

*Rebecca Behrense*

215: Fact vs. Fiction in Historical Novels

Gabriela Pereira: Hello, and welcome, word nerds, to DIY MFA Radio, the show that will help you write more, write better, write smarter. I'm Gabriela Pereira, instigator of DIY MFA, and your host for this podcast. Now, let's talk writing. Hello. Hello, word nerds. Gabriela here, and welcome back to DIY MFA Radio. Our show notes today are over at diymfa.com/215 because it's Episode 215.

Now, today, I have the pleasure of interviewing someone who is both a fabulous middle grade author and a friend. Rebecca Behrens is the author of *When Audrey Met Alice*, *Summer of Lost and Found*, and most recently *The Last Grand Adventure*.

All of her books have garnered high praise from sources like Kirkus, BookPage, and School Library Journal. Rebecca lives and writes in New York City. In fact, we live directly across the street from each other; and we were both part of the same "Write Nite Ladies" kidlit writing group some years ago.

And basically, a whole bunch of us started having babies, and then the group disbanded. But for the longest time, we would get together at coffee shops and write; and it was awesome.

A former textbook editor, Rebecca continues working as a copy editor, in addition to authoring children's books. Some of her favorite things are: the beach, history, running, doughnuts, and laughing.

Welcome, Rebecca. It is so great to have you on the show.

Rebecca Behrens: Thanks, Gabriela. It's so great to be here.

GP: So, I always like to start by asking about the story behind the story; and having already been reading *The Last Grand Adventure* – I'm about halfway through the book right now – and it's got a pretty intriguing history behind the story.

So, I have a hunch that there's also going to be a behind-the-scene story around why you wrote this book. So, can you tell us, what inspired you to write this novel – and at this particular time in your career?

RB: So, I've always wanted to write about Amelia Earhart because I always tell people I go back to the things that really fascinated me when I was a middle grade reader myself. So, that would be Alice Roosevelt for my first book in *First Daughters* and *The Lost Colony of Roanoke* in my second book *Summer of Lost and Found*.

So, when I was, you know, kind of going through my big list of ideas for, what do I want to write next for my third book, I thought about Amelia Earhart. Her disappearance really fascinated me as a kid. I never stopped wondering about what happened to her. You know, over the years, every time there's some new piece of news about her disappearance, you know, I can't wait. And I hope that they'll find some clue that will let us know what really happened.



So, I kind of knew that I wanted to explore her disappearance in a book for middle grade readers. And it was actually when I started doing like my initial phase of research. And at that point, I thought I would write about Amelia as a character sort of like I had in *When Audrey Met Alice*. I was reading a biography of Amelia Earhart that was actually written by her younger sister, Muriel Earhart Morrissey.

And it was a really great book because Muriel was writing about her sister and giving a lot of facts and details, but a lot of color also about their childhood and their family and the places they lived and, you know, the emotions that they'd shared as kids.

And it really-- I connected to that a lot because I'm a younger sister myself, and I started thinking about, you know, what would've Muriel's life have been like, wondering all those years would have happened to her sister?

And that was really when I got the idea for this book, which would be about the sister of Amelia Earhart and her granddaughter going in search of her 30 years after she disappeared.

So, it was a totally different direction that I initially thought I was going to go in. And it was actually thanks to research in another book that, you know, I kind of had that spark and that connection; and then the story grew out of that.

GP: I love that; that's so fascinating too. And I think it gives the story like a really different perspective when we're seeing the character of Amelia Earhart through both her sister – like the grandmother's lens – and then also through the granddaughter's lens as well. I think it adds like a totally different perspective to the story.

RB: Yeah. I liked also the intergenerational aspect of it, and I think especially now when kids today who are learning about Amelia, you know, they obviously were not alive when she disappeared or even when the mystery in her story was fresher in people's minds. They're coming to it, you know, almost a hundred years after her disappearance now.

And so, I kind of liked that my main character, even though this is historical fiction set in 1967, like kids today, she's discovering Amelia Earhart's life and accomplishments and disappearance through the older generation, which is kind of how it goes for a lot of kids. So, it mirrors what is happening for contemporary readers, even though it's historical fiction.

GP: Absolutely. So, one of the things that was really on my mind as I've been reading your book is this idea of writing historical fiction – not just historical fiction, in general, but particularly, when you're weaving a famous historical figure into the story.

