Cabin Tales Episode 6.5: Author Interviews about Beginnings - Transcript

[crickets; music]

[0:00] Intro

Welcome to Cabin Tales: Spooky Stories for Young Writers. This is Episode 6.5: "Author Interviews about Beginnings." Today's episode is a "talking tales" format, which mean it's all interviews, extending last week's episode, "Begin in the Darkness." Today you'll hear from five more great Canadian authors about their favourite first lines and how they tend to open their stories, their advice to young writers on how to begin, and a little bit about their own beginnings as writers. I'm Catherine Austen. And my guests today are Frieda Wishinsky; Sarah Raughley; Don Cummer; David McArthur; and Wendy McLeod MacKnight. They've published dozens of picture books, novels, and non-fiction books for young readers, and for every one of those books, they made the difficult choice of how to begin. And some of their best advice is coming up right now on Cabin Tales. So listen in.

[crickets]

[1:15] Commentary on Finding the Beginning

The beginning of your story is always a made-up moment. All stories are continuous, going back forever and continuing on forever. If you're telling a story about a haunted house, do you begin when the house was built? or with the death that launched the haunting? or when the new unsuspecting residents move in? or at the first sighting of the ghost? or when the walls are dripping blood and the family is fleeing for their lives? (Surveys say "when the new unsuspecting

residents move in" is the tried-and-true formula. Don't drench us in blood until we know whose story we're reading. Unless you really want to, then go ahead.)

If you were to tell the story of your life, you could tell just the past day, and flash back to significant memories. Or you could begin with your birth, like David Copperfield, and proceed chronologically year by year. You could start with your earliest memory, or with a traumatic moment that changed you utterly. Really, how your parents were raised had a huge effect on how they raised you, so you could begin your story with their births. And then, the natural history of your country and the economic history of your town have affected your life in myriad subtle and obvious ways, so perhaps you should begin your story with one of those, the founding of your town, the end of the ice age? (Surveys say no, please stick to one story, and keep it brief. We have a thousand other books to read.)

There is really no end to how far back you might start your story – until you consider what a reader might need to know in order to feel the impact you want your story to have on them. We choose the beginning and ending of our stories based on what the story means to us. Beginnings are important. They're like a first impression: the opening of your story will colour the reader's experience of everything that comes after.

That sounds like a lot of pressure. Particularly because you might not know what your story is about, let alone what it means to you, when you begin writing it. You might not know which moment would be best to begin at. But there really is no pressure. You can always just make up a first line for now, like a placeholder, and change it later. But do, at some point, think about: is this really where my story starts? Is this the most effective beginning?

[music]

[3:45] Interviews

Last week, you heard from authors Karen Bass, Kate Inglis, and Chris Jones about fictional beginnings that they admire, and how they try to open their own tales. This week, you'll hear from five more great Canadian authors about their favourite beginnings.

First up is Frieda Wishinsky, author of picture books, novels, and nonfiction. Her latest title, *How to become an Accidental Activist,* co-authored by Elizabeth MacLeod, will be out in Spring 2021. I met Frieda years ago, when we shared a ride to the Hackmatack Award ceremony in Halifax. And it was such a pleasure to meet her again virtually for this interview. Frieda has begun – and ended, and published -- over 70 books for young readers, and she has great advice to share. [music]

[4:30] Frieda Wishinsky on letting the reader know what they're getting into

FW: The beginning, I think of any kind of book, should tell you (a) what the book is about a little bit, or who the main character is a little bit; and engage you. And so many people--I do, I'll read the first page and if it's like boring, I might not read too much further. So you better get the attention of the person you're trying to engage right away. For instance, The Boy who Loved Math Love, which is "the improbable life of Paul Erdos," who was a mathematician I've never heard of. It's one of my favourite picture-book biographies. It starts very simply with: *There once was a boy who loved math.* Okay, we know what this is about. To me, beginnings matters so much. I don't think people realize how important it is. I mean, it's very hard to capture too much in one sentence, or two or three or four, but my very first book *Oonga Boonga* is: *Nobody could ever make baby Louise stop crying.* And you know what that story is about. So, I think even in nonfiction, longer, in chapter books, I really think the idea is to let your reader get a little bit of your voice, as much as you can put in there, and let them know where they're going on that journey. You know, I've always said my strength is titles, concepts, and first sentences. But I've got two or three new ideas and I haven't come up with a good first line. And to me, that's when you know you're really on your way is when you have a good first line. Sometimes it happens very magically when you stop thinking about it.

