

## RAR 110 – S.D. Smith Live!

**S.D. Smith:** It got easier?

**Sarah:** It did get easier.

**S.D. Smith:** Did ... did get ... did get easier?

**Sarah:** Oh yes. Do you want to ask the questions?

**S.D. Smith:** I really do.

**Sarah:** OK.

**S.D. Smith:** So, Sam, tell me how do you do it all? How do get that sheen on your head looking so excellent?

**Sarah:** You're listening to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. This is the podcast that helps you make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.

Hello, hello, Sarah Mackenzie here. You've got episode 110 of the Read-Aloud Revival podcast. This is a fun one. I'm just going to say. It's the start of a new season and every Tuesday you can look forward to another brand new episode here on the podcast. Today will not disappoint. We're kicking it off with some laughter. I know a lot of you have been waiting for this particular episode and the reason I know that is because you've told me so. Listen to this sweet message I got from a young listener not too long ago:

**Child1:** "I went to a homeschool convention at Fort Worth, Texas with you and S.D. Smith. I'm wondering when the podcast with you and him are going to come out?"

## 2:45 Are you heading to a Great Homeschool Convention?

**Sarah:** Well, my dear, I am sorry I kept you waiting for so long but it's here. The podcast is here. So, here's what happened, listeners: S.D. Smith, the author of The Green Ember books and I went around to all of the Great Homeschool Conventions in 2018 and recorded a live podcast. It was so much fun. We talked about the newest book in The Green Ember series, about The Read-Aloud Family, about life and work, and imagination, and making art for kids. It was so much fun. We recorded those and then I pulled the very best parts out of each and put them together for you in today's episode. For those of you who don't know S.D. Smith's work, he's the author of several books including The Green Ember, Ember Falls, Ember Rising, The Black Star of Kingston, The Last Archer, and I think if you haven't met his work yet, if you just do a little search online you'll find out that there are a bazillion of kids, especially Read-Aloud Revival listeners, who love his stories. They have turned so many kids onto a love of reading and really sparked their imagination. Of course, you can find out more about them and get your hands on the books by going to SDSmith.net. Now, before we go listen to that I want to make sure you know Great Homeschool Conventions, I will be at all seven Great Homeschool Conventions in 2019. Those are happening in Greenville, South Carolina; Fort Worth, Texas; Cincinnati, Ohio; Ontario, California; St. Charles, Missouri; Rochester, New York; and Jacksonville, Florida. If you want to find out more about how you can meet me, come listen to my talks, and attend my favorite homeschool convention, go to GreatHomeschoolConventions.com to learn more. Now, before we launch into today's show I

want to make sure that you know that we have complete transcripts for every episode of the podcast as well as links to all the books and all the things we talk about in the show. You can find today's episode at [ReadAloudRevival.com/110](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/110) because it's episode 110, and if you know somebody who is not a podcast listener but would enjoy what we do here on the show or maybe hard of hearing send them that way because we have those free transcripts which are really handy, as well as links and notes so that you can just sit back and enjoy and listen, or fold that laundry, or drive those kids to soccer practice – yep, I get it – without having to take notes and stop and remember what we said. One more quick warning—there is a lot of laughter and you can definitely hear the crowd in this one. Because we recorded it live it's not quite the audio quality that we usually get here on the podcast but that laughter does get loud so I'm thinking this may not be an episode you want to have your ear buds in for. I'll leave it to you to decide but I just wanted to give you a little warning. This is going to be an episode that's fun, by the way, for the whole family, to listen to together. I hope you enjoy today's show. Thank you so much for listening. It's going to be a great season here at Read-Aloud Revival. So, here it is. Read-Aloud Revival Live with S.D. Smith.

**Sarah:** We have a lot of families listening to the Read-Aloud Revival podcast who just love reading aloud The Green Ember books. In fact, who here loves The Green Ember books? [Audience cheers] So, there's a few, a few.

**S.D. Smith:** Thank you, mom. [Audience laughter] She is so loud, it's amazing.

**Sarah:** She's amazing.

**S.D. Smith:** Yeah.

## 4:40 Meant for reading aloud ...

**Sarah:** So, my biggest question for you is you hear ... we travel around to conventions like this and you meet families who've read the books and first of all, did you write the books to be read-aloud specifically?

**S.D. Smith:** No. I'm very angry that that's happening because [Audience laughter] it feels like a misappropriation of my intellectual property. It's funny, because yes and no, because as you know, the books began as stories I told my kids. So, they were read-aloud, they were improvised in the moment, they were just stories, they were definitely audible. They were stories that I told them on walks and at bedtime and that kind of thing, so it was definitely an out loud kind of a thing, but then when I wrote it I wasn't thinking that way but I'm sure maybe some of that transferred over but I was delighted to find out that so many people were doing that and, sort of, because of you and your influence in our family we've, sort of, recovered that tradition. I would tell stories, improvise stories to the kids, but I didn't do a lot of reading aloud. But, I think, thanks to your influence, we do that quite often now and our family has gone downhill [Audience laughter] ever since. It's been great, it's been wonderful – so I love that. So, more consciously in the next books, I don't know if it's really consciously like I'm thinking about it, but I do sort of feel I picked up a little bit on those rhythms, but it was a surprise to me that people were like, "I can tell you wrote this to be read-aloud..."

