

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

>> This is Jane Gilchrist at The Library of Congress. Late September will mark the 12th year that booklovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, DC to celebrate the written word at The Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival, which is free and open to the public will be 2 days this year, Saturday, September 22nd, and Sunday, September 23rd, 2012. The festival will take place between 9th and 14th Street on the National Mall, rain or shine. The hours will be from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Saturday, the 22nd, and from noon to 5:30 p.m. on Sunday, the 23rd. For more details, visit [www.loc.gov/bookfest](http://www.loc.gov/bookfest). And now it is my pleasure to introduce writer Lois Lowry, whose book, "Son: The Long Awaited Conclusion to the Giver Quartet," will be released this fall, and who will appear in the Teens and Children Pavilion at the 2012 National Book Festival. This award-winning writer, who was born in Hawaii, but who has lived throughout the United States, now spends her time in the New England area. She has published more than 30 books for children and teens. 2 of her works, "Number the Stars," and, "The Giver," have been awarded the prestigious Newbery Medal. Lois, thank you for joining us.

>> Lois Lowry: Thank you; pleasure to be with you.

>> Let's start by talking about this new book, "Son." How did your novel, "The Giver," grow into a 4-book series, a quartet, which ends with "Son?" Tell me how that first thought-provoking piece of fiction turned into 4 books.

>> Lois Lowry: Well, I think probably there are a couple of ways that that came about, and I should just interject the fact that I'm sorry that after the publication of "The Giver" I was -- I said publicly, and I'm still quoted publicly because it's on various bits of published information that I would not have a sequel. And of course it had an ambivalent ending -- an ambiguous ending I guess is a better word. And gradually I found 2 things, 1 that kids -- although I would have loved it when I was a kid because I would have put my imagination to work, kids today didn't like the ambiguity of the ending. And they wanted to know exactly where those people were, or if they were alive or dead --

>> Yes.

>> Lois Lowry: -- after the end of the first book. At the same time something else was happening to me, and this does happen I suppose after every book. The -- when the writer is writing, and when I'm writing a book, it's as if I have moved into a house, a dwelling place with those characters. They become very, very real to me. And I live with them over a long period of time. It's like having a separate family --

>> Yes.

>> Lois Lowry: -- you become very close. And then you close the door and walk away, and you don't stop wondering about what became of them. I mean, you know they're not real, but nonetheless they have a real feeling of connection to you. So they were still living with me, those

characters, and then over the years -- it was a number of years before I wrote the second book, the kids -- course today kids can email me easily through my website. In the early days it was letters with stamps on them, but now [laughter] it's email. The kids -- the emails from kids were still coming, 50, 60 a day, many of them asking for more about the characters from "The Giver." So I finally -- I think it was maybe 8 or 9 years later, sat down and wrote the second book also to answer a question that was in my mind, and I think books, fiction often takes the form of answering a question or asking a question, of what if -- instead of the world of the future having advanced in technology the way it had in the book "The Giver," what if because of catastrophic circumstances it had regressed to a very primitive and savage place? And that was the community that I set up for the second book, but realized midway through the writing that I could connect it to "The Giver." It was simply a different community of different circumstances. But the boy from "The Giver" is mentioned at the end of it. Then in the third book, "Third Community," different way of life, different culture, different set of rules, but the 2 characters -- or the 2 sets of characters from the 2 books meet in the third book, and I really thought that was the final one. "Trilogy" has a nice ring to it.

>> [Laughs] Doesn't it.

>> Lois Lowry: Random House put it in a box set. [Laughter] But still -- and that was some years ago, still the questions kept coming, and now the questions were all about what happened to the baby. Okay; we know you told us what happened to Jonas, but what about the baby? And it didn't satisfy the kids that I would reply, "Look on page 17 of the third book; there's a mention of him," but it was only one sentence.

>> Hmm.

>> Lois Lowry: And so I began I guess in response to the kids and also because I had cared about the baby too, began to envision what he might be like when he's an adolescent. And that's how I started the book. And then a surprising thing happened, no one had asked for this, and I hadn't anticipated it, but when I began to write about the boy, named "Gabe," who -- though his age isn't mentioned, he's probably 14 or so, but writing about him, wondering about his origins, I found myself wondering about the young girl who would have given birth to him. I was fascinated in the first book by these young women who were selected at age 12 to do nothing but have babies and a job without great prestige. And so I went back in my mind to her, and what it would have been like for her to give birth at -- I think she's 14 in the beginning of the book when she's giving birth for the first time, and the child is taken from her. And because of circumstances, plot devices --

>> Yes.