And so, I wanted to sort of break that down and talk about all the different aspects of weaving that character into the story. As you put this story together, what were some of the things you had to think about in order to write around the character of Amelia Earhart?

RB: That's a great question. It is really tricky. I think all three of my books have dealt in some way with real historical figures or events. I think I've learned lessons the hard way from the first two. So, it was a little bit smoother by the time I got to this story and writing about Earhart, in particular.

And I'd learned that I have to sort of draw clear boundaries for myself as the author about when I'm going to speak with a historical record, and the facts and details, and when it's going to veer into fiction.

I think my feeling is generally, you know, whenever possible, if you're writing about a real historical

figure, it's best to honor the actual historical record in their real life. Obviously, we don't have access, a lot of the times, to their emotional state, their feelings, you know, personal relationships if they hadn't written about them or something.

And that's where the fiction comes in; we have to do all of that shading, but to do it in a really informed way. And, you know, I had the great benefit of that – Amelia Earhart herself was a writer and an editor, so I could read her books and get a sense of her voice.

And reading her sister's biography of her was also a great resource because, you know, she did kind of get into a little bit of their personal relationship as sisters, but of course, there are places where in the book I had to just use my imagination.

Also, with the fact that Muriel Earhart Morrisey; I mean she lived a rich and full life herself – she had children and grandchildren. And really, the book from the point that Amelia and Muriel were teenagers or young adults, from then onward, other than Amelia's accomplishments, it really is fiction.

The character Pidge in the book-- I like to tell people that Muriel is real, but Pidge in this book is a fictional character, who's very closely based on Muriel Earhart Morrisey, but I'm not writing biography. All of the events that take place in the book in the summer of 1967 are made up.

And I mean, the character of Bea is made up. So, I do-- I did some little distinctions for myself, and that I don't think I ever mentioned in the book, Pidge's last name as an adult. And that was deliberate because I wanted to have sort of a distinction between her and Mrs. Morrisey.

I think also the details in the letters from Amelia that appear in the story, they're factually accurate. I had them fact-checked and did a lot of research to make sure that, you know, the things that were happening in dates and accomplishments and, you know, the length of time that she was in the air – on some of her flights – all of that is accurate.

But, you know, the emotional content, how she felt about them is just like an informed choice based on her own writing and interviews.

I think that when you're writing historical fiction, especially for young readers, and you are going to, at some point, definitely stray from the record, that's when the author's note becomes really important to let your reader know, kind of, like your philosophy that you used in writing the story, and to help them understand, you know, what is real in the book and where it is fiction.

You know, that's something-- I think it's a great tool. I love reading author's notes in every book that I read; I always look forward to them at the end in getting kind of like the behind-the-scenes. But I think especially when you're dealing with real history, it's an important part to have.

GP: I love that. That is such a great insight too, because I'll be honest, I'm usually the person who skips the author's notes, so maybe I won't be skipping them in the future. But you know, I love this idea of the distinction between the real-life figure of Muriel versus Pidge, the fictional character.

Can you talk a little bit more about how you chose to craft, because you know, the grandmother character, obviously, like Bea and the grandmother are sort of the two primary characters. So, this is a character who is very vibrant from the moment we see her, first time on the page.

So, how did you bring that character to life and like, what were some of the choices that you made in crafting this as a fictional character as opposed to biographical?



RB: So, a lot of the more eccentric qualities of Pidge are loosely based on my own grandmothers; I have a really close relationship with both of them. I'm fortunate enough that they're both still very sassy, nonagenarians, and I get to see them a good deal, and talk to them a lot on the phone.

So, I kind of borrowed from my relationship with them – my interactions, stories of them doing their shenanigans back in the day, like to create Pidge. So, in that sense, the character is, in terms of her personality and her manner of speaking, her characteristics, she's more inspired by my own grandmother's people from my life; she's fictional in that sense than the actual Muriel Earhart Morrisey.

I think I also, in my author's note, mentioned sort of that, you know, "This book is a blend of both, like being inspired by my grandmothers, the actual history, and then – just fiction." You know, a character that kind of came alive to me on the page.

You know, I started out in earlier drafts, I think she probably resembled my own grandmothers a little more; that was kind of like my starting point. And then, she really became this character. Obviously, Muriel Earhart Morrisey had lived a very different life than my own grandmothers.