## 6:25 Writing for children

**Sarah:** So tell me about writing for children because I mean see you at a lot of conferences like this, so I see you with families and kids who

are on fire for your stories and it's such a singular privilege, I would think, to make stories ... and I mean, as a reader myself growing up the stories that I read growing up were the ones that formed me, right? In a whole different way than the books that I read as an adult now, you know, like my own fiction. It's just different, it forms you in a different way, so what do you most appreciate about writing for children?

**S.D. Smith:** I appreciate that you asked and answered that question at the same time. I think that [Audience laughter] ...

**Sarah:** It's my podcast, I told you.

**S.D. Smith:** That's good interviewing skills there. [Audience laughter] Maybe I should take over. [Audience laughter] Yeah, but you hit the nail on the head. It's a huge privilege and it's a little bit strange in a way. So, it's super strange in one way that people care and are excited, that's just unusual. It's not something that you're always exactly super prepared for but in another way it's not because these are stories for my kids so I think it's wonderful that other kids and other families like ours like it and that they're into it and I like it too, and I think it's fine, and we're all kind of in this together, and I love that. The thing that I love about kids, and maybe kids that we meet at these kinds of things are so generous, they're so sweet, they're so special, they're considerate, they're kind, and I think that that extends to the sort of the way they behave in person but also the way that they're thinking about stories, that they're ready to welcome, hopefully, good things into their hearts and that they're ready to, I mean, surrender to it in a good way as in, like, just get lost in the story. I think, for me, that's one of the privileges, it's one of the great pleasures of writing is that I get lost in the world, I get lost in Natalia and I'm there ... actually, sometimes

when I'm out writing in the forge (that's my little writing, it's like a garden shed that we turned into a little writing hut and it's called "The Forge" because I'm a Smith and I work in the forge, you know?)

**Sarah:** Oh my gosh, I never put that together.

**S.D. Smith:** Ohhh! [Audience laughter] She's like ...

**Sarah:** I thought it was where you took naps. [Audience laughter]

**S.D. Smith:** So, I'd be out there writing and my family will come to bring me a sandwich or something and they scare me so bad because I'm just lost and they hit the door or something and I'm literally about to have a heart attack because I get lost in and I love that because I kind of forget about myself and that's such a treat, I think, especially when you're an adult you don't do that as much as you would probably like to, especially if you're as awful as a person as I am [Audience laughter] just forgetting and getting lost and thinking, 'Oh, there's all the anxieties and the worries are gone, I'm just kind of lost in this story,' and I think kids are just so much more naturally like that and I love that. I think that is a powerful thing and it's a privilege. I love it and I enjoy it and I love making jokes and things but I take that really seriously and I genuinely honored and I genuinely love these kids. A lot of people will talk about "Well, I'm doing this or I'm doing that, doing that, but what I'd really like to do ..." and I just feel like there is no "what I'd really like to do" right now...

## 9:27 If S.D. wasn't an author ...?

**Sarah:** OK, but here's a question that I bet some of the kids want to know because I always want



to know it, if you weren't a children's book writer what would you want to be?

**S.D. Smith:** Probably a better podcast interviewer. [Audience laughter] No, I don't know – that's a good question, I mean I'd love to be a professional soccer player, because I'm good enough to do that, [Audience laughter] and young enough definitely. I would love to do something like that but I don't know – it would have to be in storytelling but I'd probably want to be doing the same sort of thing but in a different avenue like movies or TV or something else. Or, actually the ministry, preaching/teaching that kind of thing, I love that sort of thing because I love the Bible, so that would be another thing that's very close to my heart.

**Sarah:** One of the things that I really appreciate about the books, and I really feel like all good children's books do this, maybe all books I may have to think about that before I say that, but all children's books for sure, I feel like a really good author can leave the reader with hope so even if you have an author like Katherine Paterson who's writing *Bridge to Terabithia* or Kate DiCamillo who's write *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* and they're sad books, they leave you at the end with this feeling of greater hope, because that's the truth that we tell kids. It's the truth that we should be telling ourselves, right, there is hope. And, I really appreciate that about your books. I feel like you do that really well with *The Green Ember*.

