

LAURA: Hi, this is Laura Backs. And today, I'm speaking with Maggie Stiefvater who's the author of contemporary young adult fantasy. Her first novel, *Lament the Faerie Queen's Deception* was published in 2008 by Flux, which is a young adult fiction imprint of Llewellyn Worldwide. And Booklist gave it a star review. And here's what they said.

"This beautiful and out of the ordinary debut novel with its authentic depiction of Celtic faerie lore and dangerous forbidden love in the contemporary American setting will appeal to readers of Nancy Welin's *Impossible* and Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Series."

Now, Maggie's second book, *Shiver* comes out this month from Scholastic Press and it tells the love story of Grace, who's a girl fascinated by the wolves who live in the woods behind her house and Sam, who spends the winter months as a wolf, but becomes human in the summer only to know that he'll change back into a wolf once the temperature drops.

And both books have sequels planned. *Ballad*, the sequel to *Lament* is coming out this October. And *Linger*, which continues the story of the wolves, is coming out in fall of 2010.

So, Maggie, welcome. And thank you so much for taking a few minutes to talk with me today. How did it feel to have your first book compared to *Impossible* and the *Twilight* series?

MAGGIE: Oh, my goodness! I think the first time I heard it, I was a bit knocked over. But since then, almost every single review, I find out that's kind of what they do. If it's a paranormal romance, it is *Twilight* or *Impossible*. Or if it has faeries, it's *Tithe*. So, it's kind of a way of positioning in the market. So, I'm not as blown away or knocked over as I was at one point.

LAURA: Well, it's still a great quote.

MAGGIE: It is! And I have to say, to get a star review from Booklist and I think who else gave me a star review for *Lament*, Publisher's Weekly and KLIATT actually both gave me star reviews as well. *Those*, I was definitely blown away by those.

LAURA: That's great! And did you feel -- did it raise extra pressure on you for *Shiver* that "Oh, my God! I've got to at least *match* what I did for *Lament* review-wise?"

MAGGIE: I'm not sure so much that as -- the real pressure came when I was ready with sequel to *Shiver* because when I wrote *Shiver*, I didn't really care if it got good reviews or not. But somewhere around page seventy, when I was ready, I thought, "You know what? This is the best novel I have ever written." Don't get me wrong. I still love *Lament*, but I knew that *Shiver* was this new place for me as a writer. And so, getting that done, I didn't so much compare it to *Lament*, but once I started writing this sequel for *Shiver*, all I can think was, "Oh, I'm never going to beat *Shiver*."

LAURA: Well, I have to tell you, I was blown away by *Shiver*. And I think I read the whole thing in about a six hour period. I don't think I moved from the chair the entire time. So, I'm

really looking forward to the sequel. And I'm hoping that I see some of the characters again that I really loved in *Shiver* in the sequel. And one thing I wanted to ask you when you're -- when you write sequels, I haven't read that much about the sequel to either of your books because they haven't come out yet. And I don't want you to give too much away, but are you going to expand on some of the more secondary characters from the first books in the sequel? And did this -- because you had such interesting, supporting casts in each of the books, did that make writing a sequel easier for you? Did it give you more ground to cover?

MAGGIE: Oh, definitely! I think that if I'd -- with *Lament*, I got Diedre a very interesting and difficult place. I finished her story up and then, when my editor said, "Oh, I want to know what happens next." I said, "Well, so do I. But I don't want Diedre to tell the story." So, like you said, I got to fall back on my secondary characters. So, I picked up James, the best friend. And so, it was fun seeing Diedre from outside of her body. And again, I do a little bit of that with *Linger*.

I can't say too much about it without being spoilery, but we do get to lean heavily on secondary characters for *Lingers*. It makes it a lot easier, especially with first person. As a writer, it's really easy to get tired of being inside one head all the time and so, it's fun to jump to another character and see the world that you made in the last book from a totally different perspective.

LAURA: And it must be kind of fun, too to see your main character from a totally different perspective and maybe you *do* learn things about this characters that you didn't even know when you were writing the first book?

MAGGIE: Oh, absolutely! And one of the best parts about *Lament* and *Ballad* is that, in *Lament*, Diedre did some terrible things to James, her best friend, but since we're in Diedre's head, we don't necessarily see them as really awful. And some of the reviews say, "Hey, did you notice that Deidre was kind of crappy to James?" And it was fun because I already finished writing *Ballad* from James' point of view and he's observing Diedre has been to him.

And so, it was fun to go and see everyone going, "Hey, did you notice this?" And it's like, "Yes, yes! We noticed it. We wrote about it."