So, I don't want to give anyone the illusion that it's pretty much how they are in real life. It's just, kind of, how you borrow from a lot of different places, including your own imagination when you're creating a character, which again, is really tricky with historical fiction because you are representing someone who really lived.

GP: Absolutely. So, the other issue that comes up – and this is something that, kind of a question that comes up again and again from DIY MFA, like students in our courses – is this issue of sort of the legalities of-- And obviously, I know you're not a lawyer, but like, were there some of those issues?

Like, what were the things that you were like, 'All right, this is where I need to ask a lawyer, or I need to ask the legal team at my publisher'? And, what were some of the resources you used in order to figure out like whether or not you were crossing any lines, in terms of sticking to the history? Basically, like, what were some red flags that writers should have on their radar so that when they're writing they know who to ask?

RB: That's a great question. Going to, you know, my team – my agent, my editor – I would always, you know, talk with them. But, are there-- Are there any, you know, legal issues that we should be thinking about in writing about real people?

You know, I think when it's someone who is as famous as Amelia Earhart, you know, she is a public figure in basically the public domain. And again, I'm not a lawyer, so when I'm speaking here, I'm speaking as a layperson.

But you know, it's generally okay to write about famous public figures. Issues of like slander, libel wouldn't come into play even if your portrayal was negative. Although I don't think any of the people that real figures that I've had in my books, the portrayal has been negative, in that sense.

You know, I would worry more about things along the lines of not giving credit to where you're getting information or words. Actually, you know, if you're including things that a real figure actually said, how do you communicate to a reader when you're making up their dialogue versus when you're putting in things they actually said?

In my first book When Audrey Met Alice, you know, in her diary entries, I worked in some actual Alice Roosevelt quotes; and there were a lot of details that came to me from about three different



biographies of her. And when you're writing for a middle grade reader and you're writing fiction, you really can't do footnotes and endnotes; that would just take them out of the story.

And so, I discussed with my editor and you know, both from legal reasons, do I need to be giving citations for this information that I'm putting in the diary? And we decided that, you know, it was not necessary; and it would be to the detriment of the reading experience. So, the solution that we came up with is I created sort of an annotated diary that is available; it's still available as a PDF on my website.

And in that annotated diary, I have given my citations and explained to the reader things where, this is real and this is imagined; in a way that I hope is also just interesting for someone who's looking at the process and see, which things were real and which are imagined in a work of historical fiction.

And there's a note in the back of the book that directs readers to that resource. Also, I think if you're writing historical fiction and you've relied closely on the work of other scholars, it's important to have a bibliography in your book and to tell people the works that you've cited to come up with your fiction.

So, I've always done that or put in your acknowledgements, if you don't want an actual bibliography; you can add acknowledgements to sources that you have used. In *The Last Grand Adventure*, there are some direct quotations from the Earhart family. And while I didn't note them where they appear on the page, in the author's note in the back matter, there is a listing of all of them, where I give context for them.

So, I hope with that readers will understand, you know, those lines in the book if they read them and were like, 'Oh, this is a really beautiful line,' that they know not to give credit to me, but to Amelia Earhart for saying that wonderful piece of wisdom.

GP: Got it. I think that's really useful also for people to know, because I think a lot of-- A lot of writers get bogged down on the logistical legal niceties; and I love that you broke it down in a way that like, it's really more about the reader's experience and kind of keeping the reader in the story as opposed to just kind of towing the line and navigating the logistics.

And so, that really resonates with me as someone who really wants the reader and the art to come through. One of the things that I also thought was really interesting in the story is the time period that we're in.

So, we're not like in the moment of Amelia Earhart's disappearance – were, as you mentioned – 30 years after; and it's a very significant time in our country's history. There's a lot happening in terms of the role of women in society, a lot of other stuff; there's a lot of unrest that's happening. Can you talk a little bit about choosing to set the story in this moment as opposed to any other place along the timeline prior to that?

RB: So, initially, you know, I chose that time just kind of trying to work out logically, how would it work, because I wanted Amelia's sister to be a grandmother. So, what would make sense for, you know, what time period it would take place?

And then, I knew it would be kind of like late 60s or early 70s. I've always had an interest in the history of the 60s. So obviously, you know, as a writer, knowing that you're going to spend a lot of time doing research to get the setting in the historical period right, that appealed to me to use 1967, in particular.

And, of course, also, there was the element of, you know, wanting it to be an anniversary of the disappearance, which was in 1937. So, you know, an argument could be made – there was a



lot of interesting stuff going on in 1968, why wouldn't I set it that year? Well, I wanted it to be 30 years after the disappearance.