CA: And when you're starting a fiction, do you tend to set your scene or do you start in the middle of action or have you ever started with dialogue?
FW: I don't know if it matters, as long as you somehow engage your reader and let them know what you're talking about, like who this book is about, what's going to happen. [music]

[6:40] Sarah Raughley on opening at the right time

Next you're going to hear from Sarah Raughley, author of teen fantasy novels including The Effigies Series, which she calls "Sailor Moon meets Pacific Rim." You met Sarah on Episode 5, talking about tension. And here she is talking about beginnings, and how she learned to find the right moment to open her story. [music]

CA: Do you tend to keep the beginnings you draft or do you change them after you've finished a draft?
SR: Thus far I think I've kept all of them. Thus far. I don't know, I guess I have strong beginnings. Aside from tightening things and the usual editing stuff. I do have a favourite first line from a book that's about to go on sub. It's a middle grade novel. It's about this thief. I can't remember exactly what the line was, but it was about the main character being a scammer and a thief and a cheat. And I just really, I liked that, because I felt like it really gave you an immediate sense of who this character is. But then, you know, in the process of writing, I was like, "Well, this line I could put somewhere else." Because I liked the paragraph after it more. I ended up switching the order a little bit. But I don't think I've had the experience where I've had to completely change the entire starting point. And I think maybe some of that just comes from watching a lot of TV. You get a sense of what the good place to start your story. You don't want to start it too early before the action. And you don't want to start in media res -- like in the middle -- to the point where the readers are confused as to what's going on. There's a delicate balance. So I just think that years of TV watching has helped give me sort of a rhythm as to when to start, where to start the story. [music]

[8:35] Don Cummer on revising an opening

Our next guest is Don Cummer. He's the author of the Jake and Eli series published by Scholastic, historical novels set during the war of 1812, including most recently, *Blood Oath*. You heard Don speak about tension on Episode 5. And

here are his thoughts about beginnings and how some outside advice helped him find the right place to start his first YA novel.

[music]

DC: My advice would be never get too attached to your beginnings. I love beginnings. They're there so full of hope and promise. It's like, you know, a paleontologist, a guy who studies dinosaurs. You give him one bone of a dinosaur; he'll be able to construct the whole thing. And sometimes you can see that in beginnings as well. Here's the beginning. Now this is the way it can develop. Well, sometimes you don't want it to develop that way, so you have to give up your beginning. I thought that I was close to having a completed – not first draft – it was about a fifth draft of a novel and I thought it was basically ready. And I workshopped it. One of your authors who was workshopping it for me just took me aside and said, "Don, you know, this is not working." And I had to start from scratch. He made me really think it through. I was starting the story too far into this story. I wanted to get right into the action right away. But he said, "I've got to know what is it that binds these two that they're so loyal to each other, so show us how they met." It was a brilliant idea. But all that great beginning that I thought was finished, it had to be scrapped. It was like dynamiting a whole building and watching the building come down. And the lesson for me was never never get so attached to something that you can't destroy it and start again and do it better. What is a way to get into the action and show their character? Move that very quickly from scene to scene and you keep increasing the jeopardy so that on page 1, kids are having a snowball fight; by page 15, somebody'a being rescued from a frozen river. You can start with action but it doesn't have to be the climax or the big turning point.

[music]

[10:45] David McArthur on setting the scene

My next guest is David McArthur, who joins us from British Columbia. He's the author of the "What Does" picture book series, including the latest title, *What Does a Caterpillar Do?* illustrated by Lucy Rogers, for which all proceeds are being donated to the Victoria Child Abuse Prevention and Counselling Centre. You met David on Episode 5.5, talking about tension. And here he is talking about beginnings and how he likes to set a scene.