>> Lois Lowry: -- that I won't go into, she spends her next year -- she found a way to keep track of the child, where he is. And so that's a little satisfying, more satisfying than having him simply gone; but then he's taken away a second time when the boy runs away with him. And so that's what was the propellant for the fourth book, which is indeed going

to be the final one, if for no other reason that I'm 75 years old now. [Laughter] And time to start wrapping things up.

>> It hasn't diminished your writing at all.

>> Lois Lowry: [Laugh] But at any rate, here are all these people together at the end of this book, and I think thinks are pretty well wrapped up at the same time that I know that after it's published I'm going to get some emails that will say, "Yes; but what about --" and they'll come up with some other character, some other little plot thing that they're still wondering about. But maybe that's as it should be with a book.

>> Well, and in addition to "The Giver" quartet, you've written other series. How do you know where to take a series, and then maybe you've just explained this, but how do you know when it's finished?

>> Lois Lowry: I think that varies. This one, 4 books, I feel as though it's done. The other series that I did about the character named "Anastasia Krupnik," which, again, when I wrote the first one I didn't anticipate writing others, but the response was so large from kids. And so I wrote a total of 9 of those, and then a spinoff short series about her brother. And in those books she gets a little older each time, and she moves and so new things are happening to her. But the reason that one ended -- and to my regret, even now after all these years, is because the publisher decided it was enough, and I don't know why they make those decisions, but I guess it's based on sales. Maybe the sales were falling off. So I still get letters about Anastasia, and now I get them from grown women who remember her from their childhood and often now they have daughters, and they're getting those books for their kids.

>> It's a little bit like the Betsy Tacy stories.

>> Lois Lowry: Yes; I suppose so, and they've had a long, long line.

>> Yes, they certainly have. Since their publication, books from that series, the Anastasia Krupnik series, and "The Giver" have appeared on The American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom's list of banned and challenged books. Why do you think people challenge or want to ban these stories?

>> Lois Lowry: I think probably it's different for the 2 different sets of books. There's a bad word -- I'm saying that in quotation, right --

>> Oh. [Laughs]

>> Lois Lowry: -- in the first book about Anastasia. It's said by an adult, and it's shocking to her, but nonetheless it's there in print. And so -- and it's a book about a fourth grader. If I had it to do over again, I probably wouldn't put that in there, but there it is, and I can't take it out. So that's caused some problems over the years. And then there are other little to me touching and kind of sad -- I'm thinking now of a little correspondence that I had quite recently, girl - email from a girl 12 or so, and she says in the email, "I wish you

wouldn't write bad things like in the book Anastasia has the answers, and do these things," I think she said. And so I -- it's been a long time since I wrote that book. I went and pulled it off the shelf and I reread the whole book, and I wrote back to her. And I said, "I'm sorry, but, you know, I can't find anything in that that you could be referring to." I said, "There's one place where Anastasia mentions the book "Gone With The Wind." And she wants her English teacher to assign it and he doesn't want to, and she says, "But there's no sex in it. You can't be objecting to it for that reason." And so I read to this girl, "That's the only mention of sex in that book."

>> Hmm.

>> Lois Lowry: And she wrote back and said, "No, no; it's the part where she thinks she is in love with her gym teacher, and that's dirty," she said.

>> Hmm.

>> Lois Lowry: And indeed that child has a crush on her female gym teacher, and she talks about it with her mom. It's a very I think touching scene. And I wrote back to this child and said, "You know, that's a question that many girls think about and wonder about, and maybe it would be a good idea to talk with your mom if that's something that troubles you." And she replied once more, and she said, "Never email me again." And so that was the end of that, and too bad. But any rate, different things trouble different people. And in the book, "The Giver," which is the most challenged of my books, it's to me very hard to figure out exactly why it is that some people have been so upset by it. But I think it has to do with the fact that a 12-year-old boy challenges the authority of the authority figures --

>> Yes.

>> Lois Lowry: -- the parents, and the government in his community. And he disobeys the rules that have been carefully set up to protect him and the society. And I think although they might not realize that that's what's troubling to them, and so people so bring the challenges pick out other things to point to. I think really that's what's troubling them, the fact that a young person is challenging authority.

>> Well, sometimes you write about everyday situations, and ordinary lives in the present, while some of your books have been set in the past or in the future. Are there any common threads that connect these stories?