I didn't realize when I started working on this book, I think I started the very beginning of my research and like drafting in the summer of 2014. I didn't anticipate that where we're at in terms of contemporary politics and news and what's going on in the world, would have so many parallels to that time.

That was interesting as I continued to work on the book, how, you know, some of the anxieties that my main character had in a time of change and unrest and conflict. You know, I think kids today are going to feel that too, and I myself feel that.

So, that was-- There was just kind of this interesting parallel that I hadn't anticipated, and that actually ended up making that time period almost a little more meaningful for me as I worked on the book.

GP: That's really interesting. I mean, what really struck me as well is kind of the way the role of women also, right? Like in 1967, it was, sort of, the women's movement beginning of that sort of liberation or whatever.

And we also have this very strong female character, kind of the quirky grandmother, who is from the get-go, exactly the opposite of everything that Bea assumes is the case about her grandmother – sort of, upending all of the stereotypes that we would've assigned to this grandmother character.

And yet, now, just in the sort of parallel, again, we're having this sort of upheaval in sort of women's, I guess, feminism, et cetera. So, it's sort of interesting too, seeing the parallel, particularly around these female characters.

RB: Yeah, I really loved how-- I mean, Amelia Earhart is a feminist icon for, you know, so many reasons.

GP: Absolutely.

RB: But I think because of the time period where she was alive and, you know, making new accomplishments, that wasn't really talked about – at least in-- You know, we didn't have a language in the 1920s and 1930s that we did even in the 60s.

So, I loved setting the book in the time where the women's movement was really taking off and all of these, sort of, roles for women were opening up, or women were having the opportunity to make more of a conscious choice about what they wanted to do and who they wanted to be in the world.

So, I kind of liked that Bea, on this trip, gets to see so many, sort of, women doing different things, making different choices with their lives – from her great-aunt who's been missing for 30 years to her grandmother, to her mother who's pursuing a career in journalism or her stepmother who enjoys being at home and taking care of her kids, which is--

I think it's a great way for Bea to, kind of, be exposed to that, and the reader then to see the different roles available for women.

GP: Absolutely. You know, it's interesting too, one of the things-- And I feel like Bea, at one point, even kind of thinks this, that her mom seems more Earhart than her dad; and yet, her dad is the one whose grandmother Muriel is, you know, I guess, his mom.

So, to me, I thought that was also really interesting that Bea, as a character, has these, sort of, iconoclastic women characters on both sides of her family. Yeah, I thought that was really interesting.



RB: You know, developing the character of her mother, sort of, evolved over the many drafts of the book. And it probably took me until, you know, draft-two or three when I realized, 'Well, there's really a parallel here between Amelia Earhart and what her mother is doing in the quote that Amelia always said to young women at Purdue University, where she taught was to "Dare to Live"; and that's really what Bea's mother has done.'

So, you know, I kind of liked that in a way like exploring Amelia's life and trying to find her is also helping be understand her relationship with her mother, and what her mom is doing now with her career.

GP: Yeah, because I think the reader could very easily feel – and I think Bea also feels this at the beginning – sort of, a sense of abandonment from the mother; the fact that her mother just, sort of, disappeared and went off after her career, and she doesn't quite know how to make sense of that, like why her mother would make that choice.

And so, I think it's interesting to then, sort of, almost flip it so that as she kind of understands Amelia Earhart and her family on the other side of the family, she can then grapple with these issues and start, like you said, have sort of a better understanding of her mother, through it all.

RB: Yeah, absolutely. I think that-- And I tried to, you know, touch on that a little bit in the letters from Amelia in the book to sort of give that perspective. And so, it's sort of like the first time that Bea has seen in kind of like a first-person point of view of making some of those choices. And I hope it, you know, kind of opened her eyes in the story, and readers will kind of, think about that too.

GP: Absolutely. So, as you were crafting these characters, Bea is obviously the central character to the story, and the grandmother is a, sort of, strong, I guess, supporting character. Who were some of the other characters that-- Like, how did the other characters build out around this, sort of, pair that set the core?

RB: So, it was kind of tricky when I was working on this book as I realized that I'd kind of set it up so it would be hard to develop other characters, the nature of it being a road trip story. You know, unless there's a lot of serendipity going on with running into people at different places, they're going to have limited interactions with other characters.

