p. 218, Tommy writes, “some people have found that you can’t describe feelings because of what’s known as the specious present. As soon as you observe the exact moment you are in, it is gone.” Given that, how do you think Tommy would feel, or would have felt, to learn the extent to which so many cared about him, and were touched by his life and disappearance?**

**LL:** When I was ten years old, I was making a fort in a forest of pine trees near my house. While I was in there, it started snowing. A lot. Little did I know but my parents were freaking out. I finally heard everyone calling for me and wandered out of my pine fortress. I was really surprised and curious by their upset because I wasn’t lost. I knew right where I was and I wasn’t worried. In a way, Tommy would be surprised and curious as well. Like being found wouldn’t have this sense of relief for him because he knows where he is. As for learning how other people felt about his being missing, he would feel awkward. All the upset. All the emotions. It would be overwhelming for Tommy.

**JP: You chose not to give the reader any easy answers when it came to what happened to Tommy. Why? Do you know where he went?**

**LL:** I chose not to give an easy answer about what happened to Tommy because, really, I believe life is a mystery. Life doesn’t give us easy answers. It’s more important to look at the why of things. As for where Tommy went, some days I think Tommy is in Switzerland working on the Hadron Supercollider. Some days, he is badgering some guy at a bus station to give him a ticket back to Texas because he was kidnapped and dumped someplace in Chicago. Some days, I think he died of thirst looking up at the stars. Some days, I wonder if he ever existed. Perhaps he is a metaphor for that lost feeling we all have in our lives.