[music]

DM: What I try and do is when I'm writing a story, especially what I think people would class as an epic story, where it's multiple stories tied together and it's happening across the planet and

that sort of thing, is I try and stage the opening chapter or opening paragraph in a way that you're giving a hint to a character's personality. So, for example, I once wrote a story about a young Viking boy who ended up being frozen in time and coming into this day and age. But the way I opened the story wasn't with dialogue or a description of who he was. It was all to do with weather and the situation that he was sitting in. So he was sitting gazing out at the ocean and there was this huge windstorm just blowing around him and blowing leaves everywhere, and it was really meant to symbolize both the wildness of him but also give the sense that he's got this far off disconnect from his family. So it's not really a first line but it is very much a first image that you could, you might get as you're reading the story. So I tend to open stories as I said with more of a description of the environment or the town or building or even an object.
CA: Do you tend to begin, when you draft a project, at the beginning and then continue chronologically through the story, however it's told, to the end? Or do you sometimes work on a scene that's from a different moment in the telling?
DM: I do tend to jump around quite a bit. I always start a story at the beginning and then I will try and focus on the ending because I think it's important from the narrative and how the flow of the middle is going to work. So I like having that in my head, so almost plotting that piece out. But then everything in the middle I sort of just jump around as I have ideas and then I sort of try and weave more together to form a cohesive narrative. [music]

[13:20] Wendy McLeod MacKnight's favourite first line

My final guest author today is Wendy McLeod MacKnight, author of middle-grade fantasy novels including her most recent title, *The Copycat*. Wendy joins us from New Brunswick. You met her on Episode 3.5, talking about getting ideas, and on Episode 4, talking about plotting those ideas into stories. And here she is talking about beginning her latest story.

[music]

WMM: My favorite first line ever is from *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier: "Last night I dreamed of Manderley again." I remember the first time I read that, I think it was probably, oh my gosh, when I was in high school. And I was like, "Wow, that's a good line." Where, what's Manderley? Why's she dreaming about it? And oh, she's dreamt about it before. Like it just sort of lays everything out and tells you nothing all at the same time. Stephen King has a really great quote that is escaping me right now about that, but the first line is that moment of enticing the reader to come on the journey. And my gosh, a really great line is a thing of beauty as far as I'm concerned.
CA: Say in the historical book that you've just written, have you tried different ways of opening the story?

WMM: I have often started with action. And this one, the first chapter ends with a significant action, but in this particular one I wanted to have the relationship between the brother and the sister. It's set in 1802 and my main character is a girl. It's the Age of Reason but there's no public education. She's poor. They don't have money to send the boy to school. They're homeschooled by their parents, who are Quakers. And she's gotten a 2-year-old periodical written by Volta, all about electricity. And so I have the beginning of that book is her brother basically saying, "I have no idea what you're talking about." Which is really important to the whole plot of the book, right. Nobody really knows what she's talking about except for a few people because nobody is educated and she's a brilliant girl. [music]

[15:20] Commentary: Beginnings are more than first lines

You'll often hear the advice to start your story at the moment of change, or just before everything changes.

Lines like these are pregnant with impending change:

- *Jason Murphy had never loved anyone before.* Or
- *No one heard the key turn in the lock.* Or
- *Celine was in the market buying peaches when she heard the voice that always made her weak-kneed.*

Those are all first lines that plant questions. But beginnings are about more than that. They're about how you unfold the events of your story.

I like a story that has a bit of an intro before the plot thickens. But you can start a story in the middle of the plot. Say it's a love story. You can open on the first date or during the first breakup before they get back together. Or you can start at the beginning of this particular love story – when person meets person. Or you can start at the end of their love story, on their 50th anniversary, or at the deathbed of one partner, while visitors reminisce about scenes from their past. What you might not want to do is to start "in the egg." That's what the Roman poet Horace called the opposite of *in media res*, in the middle of things. I think he

was talking about *The Iliad*, which opens years into the Trojan War and not at the birth of Helen. Horace, and many people since, recommend that kind of opening. If you're writing a war story, open in the battlefield. If you're writing a love story, open when they're in love, or somewhere close to it. (I would prefer the love story when they just meet.)

You could open your love story in the egg, when each of the two future lovers is first born, maybe on opposite sides of the planet, or maybe on different planets. But no one is going to begin reading that story and think, "Oh yay, a love story!" It would be something else, it would mean something else. It's okay to open that way if you intend it to mean something else. Maybe your story is comprised of snapshot moments in these two lives showing random influences that brought them together, at which point they speak about how they're soulmates who were destined for each other. And so your story is about the narrative fallacy, and you want readers not just to think about the events of this love story but about how and why humans make up love stories or any stories at all. And that is totally cool. But if I'm in the mood for a fun fast love story that I can escape into for a while, then I am going to be sorely disappointed with how you opened your deadly dull love story in the egg.