So, I really wanted to sort of, pick characters who would have a strong personality during their brief time in the book. Or at least, I would be able to do justice to the characterization and, you know, make them as well-defined as I could in a short amount of time. And I also thought it would be kind of interesting to sort of take some of the archetypes from the 1960s and play with that.

So, you know, at one point, they find kind of like a hippie artist in the desert – sort of to add a little bit of setting to the story in that way with the people who they're interacting with. And I think one of my favorite characters is actually the girl that Bea interacts with on the, train who kind of is a foil to her who's, you know, very confident and excited to be on a trip at that point when Bea is not.

And, you know, they kind of like share that experience; and that's one of the first times that I think that Bea starts to kind of open up the idea of traveling. So, you know, I was trying with the people that she interacted with, the other characters that I brought in, you know, that they would both be interesting and well-developed, but also, you know, would serve a purpose in the narrative arc and in Bea's arc.

GP: Yeah, I hadn't thought of that – actually, that like, the difficulty of crafting the supporting cast when you're writing a travel log, essentially, like a road trip story. And you know, what's



interesting, what also jumped into my mind right now is this idea also of like the places, right? Like obviously, they're covering a pretty large span of ground because they start in California and they end up in the Midwest, right? Is Missouri, where they end up?

RB: Close, it's Atchison, Kansas, which is right on the Missouri River. So, it's, you know, if you were to wade out into the river, off of the riverbank in Atchison, you would then be in Missouri.

GP: [laughs] Yeah. So, you know, like, how did the setting-- How did you use the setting to also sort of support the development of these central characters? Like, did you, sort of, have-- Did the setting play a role? I would imagine it would have to, when you have a road trip story; essentially, it's a physical and emotional journey. So, the two, I would imagine, are intertwined.

RB: So, it's partly, you know, places that I had an interest in writing about. I really like the desert. I'm originally from the Midwest, so I love writing about the Midwest.

I think it's, I don't want to say it's like under-sung in literature because I've read plenty of wonderful Midwest writers who describe it beautifully, but I don't think people always expect someone to write about a place like Kansas or The Plains and, you know, find it beautiful and interesting, which I do.

But I think, first and foremost, it was sort of, 'Well, I have to get these people from California back to Atchison, Kansas; and they're planning to take the train.' So, that kind of gave me my route – by looking at the old Santa Fe railroad train schedules and the stops on the railroad.

I really wanted them to go to Santa Fe, and I was surprised that there wasn't actually a train station or a stop on that route in Santa Fe. You had to get off in Lamy, and then take a bus or drive or walk the remaining – however many – miles between the two cities. So, that, you know--

It kind of actually drove some of the plot in terms of, you know, I want them to go to this place and the train is stopping here, and how am I going to get them there? That was part of how my plotting happened. It's also--

Going back to sort of writing historical fiction, you get, kind of, in the weeds with stuff like train schedules when you're writing about, especially mid-century where we still have access to a lot of these documents. It's not that hard to look up and online and find a, you know, July, 1967 train schedule for the Super Chief.

And so, you know, little things like in early drafts, I think I had them leaving LA on the train, you know, first thing in the morning and you know, then I looked it up and realized it left kind of early evening – so, I'd have to kind of shift everything, and realized, 'Well, this scene now is no longer going to happen at night. The scene has to happen in the morning. And, when are they actually going to have their dinner scene on the train?'

In early drafts, that have come much later because I thought they had left in the morning, that kind of stuff. So, you know, again, you can go a little crazy with historical fiction and in your plotting in terms of trying to make sure everything checks out.

Personally, I tend to draw the line at weather reports – unless I'm writing about something really specific like a historic storm or blizzard. Like I'm not going to go try and find in an Almanac whether it was sunny or cloudy that day. But like stuff like train schedules, I do try and make that determine, you know, correct in terms of my plot and setting.



GP: I love it. I could see myself falling down that rabbit hole, so far – that I would never write anything again. So, good thing I don't write historical fiction, huh? [laughs]

RB: Yeah, I think this is also-- I do work-- I freelance copy edit. I used to work in-house for some publishers, and I'm sure some of the authors whose novels I've worked on, you know, were kind of like shaking their fist to me like, 'Why? Why are you telling me this detail? It's fine. You don't have to fact-check that.' It's like, 'No, I do.'