LAURA: Well, and I was going to ask you about your main characters next. They are so out of the ordinary and yet, believable. And you have this balance of supernatural and human traits. And I wondered how long it takes you to think through the characters and get them the way you want them before you start writing or do you just start writing and the characters come to you as you're working on the plot?

MAGGIE: Well, in my head, before I start writing, first of all, I always have to have the name because I think the name really makes you who you are. Since I legally changed my own name when I was sixteen since I didn't think my actual name fit me, I've kind of feel that way about my characters too. They have to have the right name to fit their personality.

And so, I know what personality will fit the plot in my head, but I don't really know them. And so, the first fifty pages of each of my first draft is appalling because I keep on writing the wrong dialogue and backing up and going, "That's not right. That's not right." And it's like my characters always existed like a statue inside a block of stone, but I have to chip away at the stone to find what's underneath. It feels very much like that.

And I remember when I was writing Sam for *Shiver*. In my head, I knew I wanted him to be the anti-hero, not so much the alpha-werewolf dude, very sensitive and creative. And in my head, I thought that he was going to be really into directing and movies. And as I was writing, he was having none of it whatsoever. Instead, he started spouting lyrics and emo-poetry and I just said, "Sam, if you don't stop quoting emo-poetry, no one's going to like you." But it was too late. That was what he was right there.

LAURA: Oh, good! I'm glad you let him come out the way he was meant to be. I can't see him directing movies either. That's too much of a control thing for the way I see Sam.

MAGGIE: That's actually very intuitive. And very true!

LAURA: Oh, let's see. When I critique young adult manuscripts, one thing that often falls flat in the writing is the dialogue especially when you have teenagers talking to each other. Do you have any tips for writing dialogue for young adult fiction?

MAGGIE: Well, if I get into a tricky part, I always try and say it out loud. But my biggest piece of advice is to feel. Whenever I'm talking with someone or I love the way they speak or they're really interesting to me, in my head, part of me looks like I'm Maggie paying attention to the conversation and being an illegitimate person. But most of me is actually being writer-Maggie and stealing all of little pauses and the weird phrases they say and ferreting hem away.

I was in Chicago a couple of weeks ago. And one of my cabbies kept on my saying, "Oh, my goodness!" He must've said it fifty times in between the airport and the hotel. And I just kept thinking, "I'm going to use this. Someone is going to do this." So, yes. Stealing, stealing is definitely the way to go with dialogue.

LAURA: And do you worry about stealing just from teenagers or if it's great dialogue, it's great dialogue? It doesn't matter who says it?

MAGGIE: I don't -- well, it's always been a tough issue for me because everyone said I was never a typical teen. I was -- my Mom said I was born old, born thirty. And so, I've never had teen dialogue myself. And I've actually read that in a bunch of my reviews where they said that my teens sound old, but I don't know. I think a lot of times teens use teen-speak to try and fit in with their peers and so, the more confident my characters are, the more I let them sound like adults. And then, the more they're inclined to give in to peer-pressure, the more I go and borrow and steal from teen speak. But it had been hugely helpful to do school visits and library visits and actually get back into the mix of all these teens, too. Yes, steal from them too.

- LAURA:** Well, and your characters tend to be in a lot of ways have more life experience than maybe the average teen does. They may be on their own a little more or they've experienced certain things that other teens might not experience. And so, that might make them sound a little older. Simply because they're more mature in some ways, I think.
- MAGGIE:** No, I think that's true, especially with Sam. He's basically been raised by adults. And he has not had any teen peers and then, Grace has basically raised herself and so, she's been forced to also grow up on her own. I think that's true.
- LAURA:** Now, you've mentioned in the print interview that we did for the *Children's Book Insider Newsletter* that you're a practicing Catholic and you worried a little bit about when you were writing the sex scene for *Shiver*. Your books flirt with many of the same issues that this sort of magical, supernatural elements that have come under attack over the years in other books for kids and teens not just from religious group, but from parenting group, watchdog groups in general. Is possible, potential censorship something that you even should be worried about when you're writing a book? Or is this -- did you take this under consideration at all?
- MAGGIE:** Well, when I was writing the sex scene for *Shiver*, in my head I kept thinking, "Aah, I don't want to be a bad role model" and, "Aah, this is going to limit the market I can send this to" and it's a really good way to completely shut down your creativity and in certain author's voice into a story instead of your characters. If you start motivating it with the idea that, "Oh, I'm going to be censoring it" or, "This is not going to be a good role model", instead of just following what the characters actions are taking you to.
- So, in the end, I just shoved that voice out of the way. You know what? This is not a guidebook. This is the story of Sam and Grace. If this is what happens, the best I can do is handle it respectfully and not put my spin on it.
- And I actually got the most brilliant fan mail the other day from *Shiver*. And she said something about how much she got to the end that all she could think with that is she knew one day, she would find someone that loved her for herself like Sam loved Grace. I thought, "That's brilliant! That's the more I want them to take away." And my husband, of course, says dryly, "It's a good thing they didn't take away underaged sex is the moral."
- LAURA:** Well, you're not breaking new ground on that level with young adult books. So...
- MAGGIE:** That's true! And *Linger*, of course, is my sex, drug and rock-and-roll novel. So, we'll see how that comes down.
- LAURA:** Have you got any on *Lament* with the whole -- the faeries and the folklore issue, has that any problems censorship-wise? Have you heard anything about that.
- MAGGIE:** Actually, I have. And people have been very good about that. I do have one relative who isn't very strong Christian. And she sent me a very stern email about how I should believe in good and evil and God, but I don't know. I think that if you read between the