One thing most people agree on: a reader should have some sense of what type of book they're in for from the opening. We should be able to tell if this book is going to crack us up or break our hearts. We should have a sense from the beginning if this is the type of book we're going to want to read, and that we're in good hands on whatever journey we're about to take with it. Michael Ondaatje said, "The first sentence of every novel should be, "Trust me, this will take time but there is order here…"

[music]

[18:35] Guest author recommendations to young writers

In the last episode of Cabin Tales, you heard advice on how to begin a story, in both senses: how to open a tale and how to get started. I asked today's guest authors that same question. What advice do they have for young writers? [music]

[18:55] Sarah Raughley knows how hard it is to begin

Here's Sarah Raughley, who suggests a little self-compassion when doing hard things like beginning a book.

SR: It's hard. Honestly, I still have this problem every single time I have a project, whether it's starting to write fresh or whether it's diving into edits. It's hard to start. But what I can promise is that once you start, once you get that ball rolling, it just rolls and rolls and rolls. And you just have to get over that hump. That's what I sort of realized about myself, that I'll put something off for days, for weeks, or more, because the idea of starting in on this project—whether it's writing a fresh manuscript or editing a manuscript you've already written—it's not easy. And people need to sort of give themselves a break if they're having a tough time starting. Because it's a giant undertaking to write a book. It's a lot harder than people realize. To edit a book. It's a lot harder than people realize. So forgive yourself for not being able to jump in right away. But don't worry about it. It will come. If you need to go and do something else, go and do something else. It will come when it's ready. Even if you just write one word. Or give yourself a goal: Okay, this week I'm going to write one sentence, just one sentence this week. Once you start, it gets so much easier from there. [music]

[20:30] David McArthur knows that beginnings can change

And here's David McArthur reminding you not to cling too tightly to your draft beginnings.

DM: It's quite a personal thing. I mean, there's all sorts of mechanics that you can use, lots of techniques that you can use as well. For me, I find the easiest thing is a bit of paper and a pencil and just start writing. I don't think you can be precious about anything that you write. You know, when you've started a story, especially if you're writing without a real plotline in place, you need to be non-precious to anything that you've written. So, you know, as new ideas come into it, as characters develop, there may be a trait that you introduce at a later point in which,

well, that's kind of an important trait; I need to have that at the beginning. So you need to rework that into the story. So I think it's got to be flexible in order for you to create a coherent story at the end of the day.
CA: What would you say is the hardest thing about writing a good story?
DM: Keeping with it and staying true to your idea. It's so easy to become excited with (1) the idea that you're writing. So you end up coming up with a whole lot of ideas, you try and cram it all in at once. And then you find that you have another idea for a book. And then you forget the one that you've just written. And you could get distracted with that one. So actually being strict and sticking with that first idea – that's going to be the hardest piece. [music]

[22:00] Frieda Wishinsky likes to stick to the point

And here's Frieda Wishinsky, who advises you not to meander at the beginning of your story (or in the middle).

CA: And do you have any advice to young writers on how to begin a story?
FW: You know what? To be honest, I think it's the same thing you tell adults. I think the problem I've seen over the years working with kids — and I think adults do the same thing — is they meander. I remember my son, who's a very bright kid, wrote a story in maybe grade 6. It started off not too badly. It was about a murderer, and somebody chasing this murderer. And then he got really off. Uh, they took Highway 6 and then they took Highway 32 and then… And I remember saying, "David, nobody cares."[laughter] Kids should remember, and adults, what their core story is. Because I think what happens is, you know, "My grandmother is a great cook." (I don't know; I'm just making this up.) And then they veer off into how they played baseball, and they forget what they're telling the story about. So to me, it's figure out what is the story you want to tell and don't go off into another tangent. Keep remembering, "I'm still telling the story of Grandma's cooking" or whatever. [music]

[23:20] Wendy McLeod MacKnight wants to be hooked

And here's Wendy McLeod MacKnight, who wants you to get your story going quickly.