GP: One of the things also I loved following your Instagram, over the last few weeks, because you just took a trip to Atchison.

RB: I did, yeah.

GP: So, can you talk a little bit about like being on the ground in the place where your characters are supposed to go? Like, what was that like? What was that experience?

RB: It was amazing. It was wonderful. This was the first project where I didn't get to go to my studying before the book was done and final. For my first two, I had a White House setting; and I went on a special tour of the White House while I was working on the book – I think it was during early editor revisions.

For *Summer of Lost and Found*, I took a trip and I did research on Roanoke Island in North Carolina. And that was, again, after I had like a few drafts in – but definitely, well before I went to copy of it.

And both experiences changed the story in that I saw things, that it was just different than what I had expected based on research of the place. You know, smells or certain types of plants that were growing along the highway in Roanoke that I decided I wanted to describe in the story.

So, I was nervous going to Kansas, Atchison, finally, because I hadn't had a chance to visit while I was working on the book. And I had relied on Google Earth on published books, the website for the Amelia Earhart Birthplace Museum, videos that I could find.

And also, my parents live in the Midwest. They had been on a road trip; and they had sort of visited Atchison for me, and taken video and pictures. I told them specific places I wanted them to look, and they went and got that stuff for me, and then sent it to me so I kind of could vicariously visit through them, but it's not the same as being there in-person.

So, I was nervous that it would look different than I had tried to capture on the page, and I was happy in that I felt when I got there like I recognized it. And the wonderful people of Atchison – who I talk to, who had read the book – felt very positively about how it was portrayed in the book; so, that was a relief.

It was really magical to get to be in that space, to be in the Birthplace Museum; and to go into the rooms that I had described and had my characters spend 300-some pages, you know, trying to get to and to finally be there.

And for a really great weekend, I went during the Amelia Earhart Festival. I did a presentation, and then I got to just enjoy the rest of the festival and events; and to be surrounded by other people who are really enthusiastic about Amelia Earhart and the history, it was just really neat.

GP: That's amazing. That's so awesome. And for our listeners, you definitely need to check it out because there are some awesome photos on Instagram. What's your Instagram handle again?



RB: @rebeccabehrensbooks.

GP: Oh yeah, go to @rebeccabehrensbooks, and we'll also link to it from our show notes. So yeah, you guys need to check it out because there's some great photos. I was like--

RB: Thank you.

GP: I felt like I was sort of seeing it vicariously through your Instagram, so it was awesome. It was so much fun. So, what's next for you? This book came out earlier this year, do you have other projects on the horizon? Anything you want to share with our listeners?

RB: Yeah, I do. This fall I'm going to be continuing to do school visits to talk about The Last Grand Adventure and my other books, and be at a few festivals in the Northeast. And really, then I'm going to be devoting myself to finishing revisions; and hopefully, getting to copy edit for my next book, which is called In Case of Emergency; it's another middle grade.

It will be out in, I believe, October, 2019. It's the first project that I've worked on that does not have a historical element; it is contemporary fiction, realistic. And it's set around a natural disaster – a major earthquake that would hit the Pacific Northwest in the effect it has. It was actually inspired by an article in The New Yorker that really terrified me.

GP: Was it the one that talked about how it could, like that whole fault line, like the entire Pacific Northwest was, fall into the ocean?

RB: Yes. So, that is actually sort of my origin story for that. That book is, I was at my day job, I think it was summer of 2015, when that story came out. I, you know, spent my lunch hour just glued to my computer screen, reading that piece in the New Yorker, increasingly terrified; and also awed, like, what a wonderful piece of narrative non-fiction that was.

And the whole time, I kept thinking about like, well, what would happen in an event like this if a girl was babysitting; and then her parents and her charge's parents couldn't come home for like a day or several days – and they were in this environment without the electrical grid, without water to drink.

Maybe there's damage to their home; and she has to take charge and figure out how to deal with this, and she doesn't even have Google to help her. What would she do? And, that's the story.

So, I went and actually wrote that manuscript; and now, it's going to be a book. And yeah, inspiration comes from – you don't expect it; it can come from just reading an article on your lunch hour. But I'm really excited about that story.

GP: I'm excited too; that's like slightly terrifying me also. I'm like, just like hearing you describe it and like, I'm already getting chills; and I'm like, 'I will never leave my children alone ever again.'

RB: This was the first book where I felt a little evil writing it.

[laughter]

RB: I would go back to my agent and be like, 'I don't know if I can do this.'