**S.D. Smith:** Thank you. I think that's so important because I love happy endings like, big time. I love the traditional happily-ever-after, that sort of thing. And, I like getting there, but the truth is that we live in the middle part of a story, I mean, all of us. I'm writing *Ember Falls* and *Ember Rising* are definitely middle stories but that's kind of where

we live and so stories that always resolve, you know, a child does something wrong, has bad consequences, chooses the right thing, and wins the championship, gets the pretty girl, everything happening, that can actually be more harmful in a way. Not all stories like that are bad at all but that can be, if it's as simple as that, that can actually be more dishonest in a way but if a story is where characters go through difficult things but they have hope and they endure, they are inspiring to me as person as a character in a big story where that is actually happening. Our friend, N.D. Wilson, he talks about how every child will have a death scene, every person will have a death scene. So, that's happening. We may walk through the valley of the shadow of death but hopefully we can say we fear no evil because of the hope that we have. So, I think it's important to tell truthful stories about pain and about darkness and I want to be sensitive to kids, I love kids and I don't want to give too, too much, and every parent's got to figure out what's too heavy but I'm more afraid of being too soft in some ways and giving them an illusion. I just mean I think we need to just tell the truth about darkness and light and hope.

**S.D. Smith:** Who's read *The Black Star of Kingston*? Anyone read that? [Audience cheers] So did you realize that there's a character named after Sarah Mackenzie? Yeah, there's a character in that and her name is Sarah Mac or Mother Sarah Mac and she is named for Sarah Mackenzie.

**Sarah:** The funny thing is he sent me the book and I don't know if there was a hint in your note that you sent with it or what but I read it and I saw Sarah Mac and I thought that's funny because that's really close to my name. [Audience laughter] I keep reading ...



**S.D. Smith:** Well, she never said anything to me about it and I went ‘well ok, it must be no big deal to her then [Audience laughter] that a character’s named after her.’

**Sarah:** That happens to be ...

**S.D. Smith:** I mean, the character does die, but I mean, [Audience laughter] no, she doesn’t, she doesn’t – not in the first book.

**Sarah:** No, you’re right. [Audience laughter]

## 12:37 S.D. makes fun of Sarah for a bit ...

**S.D. Smith:** We’ll see how it goes! [Audience laughter] Do you guys know about the Kate DiCamillo picture? Is anyone familiar with that story?

**Audience member:** Tell us.

**S.D. Smith:** I might have to act it out actually. So, Sarah, she – this is probably her second favorite author, I would guess – so, I wish we could bring up Alison and she could talk about the whole story from a first person narrative but I’m just going to assume that I knew everything about it just from this one picture. So, Sarah’s super excited to meet Kate DiCamillo. So, she waits in line for five hours because this is a big deal author and so she finally gets up there and she’s got all her kids with her and you know, kids are super excited to meet a famous author, that’s what you would expect. Well, here’s what her kids are doing. So, her kids, Alison over there she’s just smiling super sweetly with Kate DiCamillo and then Audrey’s the older girl, she’s really cool and pretty, and so she’s smiling, and then her son, Drew, he looks like James Dean, he’s like the coolest guy, he’s like [Audience laughter] Flynn Rider. [Audience laughter] The

kids are all just really cool and Sarah’s like this. [Audience laughter] If you could go look it up online, it’s the greatest picture because all the kids are so cool and calm and like ‘we’ve been here before’ and Sarah’s just like [Audience laughter] “I’m so excited to meet Kate DiCamillo.”

**Sarah:** The truth about what was happening that moment is I was trying to contain my excitement.

**S.D. Smith:** That was you down a few levels? [Audience laughter] Because that was like ...

**Sarah:** I thought I was doing a really good job. [Audience laughter] I was sitting there thinking, ‘She has no idea how excited [Audience laughter] I am to be here,’ and then we walked away and someone handed me back my phone, the lady who took the picture, and I’m like “[gasp].” [Audience laughter]

**S.D. Smith:** It’s a wonderful picture. [Audience laughter] I would use that as your author picture. [Audience laughter]

**Sarah:** Oh boy, I can’t even believe I’m saying this but we did put that picture of me and my kids meeting Kate DiCamillo in the Show Notes so if you’re dying to see it you could probably find it on Instagram by scrolling back or you can go to [ReadAloudRevival.com/110](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/110) to see it. I can’t believe I’m sharing that there. Anyway, let’s see.

## 15:33 Going full-time

The next thing I wanted to tell you was that I asked S.D. Smith about an interview I had done with him before. The first interview I did with him for our Premium Members for an Author Access Event happened a couple of years earlier. So, I told Sam, “Hey, I remember we had this conversation about how you told me you really wanted to go fulltime as an author but that was



not within your reach.” So, the next thing you’re going to hear is a clip that I played from that Author Access Event of S.D. Smith talking about his desire to be a fulltime author; that’s what you’re going to hear next.

**S.D. Smith:** Like everybody else who wants to be writer I, sort of, long for these long stretches of time where I can just wake up and go out to my office and work for three hours and take a break and then come back, take a walk. That sounds great and honestly, I want to work super hard, I’d love to be able to do that, I’d love for that to be my fulltime job, but not super close to that yet, but ...

