

QQQ Laura Taylor Namey

[00:00:00] **Laura:** Because it's tempting to just say, well, she has that and he has that and they have that and I want that too. Or I wanna be there and how come I'm not?

[00:00:11] **Sarah:** Welcome to Queries Qualms and Quirks, the weekly podcast that asks published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from First Spark to day of publication.

I am your host, author Sarah Nicholas, and literary agent Sarah N. Fisk. Laura Taylor Namey is the New York Times and international bestselling author of Reese's Book Club pick *A Cuban Girls Guide to Tea and Tomorrow*, *The Library of Lost Things*, *When We Were Them* and two forthcoming titles. A proud Cuban American,

she can be found hunting for vintage treasures and wishing she was in London or Paris. She lives in San Diego with her husband and two children, so please welcome Laura to the show. Hello.

[00:00:51] **Laura:** Hi there. Thanks for having me.

[00:00:53] **Sarah:** Yeah. Thanks for coming on. So we're gonna talk about your journey to publication, and we're gonna start by going kind of all the way back to the beginning.

When did you first start getting interested in writing, and then how long did it take from there before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:01:10] **Laura:** I've always had a writer inside of me, but not necessarily an author. So growing up, I have a background in teaching and I would use books all the time in teaching my classroom students. And I always was a huge reader. I did really well on papers and anything like that in school. I loved literature, loved, I loved all of that, but I didn't think I could write a full length novel.

so I stuck to short form things just for me, and I really didn't have any... Being published or didn't pursue that. and I think it was just not the right time for me. fast forward many years later, I am not teaching anymore. I'm raising two kids and my daughter's in the fifth grade and I'm seeing all of these kids in her classroom reading.

It's kind of the era of Twilight and Divergent and hunger games and they're just eating up literature. And this young adult literature seems to be having this huge renaissance. And I, uh, started at that, you know, feeling at that time that I have more time. my children are grown up in junior high and, and that sort of thing, not needing as much input from me on homework and things after school and, and all of that.

I'm. Kind of in this limbo phase where it's time for me to pursue something for myself. And I got that itch like, why can't I do this? And so I decided to learn how to write a young adult novel by writing one. And that is the only training I had at that time was just my own love of literature, my own reading background and I've always been pretty good with words, again, teaching English and teaching writing.

So I just did it and yeah, and, and that's where the story starts. And, and it went pretty fast considering what other journeys that I've seen and throughout, through my friends and all of that. I'd say once I started to, the time of my debut was less than four years. All in all. And yeah, so I, I have one drawer novel.

That novel that I wrote just for the love of writing, taught me where I needed to then go learn more about craft. And I did that, I got really close with that book. I completed it. I started going to conferences and got, so close, got some r andrs by agent, revising by agents revising Resends,

[00:03:24] **Sarah:** So once you got serious about it, how did you learn more about the publishing industry? Like how it works, how to query, how to go about it, everything like that?

[00:03:32] **Laura:** I got online, I started going to conferences. I started taking some short-term writing classes with little workshops that would target certain areas. When I started querying, after again, just. Getting into some writer's groups on Facebook and online, becoming a part of the writing community, even though I wasn't an author yet, just kind of saying I'm here.

and looking at, at the other journeys from people that I admired, just kind of going, going and doing that. I put all of that to work in my own book and I, I ended up writing a new book that got very cl again, that one. after getting some training and realizing what I was doing wrong, but I think it was the best way, just doing it wrong and going all out for it and listen again, listening to feedback on where I can improve in my work.

I put all those things together into my debut and I got into, pitch wars as an alternate, which it's no longer exists unfortunately, but it, it was a great mentorship contest and I got really close and got a mentor who helped me with that book. when it was, went through the, the whole pitch wars process, I then started querying and I think I had an agent in less than two months signed, and the book sold in less than three months to Harper Collins Inkycard.

[00:04:51] **Sarah:** All right.

[00:04:51] **Laura:** it did pretty fast.

[00:04:53] **Sarah:** so you, you wrote a first book, did you query that first book?

[00:04:57] **Laura:** I queried that first book, and again, I got a lot of full requests. I got a lot of interest. I took that book, you know, the first 10 page critiques to S C B W I, which is in la. And I had a lot of positive feedback from agents that it was like, you're really good at this. This is what you're supposed to be doing.

Your voice is excellent. Your sense of prose, your characters leap off the page, but the story has issues. This, this, and this. So I thought, you know, I tried to rewrite that and it just wasn't working and it's okay. And a lot of people have these drawer books, sometimes more than one. And I decided just to start fresh and come up with a new idea, which I, which I did, and that ended up being my debut.