I always recommend to them: put us in a situation right away that we're interested in. Your first two or three lines, you've got to hook me. I've started books where you're right into the action, which is also a really fun thing to do. And there was one kid that I was working with, and he had this really great premise, but he had like 3 pages of description before we got there. And I said, "No, start where he's just being chased. And then we can go back and learn. But get us hooked right from the beginning." I always say, try to think of how you would want somebody to tell

you a story. When I tell my husband stories, many stories that I tell him he says, "Get to the point. What are you trying to tell me?" And I'm giving him all of this, you know, superfluous ridiculous extras. Sort of like you're setting the table. You can do a little table setting, but if you are still setting the table after a couple of pages, then you have set too much of the table. And I always say, all of the books that you love, go and read the first page. Like, it's a great method to figure out what really sucks you in, what touches you, and what were the things about that that made you want to keep reading. [music]

[24:45] Don Cummer suggests you just dig in

And here's Don Cummer advising a little fearlessness and reminding us that different readers like different kinds of openings, but all good openings intrigue the reader.

DC: I'd say just, first of all, don't be afraid to begin anywhere. Don't be afraid to begin, to start. Don't think you're going to be tied down to that beginning. You might change your mind. The important thing is to get something down on the paper or on the screen. And you can worry about it later. I tend to like openings that sort of build the world and give you a sense of the world that you're living in. With historical fiction one of the big problems is exposition. You have to create a world. And the temptation is to try to say too much too quickly. And I think, you know, science fiction I'm sure has the same, fantasy has the same. You just yet don't need to create a world in your opening. You just need to make us curious about that, so you'll keep turning the page. And the important thing about the opening is to just give a sense of trust so that the reader trusts the storyteller. Okay, I will follow this storyteller. I will trust that I may not understand what's going on now, but the storyteller is going to tell me. My favourite expression is: let the storyteller tell the story. All the best fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, science fiction, romance, everything begins with that sense of just opening and giving us enough to intrigue us and say Okay, I want to find out more about this world. You don't have to reveal it all at once. Be patient. Tease the reader. But get everything right so that the reader says, Yeah, I don't know where this writer is taking me, but I trust where this writer is taking me; I'm curious about where this writer is taking me. [music]

[26:30] Commentary on motivation

Every writer knows that the topic of how to begin a piece of writing has two meanings. There's the technical sense of where and how to open your story. But there's also the motivational sense: how to bring yourself to the page, how to

make yourself write when you're not necessarily sure what your story is. As my guests have said, writing is hard work. It's no easy thing to begin. For that, you need one of several things. Maybe a little bit of bravery – you have something to say that needs saying and yes, you're scared, but you're going to try your best. Or perhaps you need a smidge of confidence in your ability – you're actually quite good at putting words together and making up plots, so you're just going to go for it. Or maybe it's generosity that will motivate you – there are people out there who want to read your story, people you could entertain or inspire, people who will understand you and who will feel understood when they read your work. Or maybe all you need is curiosity – you don't care who reads your story or if it's any good; you just want to play with words and ideas, you want to create something that wasn't there before, you want to know what happens when you write down your thoughts and shift words around. You need at least a little bit of one of those things to begin — bravery, confidence, generosity, curiosity – something like that to motivate you. And you have that, young writer. You know you do. And that's all you need to begin. And as for the technical side of the question, you have every book you ever loved to teach you a little of that.

[music]

[28:05] Guest Authors' beginnings as writers

I asked today's guests how they began as writers, and once again I'm inspired by how many paths there are to becoming an author.

[28:15] Wendy McLeod MacKnight was a Deputy Minister

Wendy McLeod MacKnight only recently left a respectable career that she loved in order to return to her first love of literature.

[music]

I started off as a writer. I didn't work as a writer for most of my life. And it was an itch that I absolutely had to scratch. And I got up one morning and quit my job and decided to do this for a living, which I'm not sure if I recommend but I also recommend. You know, if you've got that passion you've got to do it. I always dreamed about doing this and then I got sidetracked, you know, working for the provincial government here in New Brunswick for years. And when I went back to it, because I had been writing when I was younger, I was like, you finish the first draft and you think, *This is really good book*. And then you realize, *No, this is a horrible book*. And that's when you know you're getting to be a better writer, when you have to make it the best that you can you can make it. And every time I go to write a book, it's like I have to teach myself how to write a book all over again. And that's the persnickety thing about it, right? They don't just line up like little soldiers, you know. And then there's like these moments of magic. I mean, I had a really good job in the provincial government, like I was the Deputy Minister of Education, but my worst day of writing is better than my best day as a civil servant. [music]

[29:40] Don Cummer was a speechwriter

Don Cummer studied English in university and, like many of us, he kept a day job writing something other than fiction.

