

Lauren St John

“world-builder” extraordinaire



We met Lauren St John in Macmillan’s offices, as they were about to publish *Kat Wolfe Investigates*, the first title in the exciting new *Wolfe & Lamb* series written by Lauren. It tells of how two young girls, Kat Wolfe and Harper Lamb, meet, become friends and then work together to investigate, and finally solve, the mystery of the missing parrot owner who lives alone in a clifftop mansion.

We started off by asking Lauren how she began writing books for children. “Since I was ten years old I had always, always wanted to be a novelist, but I’d never ever been able to think of an idea. I’d kind of given up. I thought that, in a way, I didn’t have that kind of imagination. Then one Christmas I was walking through Greenwich on my way to do some Christmas shopping. Suddenly the image of a girl on a giraffe came into my head and I thought wouldn’t it be the coolest thing in the world if you could actually ride a giraffe. Right there, on the street, the whole story came into my mind, including the girl’s name, Martine. ... The story was in my head and I couldn’t stop thinking about it. So, one Saturday, I thought I’ll sit down and have a go at the first chapter and see how I feel. It just was the strangest thing. It literally poured out. It felt as though the story really existed and all I had to do was listen to it. I wrote the first draft in a month.”

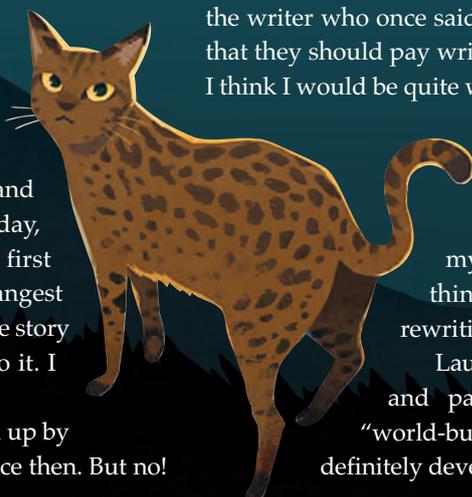
It would be good to say that it was snapped up by a publisher, and it has all been plain sailing since then. But no!

Although Lauren had written a number of non-fiction titles over several years and had worked, for nearly a decade, as a journalist on *The Sunday Times*, the letters of rejection kept coming. It took almost two years of rewriting, submitting numerous drafts of the manuscript, knocking on doors and even flying to New York to seek advice from a previous editor before the breakthrough came. At last, in 2006, the first title in *The White Giraffe* series was to be published. (Take note, all you young, would-be writers – don’t let the rejections and the knock-backs get you down and don’t give up on your dreams.) The other four titles in the series appeared over the next ten years. Between 2010 and 2017, Lauren also wrote the six titles in the *Laura Marlin* series and the three titles in the *One Dollar Horse* series. Including the stand-alone Christmas picture-book title, *The Snow Angel*, published only last year, and the stand-alone title *The Glory*, published in 2015. That’s sixteen titles in eleven years!

In 2017 Lauren was approached by Macmillan to write a new series and she jumped at the challenge. She enjoys “world-building” – choosing different characters and events, different locations and settings to create a brand-new background for a story. Lauren is a “morning-person” who, by 8.00 a.m., likes to be at the desk in her study, by her side her very affectionate Bengal cat, Max, which she adores and which she rescued from a shelter. However, she feels that she doesn’t have to be writing to be working. “Different things work for different people. I’m in awe of people who say they are going to write 2,000 words today and sit down and do it. I do a lot of thinking. I agree with the writer who once said that publishers have yet to discover that they should pay writers for the time they spend thinking. I think I would be quite well-off if I got paid that way. Even if I

have deadlines I never put pressure on myself to write huge numbers of words. As long as I have spent the day doing something to do with my book, whether that is researching, thinking, writing or crossing out and rewriting, then I’m happy.”