**Sarah:** So, it’s still a dream that you’re working towards – to be a fulltime writer?

**S.D. Smith:** Yeah, I’d love to do it and so few people can do that, that I just feel like that’s a really, really hard thing but I don’t think it’s impossible. And I sort of try to approach it, again, like I’m not the Author of this story of my life, but I try to approach it with God, honestly, this probably sounds really pious, but like a lot of other things I just try to give it to God, or just try to say, “Hey, I would love to do this and you know my heart and you know what I want to do, and there’s a mixing of good and bad motivations in everything I do because I’m human but I think that I have a heart for kids , for writing stories, and if you want to make it prosper like this so I can do this fulltime then that’s what I would love to do,” but I try to say that God knows best.  
[Audience clapping]

**Sarah:** So, what do you think when you see that? And that was not that long ago. It was really kind of a dream, right?

**S.D. Smith:** Yeah. I just feel really grateful. And we’re not done, the story’s not over, but I feel so

grateful to be able to do that work fulltime because it does feel like the stuff that we often aspire to can be very empty, so praise and fame and money and that kind of thing, those are things that are exciting but they don’t have an endurance kind of a thing. But to be able to be involved – like we talked about earlier – to be able to be involved with families and giving them gifts, and loving kids. You and I have probably talked about this that in many ways we live in an age that’s sometimes grossly inhospitable to kids and to families. So, I love the idea of fighting back against that by trying to be hospitable to give good gifts to kids and that’s one reason why I’m so grateful for what you do because I feel like that’s your whole life is you’re giving tools to parents, you’re giving tools to people who are loving kids really well, and that’s what’s so cool about being in a place like this, there’s so many families that are very intentional about that. They’re doing things on purpose, we’re making mistakes, we’re too crazy about this, and not crazy enough about that. You guys are trying to do stuff, trying to do good things for your families, and so to be a part of that and to come alongside parents as an ally to them and to say this is a need, because it’s a need we have in our family, and to be able to be that kind of ally to families is such a privilege, such an honor, and I feel like that families have been supportive of us so we’re just really, really grateful to them and I’m grateful to God for saying yes.

## 19:00 His heart's desire ...

**Sarah:** When you see a picture on Instagram or Facebook, or wherever, a child reading your books, anyone of your books, what’s your heart’s desire for that reader?



**S.D. Smith:** I hope they paid full price for that. [Audience laughter] I wish they were as excited as Sarah is about Kate DiCamillo. [Audience laughter] I love, for those kids, gosh, I just want them to be living a story to be equipped, to be brave, to live the story through the inevitable pain that they're going to face, that they would be equipped, that they would have their imaginations will be armed, to understand what evil is outside and inside, and to be encouraged and inspired to not only know what's right and wrong but to love it and to want to embrace it. I want that. I want that for myself and I want that for the kids. I don't write stories thinking, 'How am I going to prop up this virtue?' I don't think that way but I think the stories are about that in a big way and I certainly want that for them while ... and really, on a real basic level I want them to be delighted, I want them to love, I want them to have joy, happiness in a moment, I want them to feel pleasure and to enjoy the escape. But as my friend, Heidi Johnson, said the best kind of literature is not the kind that tells the truth about the world, it's not an escape from reality, it's an escape into reality and I want my stories to be an escape into reality.

**Sarah:** I thought that. That's so beautiful. Because, one of the things that I think is so powerful about reading stories with our kids is that we get practice. Every time we read a story we encounter a character who has to overcome obstacles. So if we give our kids stories and stories as they're growing, by the time they're grown when they face those obstacles in their lives they'll know, they've seen, and they've borne witness to heroes finding what they need in themselves and in God to meet the obstacle, to overcome the obstacle.

**S.D. Smith:** Yeah.

## 21:25 S.D. takes over the podcast

So, who else is bored of her asking questions? Because I think it would be interesting if ... how many of you would like to hear ...

**Sarah:** Did you just call me boring?

**S.D. Smith:** Just ignore that part. I did say it, it is true, but [Audience laughter] let's not focus on that. But, how many of you would like to hear me ask some questions to Sarah Mackenzie? [Audience clapping and cheering] So, Sarah's books, our family's really influenced by her books starting with Teaching From Rest and then the new book, which is a genuine-like USA Today's Best-Seller, so people are very, very touched by what you're doing; my family, my wife, we all love you. So, you've done all this stuff, but your podcast has reached like, what? Four million ...

**Sarah:** Yep.

**S.D. Smith:** ... four million downloads. That is incredible. So super successful writer and podcaster and you've been writing blog posts for years, you've been doing a whole lot of things. So, some of us have been reading you for a long time. I have a question about your new book, The Read-Aloud Family, if we were a person who listens to the podcast, who's kind of been tuned in to the things you've been doing, the things you've been giving away for so long, is there still something in the new book for people like that? Or is it better if we're just people who are brand new to this whole scene?