DC: My mentor and professor when I was an undergraduate was W.O. Mitchell at the University of Alberta, and he got us into writing journals. That was all he required us to do for his class. So he was encouraging us to write about our childhood and just get into the smells and touches and find the exact word that would evoke something in our childhood. Now, that's a great thing to do. You know, wonderful training. It probably taught me to write, you know, with an ear of a poet. But what it doesn't do is teach you about plotting and narrative, jeopardy and conflict. You know, writing journals is fine for certain things, but make sure that you also take time to plot. You know, I'm a professional writer. But the writing that I write to, you know, pay my groceries and buy my house, is speechwriting for politicians. Some people may say, you know, that spooky writing in its own right. Well yeah, you know, you're a fiction writer. So I know that at a certain point you in the day, I've got to get down to my paying gig. When I was working flat out on the Jake and Eli stuff, I would get up at 5:00 o'clock in the morning and put in a couple of hours before, you know, I started turning to the newspaper and the draft of the speech I was writing. In order to do that, I had to make time. And in order to make that time, I had to give up something. So I think that's always a good exercise for writers, to think, Okay, what can I afford

to give away? So you know I love reading newspapers. And in order to write the Jake and Eli stories, what I decided I had to give up was reading newspapers. They just took way too much of my time. [music]

[31:30] David McArthur read and wrote through dyslexia

David McArthur's writing career began with telling stories to his family. He had dyslexia as a child and he has great advice to young writers who might have nontraditional learning styles.

DM: I've been writing stories for really as long as I can remember. My dad used to have this really old laptop I used to type out stories on and my mom would review it and say, You really need to slow down and actually think about what you're writing rather than just writing whatever it is. So yeah, I've loved stories. I love telling stories to my kids and my wife and it's been a big part of my life. My mom collected a lot of children's picture books. She's a graphic designer and as such, she has a real love for illustration. So that has rubbed off for me. We used to have a lot of story time. Not so much just someone making up a story on their own. That's something that I do for my kids, but it wasn't really anything that ever happened for me. My wife has always loved it when I tell her stories because it reminds her of when she was a kid. I had really bad dyslexia growing up, so as soon as I could read I just read everything I could find.
CA: Is there anything that you want to say to young people out there who think maybe they don't have it in them to be writers, either because of some learning style or maybe they think they don't have any good ideas or they just can't write?
DM: I think what you just said there is a thought that I've had for a really long time about all learning difficulties -- and I'm doing, you can't see it but I'm doing air quotes with the learning difficulties, because I feel that society — and I'm going to get political here – society in general determines anyone who doesn't learn in the standard normal way as having some sort of disability. And I find that puts a lot of kids at a disadvantage. They think, Well there must be something wrong with me. When in actual fact, not only were some of the brightest minds in history suffered from learning difficulties – again in quotes. They just have different way of thinking. Leonardo da Vinci, for example, had dyslexia. And I think because of this label that it's a difficulty, a lot of kids do tend to struggle to identify with themselves and it almost gives them a reason to not try. And actually that shouldn't be the case. It's just a different way of thinking, it's a different way of seeing things. And if you embrace that, if you embrace the way that you think, which is different -- dyslexics tend to think very visually. So I think the advice I would give is: don't let it limit you. Don't listen to people who tell you that it's a disability or a learning difficulty or anything like that. It really is just a different way of thinking. And embrace that and use it to your advantage and turn it into a strength.

[music]

[34:25] Frieda Wishinsky loves being part of the human story

Frieda Wishinsky has always loved reading and writing and here she is talking about how we all need stories.