Lauren uses her research, her imagination, and past encounters and experiences to “world-build” and to tell a very good story. She definitely develops and models the characters of her





predominantly female protagonists using her own opinions and beliefs, and her own philosophy of life. “As a child I had so much fun. ... So, I can totally identify with the kids I write about.” As a child on the farm in Zimbabwe Lauren was given a considerable amount of freedom to ‘do her own thing’. “I love my parents ... but they were always gone, in one sense or another.” She believes that children should not be confined by long lists of rules and expectations but should be allowed the freedom to explore and investigate. In *Kat Wolfe Investigates*, Kat’s mother certainly gives her daughter a great deal of independence in Bluebell Bay as she is so busy running her veterinary practice, and, in *Dead Man’s Cove* when Laura moved from the children’s home to live with her uncle in St Ives and he tells her, “I don’t believe in rules.”, Laura finds her newly-found freedom exhilarating. Lauren told us that, “My mum was a great believer in the power of dreams.” Laura’s uncle tells her, “I’ll do anything in my power to help you achieve your dreams and make you happy ...”



Lauren shared with us that, “Growing up, I was crazy about mystery novels. I read every one I could get my hands on – Famous Five books, the Secret Seven, the Five Find-Outers and Nancy Drew. ... I was obsessed by adventures. I so wanted to be someone who had adventures. I would think, if only I could be someone who had adventures like these kids.” Certainly, Laura and Kat love reading and they are very inquisitive, seeing life as a series of mysteries which need solving. Kat, “only had to glance at an adventure novel she’d read earlier and she’d be parachuted right back in time, with all of its emotions and dreams.”

Lauren grew up in Africa surrounded by animals and, until she was thirteen, she dreamed of becoming a veterinary surgeon. All her protagonists display a definite affinity to animals of all kinds. Kat, with all her free time, sets up *Paws and Claws*, a pet-sitting agency, and finishes up looking after an Amazonian parrot, a very excitable ex-racehorse nicknamed the Pocket Rocket and an overweight retriever named Toby, as well as living with a huge, near-wild, Savannah cat, ironically called Tiny.

Kat Wolfe Investigates is a brilliant mystery adventure for younger readers, an excellent start to a new thrilling series.

Almost unwittingly, Kat Wolfe and Harper Lamb use their ingenuity, together with modern technology, to uncover a plot by ruthless, illegal, sleeper spies, who have been embedded into western society. (As an investigative journalist, Lauren had gained insight into the existence of such dangerous spies!) It will surely delight and thrill Lauren’s fans who have been eagerly waiting for her new series. The second title in the series, *Kat Wolfe Takes the Case*, will be published next year, in 2019.

A passionate conservationist, Lauren cares deeply about our world and the environment. She recently launched a project called *Authors4Oceans*, “a campaign ... to find eco-alternatives to the plastic bags, straws, bottles and single-use cutlery destroying our oceans.” Lauren told us that she came up with the idea when she ordered a drink in a bookstore and it arrived with a plastic straw. “There are hundreds of bookshops across the UK, many of which hand out plastic bags, straws and bottles daily. It occurred to me that an alliance of children’s authors ... might have a voice together. And if publishers, literary festivals and some of our young readers joined us ... we could make a real difference.” She personally approached fifty authors and illustrators to join the campaign and they all readily agreed, including Sir Michael Morpurgo, Dame Jacqueline Wilson, Quentin Blake, Elizabeth Laird, James Mayhew and Jackie Morris. If you are interested to find out more, then go to www.authors4oceans.org.

Sinead and Martin Kromer

Bibliography:

Laura Marlin Mysteries: Dead Man’s Cove Orion £6.99
ISBN: 978-1444001488

The Glory Orion £6.99 ISBN: 978-1444012767

The Snow Angel illustrated by Catherine Hyde Zephyr £10.99
ISBN: 978-1786695895

Wolfe & Lamb: Kat Wolfe Investigates Macmillan £6.99
ISBN: 978-1509871223