[00:05:40] **Sarah:** All right. So then you went out, querying with that one. How did that process go?

[00:05:45] **Laura:** That one, it was relatively fast. it did go through the pitch wars, and this is something I recommend to all debuts, or emerging authors. Look at the MSWL manuscript wishlist tag on Twitter and. You can find those things through agencies and online, through specific agents after you have done your due diligence and look at looking to see what agents are representing what you're writing and what they're looking for at the time.

My agent now, asked for the, almost the exact carbon copy of the book that I was writing. And she put out a tweet asking for what I had just written. I had other agent offers though at this point. So I had sent it to other agents and I'd gotten an offer. In the meantime, this happened so fast.

So I had an offer from another agent while I'm sending the query to my now agent. Kind of, I, you know, going back and forth, that was, that was really difficult to weigh all those things. But when I saw that tweet, It was just kind of the right book at the right time for this particular agent. And then I really clicked with that agent, ended up signing with her, and I'm still with her today and will never leave her and she better not leave me So, so it did go quickly, because it did help that I had that manuscript wishlist and was kind of answering a call and it happened to be the right book for that particular agent who'd said, well, I've read a lot of books asking for the same thing. They, a lot of people answered that call, but yours was the one that was what I was looking for.

it was fortuitous. It was the right book at the right time Again.

[00:07:12] **Sarah:** Awesome. Did y'all do edits or did you go out on sub right away?.

[00:07:16] **Laura:** I did a few light edits. I think it took me about three weeks. We got it into shape. I added, you know, tweaked a few things. I really loved the input that my agent gave on the book, and her insight was excellent. We tuned that up. It went out, and again, I had, I got read pretty quickly, and this again is in 20.

2018, it's a little bit different. Um, right now it, I think it's a little harder, but then it was still very difficult. But I got, I would get read pretty quickly and was getting almost in rejections and, and just all that feedback right away. But it did end up selling, less than three months to, uh, my editor at Inkyard Harper Collins.

[00:07:59] **Sarah:** Nice. It is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your query letter for us?

[00:08:05] **Laura:** Yes, I'm seeking representation from my young adult contemporary romance paperback midnight. On the MSWL tag on Twitter, I noticed you'd love to see a story featuring a pining romance as well as the topic of hoarding and its effects on the family. My novel centers on both. In paperback midnight, 17 year old literary genius.

Darcy builds an ink and paper bomb shelter living in books and fairytale settings to escape her mother's hoarding. She lies even to friends to protect her home and the secret behind her front door. When a new apartment manager becomes more active in the upkeep of their building, Darcy must confront the

horde without driving her mother deeper under an avalanche of things, losing her for good.

As Darcy seeks the truth behind her mother's compulsive shopping, she meets a teen pilot grounded after a car accident rewrites his future. She is instantly moved by his tragic tale. But Darcy, a girl who's only had book boyfriends must leave the safety of reread happy Endings and Trusted book Characters

the more she's drawn to him. Unlocking her mother's illness, and finally securing her own love story requires Darcy to stop lying and start living her own truth, even if it's messy. Paperback Midnight is the young adult contemporary romance complete at 80,000 words. It would appeal to fans of Sarah Dessen's say anything.

The story structure and lyrical style are reminiscent of Huntley Fitzpatrick's writing in What I Thought was True .

[00:09:27] **Sarah:** Awesome. Thanks for sharing. how has your experience been since signing that first contract? Especially let us know if there are kind of any surprises along the way that aspiring writers might want to know about.

[00:09:41] **Laura:** It's been a whirlwind where I feel like sometimes it's chasing me because after I got that first deal, I kept going. as I was writing out all of the things that you expect during that revision and editing process with your editor and you're getting your cover and all of these things, you, you realize how many little details there are that your agent will help you with.

You know, the cover was wrong. We went through all these revisions and then my edits were late, very late because there was a backlog at my, at my house and my imprint. So I think comparison is what was really difficult because I was then in a community group with my debuts, making friends on Twitter and on Instagram with other writers and seeing that they're getting things a little bit more quickly than I was getting them.

Things were getting done and it's really hard when you, Just trying to find who you are in this space, and it was a new space for me. And then seeing my colleagues and peers maybe getting things quickly or, or in a different way than I was. It kind of was a pitfall. It was, it was tough, but we made it through.

Everything got done and, and debut was lovely. I had a lot of support from, again, friends that I had made and, and my agency and my house, and we have been going ever since and I have not stopped so yeah.

