



BEST
BOOKS

AUTHORS

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

EXCERPT FROM:

Survival Stories Have Young Readers Hooked

BY SALLY LODGE | JUL 13, 2017

The theme of survival has perennial appeal for young fans of adventure stories. The destruction of Pompeii, the sinking of the *Titanic*, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks are three of the catastrophic events covered in Lauren Tarshis's *I Survived* novels from Scholastic, showcasing young people's resilience and strength in the face of unimaginable disasters. Launched in 2010, the series interlaces history and fiction, and has ignited the interest of booksellers, educators, librarians, parents, and kids: there are more than 23 million copies in print of the book and digital editions of *I Survived* titles in the U.S. alone. And that number will likely grow after the 15th installment, *I Survived the American Revolution, 1776*, pubs on August 29 with a 685,000-copy first print run across all Scholastic channels.

Reeling in Difficult-to-Catch Readers

Tarshis's inspiration for *I Survive* sprang from two distinct parts of her life. Almost a decade ago, searching for a way to hook the third of her four children, who is now 19, on reading, she recalled, "I asked him 'What kind of book would you *want*



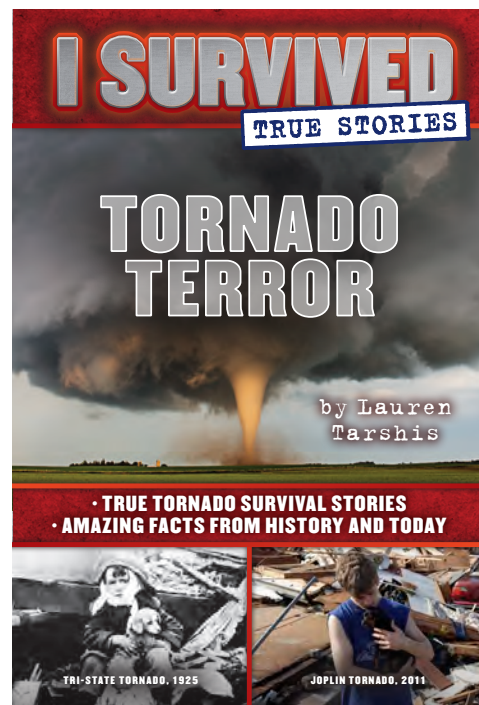
to read?' and he said, 'Cool stories that are about things like the *Titanic* or tornadoes and have a character like me in them.' I had written two novels about Emma-Jean Lazarus for Dial, and I love her so much, but I began thinking that maybe I should try to write a book for kids like my son. I never thought it would launch a series that is still going strong so many years later, but the truth is that now I feel a sense of mission to make these stories—which are not just about survival, but also about history, the environment, and human nature—accessible, and to get more kids reading."

Tarshis's professional life also fueled the creation of *I Survived*—and continues to inspire new ideas for storylines. A 28-year Scholastic employee and currently VP, editor of classroom magazines for the company, she edits *Storyworks*, a national language arts classroom magazine for grades 4–6,



Lauren Tarshis

PHOTO: DAVID DREYFUSS



as well as the recently launched *Storyworks Jr.* for grade 3. “When I became the editor of *Storyworks*, I recognized that there was very little nonfiction in classrooms,” she said. “I’d been told that teachers wanted fiction, poetry, and plays, but I remembered, as a child who was a struggling reader, loving reading real-life *Readers Digest* stories in my dentist’s waiting room.”

Though the author originally envisioned *I Survived* as narrative nonfiction, the lack of primary source material about children who have survived cataclysmic events led her to write the series as historical fiction. Feedback from *Storyworks* readers, and from kids she encounters on her frequent school visits, helps keep her supplied with book ideas. In turn, nonfiction adventure and survival tales that have appeared in *Storyworks* inspired Tarshis’s spinoff series, *Survival: True Stories*, which Scholastic Press debuted in 2014. That series’ third and most recent release, *Tornado Terror*, was released last March.

True Stories has been eagerly embraced by teachers, who pair those tales with *I Survived* books to shape classroom curricula. “With teachers using

these series side-by-side to augment their lesson plans, they’ve become mega bestsellers in print and digital,” observed Nancy Mercado, Scholastic Press’s editorial director, who edits both series. “There is significant crossover in the series’ material, so teachers and parents can use whichever channel works best to introduce these topics to readers—kids who like historical fiction can enter through *I Survive*, and nonfiction readers can enter through *True Stories*.”

And, added Mercado, both series show no sign of slowing down. “I have a running list of ideas on my iPhone, since friends, co-workers, and people I meet on school visits are constantly suggesting book topics,” she said. “And Lauren obviously has no shortage of ideas—her curiosity knows no limits, and she loves diving headfirst into these books. So as long as kids have such a huge appetite for these series, we’ll continue to do them. They could go on forever!”

***I Survived the American Revolution, 1776*
by Lauren Tarshis. Scholastic Press, \$4.99
paperback Aug. ISBN 978-0-545-91973-9**