[laughter]

RB: I really haven't done anything this terrifying in my previous books, but, so it was a stretch for me. It's a creative stretch, but it was a really fun project; and you know, I'm excited about it.

GP: I'm excited as well. And for our listeners who can hear the siren in the background, that's like, we're literally across the street from each other. So, like if there's something that goes down our street, it's going to like come across on both sides of our microphones; it's kind of hilarious.

RB: Yeah.

GP: So, that sounds amazing. I can't wait for that to come out. So, I always like to end every interview with the same question, what is your number one tip for writers?

RB: Oh, I thought hard about this, and I think it's probably to cultivate patience. It's not something that I'm naturally very good at; and not just in terms of how publishing is so slow – and especially, like this time of year, you can refresh your email inbox, all day long, and not get any news for like weeks at a time.

But cultivating patience, also, in terms of like your process for writing a story, and someone who-- I don't like writing first drafts, they kind of stress me out; so, I'm always kind of racing to that finish line to have them done. And you know, I'm working on being a little more patient – in giving myself space to work on the story, to let it breathe, to let it grow.

You know, if that means sometimes that my word count is pretty low, that's okay to just kind of like trust that it will take the time it needs to take. And you know, even if it seems online like everyone else is getting a lot more done or faster, accomplishing more, to just kind of give yourself patience and the time that you need to be a storyteller.

GP: I love that. That is such great advice. And it made me wonder, have you noticed a shift in your process over the last, I guess, three or four books?

RB: Yeah, I think writing my fourth book, *In Case of Emergency*, was definitely the fastest of any of them, which surprised me. I think it's partly just, I'm better at having a routine now, and you know, sitting down and doing the work, but I'm working on something else that, you know, I'm not really ready to talk about what it's about yet.

But you know, that's a book that on-and-off, I've been working on for probably three or four years; and it's coming very, very slowly partly because it, kind of, I work on it in the gaps between other projects.

So, it's something that I have to remind myself on an almost daily basis is to just be patient, and to trust the process, and to not feel like I'm in a race because I'm not. It's just, I'm exploring; and it's going to take me the time it takes to get there.

GP: It can feel like that too sometimes. I mean, it really resonated with me when you said, you know, sort of, "Even when it looks like everyone else is going full-speed ahead," because I mean, I was even thinking like, you know, so our "Write Nite Ladies" group, like so many of the ladies in that group are like just totally kicking butt and doing amazing stuff.

And so, like it's really attempting to be like, 'Oh man, I've only written one book,' and to kind of like beat ourselves up. It's really hard sometimes to kind of keep our eyes on our own paper.



RB: Yeah. I have written, next to my desk is just, “Run your own race.” And that’s, you know-- Especially with social media, I think you have to remind yourself of that on a daily basis. I try, I have to, at least.

[laughter]

GP: Yeah, I need to do the exact same-- I’m right there with you. And it’s comforting to hear someone else also say like, ‘Yeah, I have a hard time keeping my eyes on my own paper too,’ because you know, sometimes we feel like we’re the only ones being like, ‘Am I the only slacker, who’s only done X, Y, and Z, and not a million other things?’

RB: Yeah.

GP: So, it’s nice I think to hear other writers also-- And this is one of the reasons I appreciate you sharing that with our listeners, so that our listeners can also – if they’re feeling like that, they can realize they’re not alone.

Rebecca Behrens: Yeah. And if I can say one more thing, I realized for me too, like it’s seasonal; that there’s certain times of the year that I’m just a lot more productive, and it’s easier for me to give myself over to a project and, you know, work on it really intensely.

And then there are times of the year – like, when it’s really hot and humid in the summer – and there’s all this stuff going on in the city that you want to go and experience before it starts snowing again. And you know, maybe then, I’m not going to accomplish that much; and that’s okay because we all need those periods that are sort of generative, just a rest and refill the well.

GP: I totally agree. I think my rhythm is the opposite. Like for me, as long as they’re-- Like, the longer the days are, the more productive I am; I’m really not productive when it’s dark out all the time. So, winter is just really a huge problem for me. So anyway, that’s just amazing. Great advice, great advice. Thank you so much for sharing that. And thank you so much for being on the show.

RB: Thank you so much for having me. This was a really wonderful conversation.

GP: All right, word nerds. Thanks so much for listening. Keep writing and keep being awesome.