lines with *Lament*, it's right there. It's that there are no evil faeries in *Lament*. The only good and evil comes from the humans.

While I don't get out that preachy, I'd like to think still that knowing that I'm Catholic in the back of the reader's head, they can read it and go, "Oh, I see."

LAURA: Let's shift gears a little bit here and talk about marketing. With the current technology out there, there's a lot of marketing systems in place for authors that didn't even exist a few years ago. And I think the traditional author tour is going by the wayside, where you actually have to get on a plane and fly around the country.

So, for example, on your website, you have a podcast of you reading the first two chapters of *Shiver*, a Q&A podcast and two book trailers, one from Scholastic and one that you made, which I personally liked better and I think is gorgeous.

MAGGIE: Thank you.

LAURA: And I keep thinking about it's all these cut paper pieces that flutter down from the sky. And I'm thinking how long did that take to create that? That must've taken you days and days just to get that effect.

MAGGIE: Oh, yes. Longer than I would like to admit, but it was a labor of love anyway. I always wanted to play with stop motion animation and this looked kind of -- it just gave me the excuse to do it. So instead of watching TV in the evening, I was cutting out hundreds of little pieces of paper and taking hundreds of photograph and photo-editing. Hundreds of photos and pasting them together and working on the sound track, so it's not *entirely* work. It was very fun.

LAURA: Great! It was worth it. It's really beautiful. Did you have to get any kind of permission from your publisher to read the chapters on your site or anything like that? I'm thinking of other authors who might want to do this kind of thing for their books. Are there anything they have to worry about along those lines?

MAGGIE: Well, I always like to err on the side of having permissions in place. But with the first chapter, I already had the go-ahead. I was up in New York City anyway. And they were doing extras for the audio book. And so, they had me come in and read the first two chapters. But even if they hadn't done that, I think it's -- studio time is not expensive -- now, it's about \$50.00 an hour. If I were an author, I would definitely shoot an email to my publisher and say, "Hey, can I have permission to do this?" And go in. It would take no time at all.

LAURA: And I think it's a really great way to pull people into the book. You hear the first two chapters. And you think, "I have to know what happens next." So, it's a great marketing tool.

Now, you're currently in the middle of a blog tour. We're recording this interview at the end of July. It's going to be on our site in August. So, the month of August, I guess you're doing a blog tour for *Shiver*. Do you want to tell me a little bit about that?

MAGGIE: Sure! I did an unofficial one for *Lament*. I had been blogging for a couple of years when *Lament* came out. And so, I had a pretty good audience. And I had some blogging friends. So, I had about -- I don't know -- twenty blogs probably featured me or did reviews and interviews with me. And so, I thought that it would be a good idea for *Shiver*.

So, Scholastic asked if I had a list of people that would be willing to feature me. So, I said, "There are about fifty people that I've touched basis with that I knew loved *Lament* or are really looking forward to *Shiver*" and I had all of them said that they were willing to do it. I thought, "This is great!" until I realized -- and I'm just realizing now because like you said, it's the last week of July and it's going to be going up for the first week of August, that's fifty blogs that I now have to do contact for. So, I have been doing interviews every single day and reviews and guest blogs. And I think answered the same questions about eighteen different ways. So hopefully, it looks cohesive across the board, but yes. It should be interesting to see all of this process going up next week, that's for sure.

LAURA: And the tricky part is people who read blogs tend to read lots of blogs in the same genre. So, you can't just cut and paste your answers from one to the next.

MAGGIE: Exactly! I try to make everyone a shade different. If someone was going from one blog to the next, to the next, I want them to be constantly entertained. And this is something that I always tell authors when they send me emails asking about interviews. It's not worth doing an interview if you're just answering the questions. You have to entertain, otherwise you're not going to get someone at the end of the day interviewed or head over to IndieBound or Amazon and buy your book. You have to give the same amount of thought that you would writing your book to answering the interviews.