**Sarah:** Conferences, and on the podcast, and email – I hear from families who have never really read-aloud or families who used to read-aloud but their kids are all older or families who have been reading aloud a long time, and kind of,



depending on where your family is in your read-aloud journey there's a different struggle that you're dealing with. But it's never usually just easy cake walk, right? So, it's either "I don't know what books to read" or "I don't really know where to start" or "I have a 16 year old who does not want me to read-aloud to him" or "My teenagers are going to scoff at me" or "I have kids I've been reading aloud to for a long time but I'm ready to have some good conversations about these books that we're reading and the ideas that we're encountering in them and so, how do we do that?" so in The Read-Aloud Family the biggest challenge was I wanted it to be a place where a family could be met where they are no matter where they are on that spectrum. So, the first part of the book (it's divided into three parts) is all I hope it's a lighting a fire, that was the hope, because—I don't know about you guys—but, in the middle of the week in a homeschool week when you're tired, your laundry's falling out the laundry room, and the dishes are behind, and my 12 year old's shooting nerf darts instead of doing his math homework, sometimes reading aloud can be the thing that falls off the radar, right? Because there's so many other things that feel more urgent and that you see in the immediate result for, it's not like you sit down and you read The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe to your kids and they hop up and they're suddenly more virtuous or something, right? [Audience laughter] So, it's not like we get instant results from reading aloud and you can, kind of, feel like it's the least priority; it's easy to fall off. So, the whole first part of the book is I hope a fire that reminds us how important it is, even if we can't see the instant results, how those long-term investments we're making a mark is. And, the second part is more practical and that's where it got challenging to figure out, how do I address the questions from

people who are new and people who've been here a long time? And I hope I did that. The hope was that everybody depending on where they were would find what they needed, and the third part is book lists. So, I would say I tried to write The Read-Aloud Family for anybody who either wants to or has been experiencing books with their kids and making stronger connections with their kids by using books in their family, reading books together. I don't know if that was answering your question because I usually come up with the questions not the answers. Did that answer your question?

## 24:47 Vision and heart for reading aloud

**S.D. Smith:** Yes, I wonder, just following up, so do you find that there's all this research about the value of scientific benefits, the brain development, all this kind of stuff that increases your ability to do well in other subjects, that kind of a thing, if read-aloud does all these things. So, have you found the difference between knowing the facts about read-aloud is technically valuable verses I want to be passionate about this—Is that part of what the first part of this is, giving us a vision, kind of like a heart for it?

**Sarah:** Yeah. I think once we experience it for ourselves there's almost no going back. So, I launched the Read-Aloud Revival podcast on kind of a whim, like four years ago.

**S.D. Smith:** Tell that story. That's a cool story.

**Sarah:** OK. So, I had read – how many of you have read Jim Trelease's The Read-Aloud Handbook? Anybody? – so I read that book when my oldest daughter, who's now 16, when she was 1. So that was the first time I encountered this idea that reading aloud wasn't just to prepare our

kids to prepare to read on their own. I always thought that you read-aloud to kids who couldn't read and then once they could read then it was preferred that they read for themselves. And that was the first book that challenged that. That said no, there is something else, that there's another benefit to reading aloud outside of that, and it's bigger and it's longer lasting. And so, I was reading aloud to my kids quite a bit but it really got amped up after I heard Andrew Pudewa give his talk, Nurturing Confident Communicators. And who's heard that talk? [Audience cheer.] So good. And his basic argument there is that to help your child be a good communicator, writer, or speaker, you want to read-aloud a ton and you want to help them memorize poetry. Then I started reading aloud a ton with my kids, and really was sort of gob-smacked at the differences I saw in their relationships with each other and with me and like this family culture we were building around books. We seemed to have our own almost secret vocabulary and inside jokes, kind of like when you watch a movie and someone else quotes something from the movie and everyone laughs ...

**S.D. Smith:** You're going on real journeys together and I would call them real journeys.

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**S.D. Smith:** It's not pretend.

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**S.D. Smith:** It's a real experience you're having.

**Sarah:** Yeah, and it's that shared experience ...

**S.D. Smith:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** ... especially with the older kids when they start butting heads with each other or with you, then it's like when you sit down and read

together everybody's on the same page now. We remind ourselves we're all on the same side of the fence, right? So, it's such a beautiful experience and I was, sort of, just amazed at this change in my family and I got so excited I thought I would love to do a couple of podcast interviews about this. I'm a tiny bit impulsive and so in the space of about 10 minutes I thought, 'It would be really fun to do a podcast interview with Andrew Pudewa about reading aloud,' and then I dashed off an email to Andrew Pudewa's marketing director, "Hey, would Andrew Pudewa like to be on my podcast to talk about reading aloud?" I didn't have a podcast. [Audience laughter]

**S.D. Smith:** She's a liar. [Audience laughter]

**Sarah:** I didn't say "my existing podcast" it was my podcast in my mind. [Audience laughter] So, the thing is this is Andrew Pudewa, he's not going to say yes, except that he did. And so, I get this email back an hour later, "Oh Andrew Pudewa would love to be on your podcast."