[00:10:55] **Sarah:** it is time for the quick ground. I call it author dna. It's just kind of fun classifications we like to put writers in. Are you a pantsier or a plotter?

[00:11:05] **Laura:** Plantser,

[00:11:06] **Sarah:** Do you tend to be an overwriter or an underwriter?

[00:11:08] **Laura:** I'm such an overwriter.

[00:11:10] **Sarah:** Do you write in the morning or at night

[00:11:12] **Laura:** morning.

[00:11:12] **Sarah:** when starting a new project, do you typically start with character or plot or concept or something else?

[00:11:18] **Laura:** Character,

[00:11:19] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:11:21] **Laura:** coffee,

[00:11:22] **Sarah:** Do you like to write in silence or with some kind of sound?

[00:11:25] **Laura:** Silence.

[00:11:26] **Sarah:** when it comes to the first draft, are you more of a get it down kind of person or get it right kind of person?

[00:11:31] **Laura:** get it right.

[00:11:32] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft

[00:11:35] **Laura:** Microsoft Word and laptop and a puppy. That's it.

[00:11:39] **Sarah:** Do you prefer a drafting or revising more?

[00:11:41] **Laura:** Revising all day

[00:11:43] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around?

[00:11:46] **Laura:** Sequential.

[00:11:47] **Sarah:** final quick round question. Are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:11:50] **Laura:** I think I'm both at times, but mainly extrovert.

[00:11:54] **Sarah:** Hmm. So we're gonna talk about the second Q now. What were some of the qualms or worries that you had on your journey to publication, and do you feel like they were realized or you overcame them? Or how did it that shake out?

[00:12:06] **Laura:** One of the worries that I've always had and I still have, is like longevity. And instead of being this quick flash author where maybe you do really well and then die off, I wanted to be an author that was consistent that could make a career outta this. And so, and that is hard on times, at times when you don't know if what you're putting out now or next is going to catch and stay and propel and go along with you.

That is something that we always worry about. I know I'm not alone in this and it's something that can get in the way of your drafting new projects, and it's something that I have to actively compartmentalize and put aside to keep going. we do our best. Writing and publishing is, is a box of unknowns and relying on your past success, your current joys and your people are really the only thing that I have and, and that's what I use to get past those.

[00:12:59] **Sarah:** Hmm. Now we're gonna talk about the third Q. Do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that you think is kind of different or interesting or unique?

[00:13:08] **Laura:** I do everything wrong and that they always, they, I mean like writing professionals usually tell you not to go back and fix things in your draft, just to get it all down and then fix it. But I don't do that and I, I fix stuff all the time and when I'm stuck, I go back and look at stuff and re-edit because I feel it helps me get back into the novel.

And it reminds me of who I am as an author of that book. And it allows me to go forward. I also can't, if I make a substantial change in something that it is earlier in the book that it's gonna then Change the rest of the draft. I can't leave it alone and wait until I'm done with the draft and then go fix.

Like if I'm on chapter eight and something in chapter three, I know it's gonna have to completely change because I've changed the trajectory of my story. I have to go back to chapter three and redo it. Otherwise my brain won't let go of it and won't let me go forward. And that is just a personal quirk, it's probably not unique to me, but it is definitely characteristic of me.

[00:14:03] **Sarah:** All right. Awesome. When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, whatever that may have been for you, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?

[00:14:12] **Laura:** Critique partners. I have two that are, my ride-or-dies, my confidants. I talk to them all day, every day, even on Christmas. Uh, we're like family and we do life together, not only books. And so that is where I put everything and they put everything that they're going through. They're both publish authors and we just link arms. We go forth and we cry and laugh and support and jeer, and we keep it all in there. It's just like having a family that, that knows what you're gonna do, knows you're gonna, how you're gonna respond. The trust level is so high. With me, with my critique partners, they see all the bad stuff before any agent or editor sees it and they see me at my lowest.

They, uh, you know, and they're there when I'm in a triumph also. So it's all things, and without them I would be lost.

[00:15:02] **Sarah:** Nice. Do you feel like you made any mistakes along the way that you might want to warn listeners about so they can avoid making the same ones?

[00:15:12] **Laura:** I don't call them mistakes because I think that they're just. Part of the whole learning experience, maybe I had misbeliefs about elevating the experience to something that I was re maybe romanticizing it to something I thought it was gonna be. And that being debut year and every other thing, I mean, it's really hard to do that.