>> Lois Lowry: Oh, let me think back. I wrote a book called "The Silent Boy," which is set in the years of my mother's childhood and it's illustrated by old photographs, some of my mother as a child. I wrote a book set in a shaker village that exists near my home in Maine, and that one's set in 1918, so about the same period. And then one's set in World War II, a time of my childhood, which of course is now historical fiction that makes me amused to think of it. The thing that runs through all of them and is true of my contemporary fiction as well is that it deals with

the heart of a child, the observations of a child of the life that he or she is living and about the adult life he or she is about to enter, and the things that such a child is confronted with, and was confronted with in 1910, the time of my mother's childhood, was confronted with in another country in 1943 in Denmark, and children are still confronted with these questions today about human relationships and how we should be to one another, and why we fail to measure up to our own expectations. I think all my books are about the same thing.

>> What part does humor play in your books?

>> Lois Lowry: You know, there was a Canadian writer whom I admired, named Robertson Davies.

>> Oh, yes.

>> Lois Lowry: Okay. He's long dead, but I loved his work, and in particular the "Deptford Trilogies," a set of 3 books, which is wildly funny, and also profoundly tragic at the same time. And I've never met him, but I read an interview with him when he was asked about the humor in his books. And he said something very cryptic, but I knew right away what he meant. He said, "Humor is simply a way of sending the dogs in a different direction." [Laughter] And what that meant to me -- because an important book in my childhood was the book, "The Yearling."

>> Yes.

>> Lois Lowry: I don't know if you remember that book, but --

>> Oh, yes.

>> Lois Lowry: Okay. Jody and his pa go out again and again to try to kill the bear that's a specter and they're part of a huge bear. And it's very frightening. And they go with the hunting dogs again and again. And listening -- my mother read that book to me, and listening to her read it I can remember the exhilaration and the fear as they went stalking the bear. And then sometimes it wasn't the right time, or something went awry, and the dogs would go in a different direction, and they would not have to confront the bear. And to me that's what Davies meant when he said that.

>> Yes.

>> Lois Lowry: That you creep up on something that's a little scary or worrisome, and then you veer away, you send the dogs off another way, and that's what humor does. You don't have to confront that thing head-on in all of enormity. And so I've used humor in a lot of my books. I feel very comfortable going back and forth between humorous and serious books, but I think they're all striving to do the same thing in the end.

>> Well, how would you describe a perfect or at least a really, really wonderful day in the life of Lois Lowry?

>> Lois Lowry: [Laughs] Well, I live alone now. My husband died last year. But for me a perfect day -- and right now I'm sitting at my house in Massachusetts, but I spend the summers usually -- I came down here this week, for a dental appointment.

>> Ah, yes.

>> Lois Lowry: I spend the summers usually at my perfect place, which is an old farmhouse, 18th Century farmhouse on a hilltop in Maine.

>> Oh, that sounds perfect. [Laughs]

>> Lois Lowry: And right away -- no, it's perfect, doesn't matter what the weather is. A rainy day is just as good as a sunny one. But of course the perfection for me has to do with looking out at the flower gardens and the lake, and having a good book by my side. I suppose I should say the perfect day also involves some writing, and I certainly do that every day. But for me reading a wonderful book all by itself would be a perfect day.

>> Well, you talked about writing every day. Can you tell us about your current projects, where is your writing and your imagination going to take us next?

>> Lois Lowry: Well, of course I finished the book "Son," which is soon to be published, but I also have -- oh here's a series we hadn't talked about, but a series for younger kids, a lighthearted series called -- about a character named [inaudible].

>> Oh, yes.

>> Lois Lowry: And each book is set at during one month of her second grade year, and I'm working now on the March book. And I'll just confide something kind of funny. Each -- in each month her class is focusing on some different aspect of learning, and I thought it was time to deal with math. [Laughter] I went and sat in a real second grade classroom to see how they teach math these days. But I finally gave up. I can't just sit in math. [Laughs]

>> It's a little different than it used to be.

>> Lois Lowry: Yes; it's too hard for me. [Laughter] So instead let's see, last month, February, they dealt with geography, and in March they're studying the human body.

>> I see. Well, we can look forward to that. Well, thank you so much for talking to us this afternoon. We've been hearing from author, Lois Lowry, who will appear on Saturday, September 22nd in the Teen and Children Pavilion at the National Book Festival on the National Mall. On behalf of The Library of Congress, National Book Festival, thank you so much.

>> Lois Lowry: Okay. It's been fun for me to talk to you.

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