**S.D. Smith:** that doesn't exist. [Audience laughter]

**Sarah:** I've got to figure out how to start a podcast. [Audience laughter]

## 28:10 Why did people respond?

I really thought it was going to be four or six episodes, just some encouragement for my small blog readership about enthusiasm for reading aloud with your family and instead what happened is this took off. And I think the reason it did, and the reason I'm even telling this story, is because it really surprised me that it did, but maybe in hindsight I shouldn't have been so surprised because I think when parents who care about their kids and their relationships with their



families with everything they are find that they can make such a tremendous impact from this simple act of opening a book and reading a little bit with their kids we almost become fanatical about it, right? It becomes like a part of who we are.

**S.D. Smith:** And that's one thing that so many people respond to you I think so much that we hear about the homeschool world or another worlds, you just hear these "let me tell you how you're messing up and you need to do my way to do it better," and it never feels like that's what you're doing. It feels like you have found something that's amazing, you're just the person the most excited about it and enthusiastic and it's not fake, it's really genuine.

## 29:12 A new tagline

**S.D. Smith:** Did anybody notice in the last year you changed your tag line for your podcast? It used to be—does anybody remember what it used to be? "Build your family culture around cigarettes!" That's right. [Audience laughter] No ...

**Sarah:** See, this is why we edit so heavily when S.D. Smith ...

**S.D. Smith:** "Build your family culture around books" – that was the old label and then the new one is "Help making lasting connecting lasting meanings." That was it. And, it's so eloquent. That's really my favorite part, it's a great sentence. [Audience laughter] No, "Making lasting" ...

**Sarah:** "meaningful and lasting"

**S.D. Smith:** "meaningful and [\*\*inaudible\*\*] connections"

**Sarah:** "connections"

**S.D. Smith:** I've heard it before. [Audience laughter]

**Sarah:** "with your kids through books." What happened is I started writing The Read-Aloud Family and I thought I was writing a manifesto, basically, on reading aloud. And then as I was writing it I realized it was more like a manifesto on connecting with our kids and reading aloud ends up being the avenue we do that with. But the point isn't the books the point is the children, right? Like, the point isn't the books the point is the family connections, it's reaching our kids hearts; the books help us do that. But, as I was writing I realized that the reading aloud is important only in so far as it serves our greater purpose which is to reach the hearts of our children. And so, as I thought about that, too, when I wake up in the morning and I don't know about you, but I don't wake up in the morning and I'm like, 'how am I going to build a family culture today?' I'm like, 'how am I going to make sure everyone has clean underwear on before we go to co-op,' right? [Audience laughter] So it felt very daunting. I kept thinking on the podcast that the whole purpose of the podcast is to help families do this thing of connecting with their kids through books and it's actually very simple but so many of us, me totally raising my hand here, make things more complicated than they need to be, or build them up to be more complicated, and so I thought that's not really helping because when we say "Until next week, go build your family culture around books" or "just make sure your kids are wearing clean underwear" one of the two, whatever you can manage [Audience laughter] today ...

**S.D. Smith:** I think you should of made that ...

**Sarah:** Yeah, yeah.



**S.D. Smith:** That would have been a better tag line.

**Sarah:** So, I thought, actually, what the essence of what we're trying to do is connect with our kids, right? That's the point. So I thought, 'well, it's a kinder more generous thing to say at the end of the podcast is to go connect with your kids because you can do that in 5 minutes, 10 minutes of reading aloud, or looking into your child's eyes but you can build a culture that way, one read-aloud at a time, one day at a time, built over years, but that's not what we're really doing today.

**S.D. Smith:** What you talk about with the deeper thing, that's so important, because I feel the same way. C.S. Lewis talks about this and this wonderful quote that I'm never prepared with to actually do justice to, but he talks about how we think that it's the painting or the book or the ...

**Sarah:** Oh yeah.

**S.D. Smith:** ... sunset. We think it's something but these are things that the beauty comes along but what we're really longing for is something deeper. So that doesn't mean that they're bad. I believe in the power of storytelling profoundly and I don't think that stories should be reduced to tracks to try to teach good behavior or something like that ...

**Sarah:** Or utilitarian: I'm going to read this to my child so they are improved in this way ...

**S.D. Smith:** Right, right, right! I don't believe that but I also don't believe that, like you said, they're the ultimate thing. So, I love what you're saying. I think it's even what we long for is these connections and I think that goes back to even Trinitarian theology as far as that's the beginning of God, the connections, and the love and unity,

that's where we come from and I think that's what we all long for is these deep, deep connections. And all our connections in life are these images of this deeper connection that we have, that we long for.