LAURA: That's a great attitude for you to have and we certainly appreciate it on this end. And I hope you can keep it up with every book you have. If you get really famous and crank out a bunch of books, you may change your mind about that. But right now, it's wonderful.

MAGGIE: It's possible. Maybe next time we'll cap it at maybe thirty blogs for the next blog tour. Maybe not fifty.

LAURA: Probably a good idea, yeah. And you said you have been blogging for a while or you have been -- how important is it as an author to have a blog and just get your name out there in cyberspace a little bit?

MAGGIE: This is a dicey question because I always feel that with blogging, if you'd like to blog, a blog could be the absolute best marketing tool out there. But if you don't like it, it won't help you. I know it just eat your time up. I got into blogging before I was a full-time author because I was a full-time portrait artist and I did a lot of my marketing online. For a long time, I was blogging every single day on an art blog and putting up a new piece of art that I did every single day and selling it off the blog or on eBay. And so, it was basically -- that was how I made my living. It was by being entertaining and blogging. So,

I took that platform and moved it over to my writing. And I loved the blog. And so, I think that when people read my blog, they can see that I'm entertaining myself, at least. But you should see *some* blogs where you read them and they're very dry or they're full of post where they say, "Oh, I'm sorry. I haven't been blogging for the last two months. I'll be better", but that doesn't do any good for you whatsoever.

But right now, someone just asked me the statistics for my blog and my Live Journal blog right now is getting about 24,000 to 35,000 hits every single month.

LAURA: Wow!

MAGGIE: That's a lot of eyeballs. And when you go and take that and multiply it by those people who mentioned on their blogs or if they do a giveaway or a context, suddenly it becomes, not just something that you do on the weekends, but that can equal a lot of exposure.

LAURA: Exactly! And I've talked to a lot of authors who are afraid to start blogging because they think it's going to suck their time away from writing. So, I imagine there's a certain amount of discipline involved. But I would imagine blogging would be, like you said, if it's fun, it's more of a break from the writing that you might need. And then, you can go back to working on your book.

MAGGIE: Oh, absolutely! It's not at all like writing fiction. It's just -- once you get into the habit, it's like -- it's as easy as picking up a telephone and chatting to a friend about how your day went only you're being maybe slightly more cohesive than you would be on a phone call. But it's just -- especially when you have a very conversational blog, you don't have to pump out an article three times a week. Just do a little tiny short post that's, "This is what I'm doing", you know? That's it!

LAURA: Mm-hmm. Yup, and as you said, it snowballs into thousands and thousands of eyeballs. And it's a tremendous marketing tool when your book comes out.

MAGGIE: Yes, I actually use it in conjunction with my trailer. We did a giveaway and folks had to post a link on their site and then, come back and post a link on my blog. And I gave them an entry. And literally, within nine days, we had over 400 posts all across the blog. It's there, which was my cover, a link to my trailer and a link on where to buy it. So, it can be hugely powerful.

LAURA: Mm-hmm. That's great! That's great! And *free*, that's what's wonderful.

MAGGIE: Yes, *free* is important.

LAURA: To the blogger. Yeah, very important. Okay, my final question here. Is there anything you learned from this process? The whole writing, marketing, whatever process that was surprising to you? And that you might want to pass on to other aspiring authors who are listening to this interview.

MAGGIE: Yeah, actually. And it's especially been driven home as *Shiver* has been out for just a couple of days and has already exploded all across the country. It's kind of bizarre. But the biggest thing that surprised me is that writing doesn't change when you're published. The actual process of writing, the actual process of getting the characters down and getting the story out there, it doesn't matter how much people like you or how big your blog is or how well your book is doing. When it comes down to sitting down and writing that novel, you have to be exactly the same person. And *that* was the biggest surprise. I kept on thinking, knowing that this book is under contract should change things, knowing that people are waiting for the sequel should change things, but it doesn't. For me to really write well, I have to forget all that and just write, just be the person I was, writing all along.

LAURA: That's great! I've never had anybody tell me that before. And that's a really good point to have. And it doesn't suddenly make the words magically flow from your fingertips...

MAGGIE: No.

LAURA: ...because you have a contract.

MAGGIE: Right!

LAURA: It's what you're saying.

MAGGIE: Yes, yes.

LAURA: But you know, but that's good because what brought you to writing in the first place doesn't change. Thank you so much for speaking with me today, Maggie. I know you're really busy. And I appreciate you taking this time. And I'm sure that my listeners are going to get a lot out of your interview, both the podcast and the print interview in the August issue of the newsletter. So, thank you very much.

MAGGIE: Thank you so much for having me.