



BEST
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AUTHORS

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

Lauren Tarshis Leads a Virtual ‘I Survived’ Field Trip

By Sally Lodge | Nov 15, 2022



Fourth grade participants in Tarshis’s virtual field trip from Karisa Schwanekamp’s class at Guilford Elementary in Plainfield, Ind.

On November 10, an estimated 88,000 students from 30 countries participated in a “virtual field trip” based on Lauren Tarshis’s latest *I Survived* historical adventure. Following the series’s signature format of placing a fictional character at the scene of a real-life disaster, *I Survived the Wellington Avalanche, 1910*, released in September by Scholastic, is the 22nd

installment in the paperback series, which has almost 50 million copies in print since debuting in 2010.

[The centerpiece of the field trip](#) is an *Adventures in History* video, narrated by Tarshis at the site of the Washington State disaster, which re-creates the catastrophic avalanche—the deadliest in U.S. history—and its aftermath. The book unfolds

through the experience of a young train passenger who is stranded during a blizzard in the Cascade Mountains when an avalanche strikes, claiming the lives of more than 100 railroad travelers. Tarshis interlaces the story of this tragedy and the resilience and courage of those involved with information about the history of transportation, life in the early 20th century, and the science of storms and avalanches.

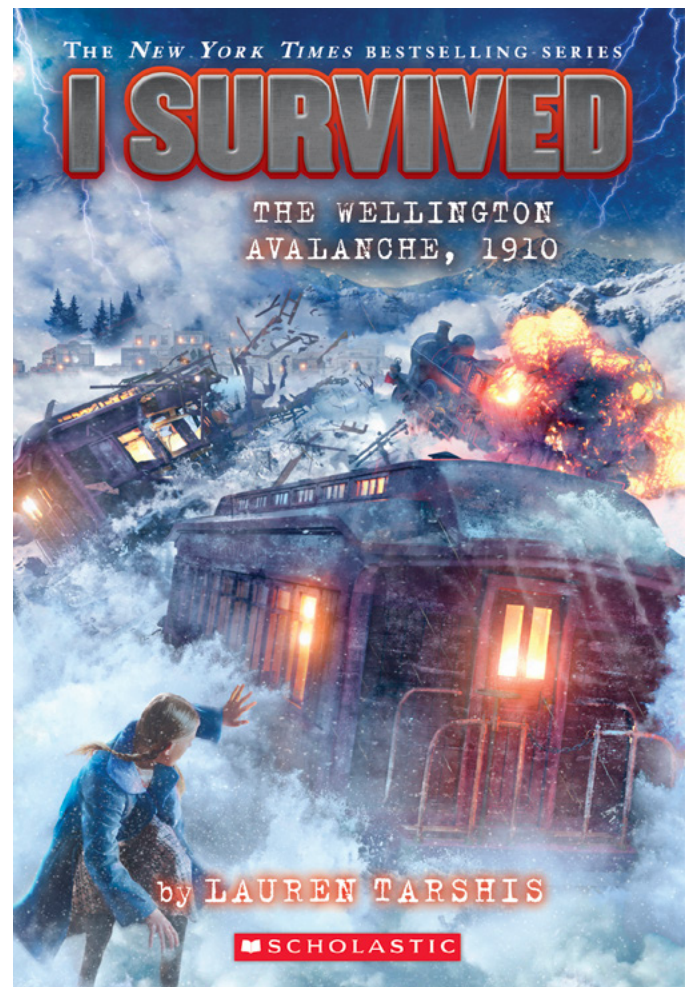
Other aspects of the virtual field trip included an interview with Tarshis; articles about the avalanche that the author wrote for two magazines, *Scholastic Storyworks* (for grades 4–6) and *Scholastic Scope* (for grades 6–8); teacher resources and lesson plans; and a sweepstakes entry form for a chance to win a set of I Survived books.

The Genesis of an Ongoing Survival Saga

Tarshis, who wrote two novels for Dial (*Emma-Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree* and *Emma-Jean Lazarus Fell in Love*) before moving on to I Survived, embarked on that creative path when, as the mother of four, she realized that there was a dearth of “engaging, well-researched children’s books about true events, written as suspenseful stories.” Over the course of a weekend, she recalled, she wrote a proposal for what became I Survived.

“I originally envisioned the series to be about long-ago natural disasters, events outside the realm of kids’ lives today,” Tarshis told *PW*. “But I quickly got input from kids who wanted to read about Hurricane Katrina and other events they had lived through, so the purpose of the series switched a bit. I also saw how often the books were being used in classrooms, so I began to create more nonfiction backmatter and material I could offer to teachers online for free. I was able to establish a strong connection with them, as well as parents, grandparents, and kids—and was soon receiving 50 emails daily.”

Tarshis has also benefited from interacting with



young readers through her longtime in-house position at Scholastic, where she is senior v-p, editor-in-chief, and publisher of Scholastic Magazines+, which is comprised of 23 print and digital resources, spanning pre-K to high school.

“Writing I Survived and working on the magazines is so synergistic,” the author noted, “between the input I get from kids and parents and teachers on book tours—and constantly reading students’ and adults’ views in the magazines. It was an unexpected, though interesting, crossover.”

Tarshis emphasized that her goal in writing adventure books and magazine articles is the same. “With both, I want to help kids understand events that changed the world and our ideas about things in a way that is immersive and exciting for them and will inspire them to learn more about related subjects,” she said. “I try to layer on as much

knowledge as I can without bogging readers down.”

The author is currently finishing *I Survived the Alaskan Earthquake, 1964*, scheduled for release next fall, which explores the quake that destroyed parts of downtown Anchorage, triggered multiple tsunamis, and, she explained, “changed our ideas about seismology.” As she does with all her books, Tarshis will travel to the scene of this disaster to witness the site personally.

Tarshis hopes that such initiatives as the virtual field trip to Wellington, Wash., will further enhance her connection to readers—and bring additional meaning to her *I Survived* stories. “I am so gratified and thrilled by the response to the virtual field trip,” she said. “The number of teachers who signed on was incredible! I get the chance to visit these amazing places I write about, and I’ve always wanted to bring kids along on my research trips. Creating these mini documentaries to offer immersive, virtual experiences to readers is an effective way to bring geography, history, and science to life.”



PHOTO CREDIT: DAVID DREYFUSS

Lauren Tarshis

***I Survived the Wellington Avalanche, 1910*
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