## 32:52 Kids' questions

**Sarah:** Ah, that was such a fun conversation. I had such a good time doing those at the Great Home School Conventions with S.D. Smith. Before we stopped each time we asked some kids if they wanted to come to the microphone and ask S.D. Smith any questions about The Green Ember. Now, unfortunately, we weren't able to get good audio recordings of every child who did this but we did get a handful of them and that's what you get to hear next.

**Georgie:** What is your favorite character from the books you wrote?

**S.D. Smith:** Georgie. Georgie with a wonderful question: what is my favorite character from the books I have written? I don't know, so I like Heather and Pickett a lot and maybe Heather the most because she's sort of the main point of view character for me. I identify with both of them so I really like them a lot but I, sort of, kind of like Helmer a lot. I'm surprised by how many kids really love Helmer as another favorite. I hear that all the time, he's their favorite character, he's so mean and crotchety old man I think people love that for some reason.

**S.D. Smith:** This is Decan.

**Decan:** How did you feel when you got the first copy of your first book?

**S.D. Smith:** I felt happy. I felt grateful and scared because I didn't know what to expect. It was a bit of an investment and I was a little bit afraid that



not many people would buy it and so I, kind of thought, ... well, you know it's risking something. You're trying something. You're sharing something with the world from your heart and you just are a little bit nervous about rejection and criticism and that kind of thing. And I read this quote from J.R.R. Tolkien from a letter that he wrote and he talked about how afraid he was that The Lord of the Rings had been published. He said I'm afraid I won't be able to mind what is said, I'm afraid I exposed my heart to be shot at. And that's how he felt after writing the greatest novel, in my opinion, of all time. And so, I'm a lot like Tolkien, probably better [Audience laughter] ...

**Sarah:** I knew that was coming. [Audience laughter]

**S.D. Smith:** So, I remember just feeling like happy about it and I love the art so I was real excited about how good it turned out looking and I just thought, 'wow, people are going to want to read that when they see it,' and that's a little bit scary. I was happy and thankful, grateful, and scared.

**Sam:** What is your favorite book that you wrote?

**S.D. Smith:** Favorite book that I've written? So, the thing that most authors say is that that's like choosing a favorite book that I've written is like choosing my favorite child, which I'm happy to do [Audience laughter] (no, I'm kidding, my kids are all great), I think, my favorite book, gosh, The Green Ember's really special to me because it was first and it was our own family story but I really love the new one, Ember Rising. I really enjoyed that a lot, so it's probably my favorite one right now. Thank you, Sam. Sam, what's your favorite? The Read-Aloud Family? [Audience laughter]

**Sam:** [**\*\*inaudible\*\***]

**S.D. Smith:** The Green Ember or The Black Star of Kingston because it has a character named after her. [Audience laughter] Thank you, Sam.

**Child4:** Where did you get the inspiration to use rabbits as the characters?

**S.D. Smith:** Where I got the inspiration to use rabbits was a lot of people think I have a bunch of rabbit hutches and I'm keeping and taking care of rabbits and they run around my house and that I'm part rabbit or something weird like that [audience laughter] I don't (nobody's ever said that, I don't where it came from [Audience laughter]) but the truth is I didn't ... so, what happened was I was just telling my kids, my daughter stories. And there, we happened to be on the porch in our rural West Virginia home and there were some wild rabbits hopping around the yard and I just started telling her stories about them and she loved it and so I told her more and she loved those so I told her more.

Alright, this is Abby.

**Abby:** Did you like reading when you were little?

**S.D. Smith:** Abby, I did in a way and I didn't in a way. So this is another cautionary tale. When I was really little some people read-aloud to me, my first grade teacher and my mother read The Chronicles of Narnia. My teacher read Lassie and The Boxcar Children and books that I just really loved and so I loved storytelling and I was very excited about it. And I thought, 'Well, I want to be an author,' and I'd write little things there but then I sort of didn't read. I didn't pick up my own books. It felt strange to me. I didn't know a lot of men or males that read a lot other than, sort of, the Bible and spiritual literature, I didn't know a lot of people who read novels – that was mostly a



lot of girls that I knew, girls in my class, girls my own age would read, and that isn't why I didn't necessarily, I liked scored tonight and I just didn't see a lot of that. And I really regret that, so I kind of came to it pretty late. I came to reading pretty late so I think I started reading a lot when I was 15-16 and I just never stopped, and got crazy and read. I went from reading Tolkien to Shakespeare and was really loved British literature and got into that. So, I think a lot of boys (maybe less so in the homeschool community) but it feels like a lot of boys sometimes we can think they're a little bit behind girls their age so maybe it's tough to not be as good at something so that keeps us from trying things sometimes, which I think is a mistake. We should keep going and keep trying. So if it's been tough for you to be a reader I think it's never too late and I've had so many people say that they were reluctant readers and maybe *The Green Ember* was a first book, heard that from a lot of moms about boys who this has been the first book that they read on their own or that kind of thing and I feel super honored by that, partly because of my own history of being a little bit late at it.