FW: It's very funny because I was on the debating team in high school, and elementary school, too. Not in college. But I realize I always liked speaking. And storytelling. Speaking *is* storytelling. Yeah. I write kids' books, and I write them because I love stories. And I really feel that what keeps us going is our stories and other people's stories. When we're sad, it's good to know that other people have felt sad or scared or happy. How they got through things. I think I read because I think, "Wow, that person got through that. Maybe I can get through my stuff." So to me, writing, reading, stories are life affirming. And when we get together with a friend, we're constantly telling each other stories. I always tell kids when I'm at schools, you know, it's like 9:00 o'clock now, a whole bunch of stuff has already happened, and you've probably told 5 stories from the time you woke up till the time you got to school. So we're constantly living our own story. And really, stories are what makes the world go round. And the good thing about being a writer is if someone bullies you — I had a bully in grade 3, and it was pretty unpleasant dealing with her, but now she is material. And I've used her in so many stories. And I'm in charge of what happens. I'm in control. And in a story, you can make things happen. You can change them. And I think that's very powerful. So, writing is a powerful thing to do. [music]

[36:15] Sarah Raughley learned to believe in herself

And finally, here's Sarah Raughley, who has always loved to create stories and who urges you, young writer, to believe in yourself and your ability to tell your own tale.

SR: If you've never written anything before and you're wondering, you know, if you can write or not, I remember when I was a kid I loved writing. I would write smaller stories like short stories and things like that. But I never thought that I could be a writer because I always had this idea in my head that, Oh, I have to be, you know, a medical doctor. And so I was doing biology and science and all these things. And I think it was because I've read so much I've read so many books and watched so much TV and anime and played video games, I think somewhere along the lines, I realized that I really really want to tell my own story. There's a gap here in the market that I can fill. There's you know, stories that aren't being told that I can tell. And I think I just needed to believe in myself, that I could make that leap, that I could start this and maybe even have a career out of it. So once you shift your thinking, and you start to see yourself in that role and you start to believe in yourself that -- I can do this; I can make the sacrifices; I can

put in the time; I can do it -- that's when you might be able to start on this journey, on this publishing journey. You do need to believe in yourself. You can do it.

I actually remember very vividly when I was in the 6th grade, I remember an author came and one of the exercises that she had was, I think, she gave us a writing prompt and we had to come up with a story. We had to tell it verbally. And I put my hand up after the time and it's like nobody else wanted to kind of talk. And I just started talking about the story and this and that. And I don't think the story really went anywhere. I think there were some issues and I think I was stealing a little bit from Buffy the Vampire Slayer. But eventually the writer was like Okay, okay, okay. And she said you know what, you make a great storyteller. Because I was so passionate about telling the story. And because there were elements in the story, in terms of you know motivation and why the characters would do what they were doing, and stakes, that I

just kind of intrinsically knew. So that was like a big moment for me in my life. That reaffirmed this idea that I really really like to tell stories, and I like I just like stories in general. So that's always a good thing I think for writers, professional writers, to do when they do school visits, is just give your students a prompt and just see what they come up with. And you'll be surprised. I've done it before and I've heard students come up with amazing storylines, obviously rough around the edges but the imagination is there absolutely. [music]

[39:35] Thanks and Coming up on the Podcast

So with all this good information in hand, it's time to write your own tale. There is no one way to begin it. There's no best way. There's just your way. Find your way to your next story. Begin in the darkness.

[music]

And that's all for today's show. You'll find links to the full transcript of this episode on the website at CabinTales.ca, and you'll also find more information on all of the wonderful guest authors featured today: Frieda Wishinsky, Don Cummer, Wendy McLeod MacKnight, David McArthur, and Sarah Raughley. I'll post full interviews with each individual author in the new year, when all my cabin tales are told. In the meantime, check out their websites and their books, and drop them a line to tell them how they helped you find a way to begin your own story.

Tune in next week for Episode 7: "Just Get it Over With," all about the endings of stories. That's a "telling tales" format, so you'll hear stories, excerpts, and prompts, all answering the question, "How should I end my tale?" You'll hear gorgeous last lines from *The Great Gatsby, Out Stealing Horses, and Wuthering Heights*. And you'll hear great advice from three fabulous guest authors: Marty Chan, author of spooky, funny, fantastic middle-grade novels; Jeff Szpirglas, author of spooky stories, novels, and choose-your-own-ending adventures; and Frieda Wishinsky, who will have as many great things to say about endings as she did today about beginnings. That's coming up next week on "Just Get it Over With."

I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did, share it with your writerfriends and reader-friends and teacher-friends. And write your own tale.

I'm Catherine Austen. Thanks for listening.

[crickets]