You have to stay in your own lane and keep your eyes on your paper and really everybody's journey, everybody's experience with their agent, with their editor is so unique. And it's really hard, and I think it's futile to compare yourself to someone else and into their journey too much. You can use it as a sounding board, but I would not use it as this huge gauge of who you are in publishing and, and what you're doing.

It's really, you know, keeping your eyes on your own work and just carving out a lane for yourself and being consistent and staying in that lane really is the only

thing that has helped me to battle that. Because it's tempting to just say, well, she has that and he has that and they have that and I want that too.

Or I wanna be there and how come I'm not? and it's, and that's just all we see on social media and in bookstores and, and all of the places that we go where books are and authors are, it's, it's really hard not to do that.

[00:16:25] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:16:26] **Laura:** If I would give, advising emerging authors, try not to just find who you are on the page and in the world with your work and work on that,

[00:16:35] **Sarah:** Yeah. can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:16:42] **Laura:** that it's okay to do things backward In my way. It is okay to break the rules as long as you know them. If, and this is the important part. If it is serving you well, and if it is carrying you forward, if what you are doing. is causing you to stress out and have roadblocks. Then maybe look at what other people are doing and, and listen to the advice, um, of authors who have been doing it for a while, or experts and professionals.

But if you have a way and your way is completely different than the traditional way of, of writing, editing, revising, whatever, but that way is working for you and serving you well, that it is your way and it's OK to own it.

[00:17:20] **Sarah:** Nice.

I call this the acknowledgements portion of the podcast. This is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own. And you mentioned some of them, but who are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:17:33] **Laura:** Just my critique partners Joan Smith and Alison Bitz, my amazing, amazing agent who's like another limb to me. Natascha Morris. Thank you, Natascha you're incredible. my editors, Lauren Smulski, Sophia Jimenez, Alex Borbolla. They have just been so kind and just in teaching me and guiding me, I love all of them.

My whole writing community, I could not even if you're listening to this and you're my friend on Twitter, Instagram, I'm talking about you because I love you all and

[00:18:05] **Sarah:** I'm sitting here like you're talking about me. I'm your friend on Twitter.

[00:18:08] **Laura:** I'm talking about you, Sarah. Absolutely. Like I have so much joy and delight in like all my writing friends and just seeing everyone succeed and doing their thing and, and getting these beautiful things, it just adds to my world so much and it, it inspires me and that inspiration helps me to keep going. It's hard when I'm not having the best day or the best season, maybe just saying, it's not my time right now. It's time to lift somebody else up and get in their world and do everything for them.

And that actually really helps.

[00:18:37] **Sarah:** Hmm. . Awesome. Okay. You have a release coming out in September. Can you tell us about it?

[00:18:44] **Laura:** Yeah, A British Girls Guide to Hurricanes and Heartbreak is coming out and it's not really sequel. This is the companion novel to Cuban Girls Guide to Tea, and tomorrow. This one takes place three years later and it features a lot of our favorite characters. You're gonna see them three years later and coincidentally, it comes out exactly three years after Cuban girl debuted.

So, uh, this one centers on Orion's sister Flora Maxwell, and. She, uh, is dealing with some of the things that are brought up in Cuban girl and her mother ends up passing. And this is something that is brought up in Cuban girl that she is, uh, suffering with, uh, this whole time. And the book opens right after her mother has finally passed from this disease that we know about.

And she's not having a great time and she's not making some, what we would call good decisions. She's made some choices that she's hidden. Because she realizes they served her really well, but they've ended up really hurting others, her family and friends, and she's in this spiral of stagnancy and hiding things while having to make some difficult choices about her future.

And there's a ticking clock hanging over her head that she's gotta, she's gotta straighten up and fly right, and go on. But she's in this holding pattern and so what she does is the opposite of what her, a friend now Lila Reyes does, who was sent from Miami to England to help her get over some losses.

Flora takes it upon herself and sends herself to Miami and stays with Lila's family, and in order to snap herself out this funk to get some clarity, To complete the task she's supposed to be doing, and hopefully heal and find who

she is in this new era and find out how to approach her family and friends again after what she's done.

[00:20:32] **Sarah:** Hmm. Nice. Laura, thank you so much for coming to the show today and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:20:37] **Laura:** thank you so much and good luck to all the emerging writers out there. I'm pulling for.

[00:20:42] **Sarah:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries, qualms, and Quirks. You can find the text of Laura's query in the show notes along with links to find out more about her and her books. If you enjoyed the show, I'd appreciate if you helped me find new listeners by leaving a review on Apple Podcast or Pod chaser, telling your friends or sharing this episode on social media

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Thank you so much for listening, and we'll see you next time.