**Lily:** I'm Lily, I'm 13.

**Sarah:** Awesome. What's your question for S.D. Smith?

**Lily:** My question is where do you get your passion for writing? Like, you have a stream of creativity, where do you get it from?

**S.D. Smith:** I think I was motivated to tell these stories because I love my kids and I like storytelling, too. But to actually write it down; that takes more than just sort of passion so I feel like it's more important, more important than passion is commitment, is showing up. Sometimes you

feel passion or excitement and sometimes you don't but you still have to do the right thing, you still have to show up for what you're called to. So, I feel like I did have that to some degree. I do have that, I feel that. You don't feel it all the time. But, I think as far as my own heart, like what I love, I think I talked about it earlier but I love my kids and I love all the kids who read these book. Before I started writing everyday I'd pray for the all the kids that' read the books, and because I love them and because I want good gifts for them and I know that I'm super capable of getting in the way, so I've asked to get out of the way, all my baggage. I want to give kids good gifts because I love them so that passion is definitely there all the time. And when other things go and book sales or popularity or other kinds of things they come and go and they feel good or they don't for awhile but that love and commitment I have to young readers is means the world to me.

**Sarah:** Ah, so good, right? That was such a great conversation. Thanks to all of you who showed up at our live podcast in 2018. I hope to do some more live podcasting at some point in the future because it was really fun to have a studio audience and to connect with all of you and hug your necks and see your beautiful faces and hug your kids, just loved it. Hey, if you want to connect with S.D. Smith you can do that at [SDSmith.net](http://SDSmith.net) and of course, in the Show Notes of today's show at [ReadAloudRevival.com/110](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/110) you'll be able to find links to everything we've talked about, all of his books, all that good stuff. That's [ReadAloudRevival.com/110](http://ReadAloudRevival.com/110). And just as a reminder if you want to catch me at a Great Homeschool Conventions in 2019 go to [GreatHomeschoolsConventions.com](http://GreatHomeschoolsConventions.com) for more information.



## 40:44 Let the kids speak

Now, it's time for Let the Kids Speak. This is my favorite part of the podcast where kids tell us about their favorite stories that have been read-aloud to them.

**Child2:** Hi, my name is Anthony and I live in Sugarland, Texas. I am 8 years old. My favorite book is *The Last Firehawk* by Katrina Charman. I like it because the firehawk throws fire at the ceiling and traps a jaguar.

**Child3:** Hi, my name is Emma and I live in Albuquerque, New Mexico and I am 16 years old, and it's really hard to choose a favorite book that has been read-aloud to me even. But, I would have to say that *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Chronicles of Narnia* series would be my favorite read-aloud by my dad and by mom would be *The Penderwicks* series. I like *The Penderwicks* because it makes just normal everyday life so exciting and makes you be able to realize the things that are so funny in our day to day lives. And, I like *Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* because they are so inspiring and give so much encouragement for our lives. I'd just like to say that I think we need more teenagers on here, so let's get to this, guys.

**Sarah:** Well, Emma, Sarah Mackenzie here popping in to thank you for your message and to say I quite agree. I love getting messages from teens.

**Child4:** My name is James. I live in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I am 13 years old. My favorite books that have been read-aloud to me would have to be *The Hobbit* series and *The Little House* series. Both of which I really like because of their adventure and because of the wonderful characters.

**Child5:** Hi, my name is Joshua. I live in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I'm 11 years old and my favorite book that has been read-aloud to me by my dad is probably *Lord of the Rings* and by my mom is probably the *Jeanne Birdsall Penderwicks* series.

**Child6:** My name is Anna. I live in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I'm 9 years old and my favorite book is *The Penderwicks* by Jeanne Birdsall. And, my favorite part is when Batty gives Jeffrey the picture of Hound.

**Child7:** This is Sarah. I'm 6 years old. I live in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and my favorite book is *Richard Scarry*. I like it because all the people are cats and dogs.

**Child8:** Hi, my name is Charlotte and I live in Albuquerque, New Mexico and I am 14 years old, and my favorite books are the *Ashtown Burial* series by N.D. Wilson. I like them because of the adventure, and suspense, and there's a little bit of romance too, so thank you so much, bye.

**Child9:** [Mom: what is your name?] **[\*\*inaudible\*\*]**  
[Mom: **[\*\*inaudible\*\*]**, how old are you?] I 2.  
[Mom: you're 2? And what's your favorite book?]  
*Good Night Moon*. [Mom: *Good Night Moon*.]

**Child10:** Hi, my name is Maya. I'm 5 years old and my favorite book is *Paddington Bear*. I like the part when he's scrubbing himself and when he's done scrubbing himself then he gets all fluffy after his bath.

**Child11:** My name is Josiah and I am 5 years old. My favorite book is *Junie B. Jones* and my favorite part about it when she was funny when she did Ella Mae's homework.

**Sarah:** Thank you kids. Gosh, I just love those messages. So I really appreciate you taking the time to send those in. Hey, thanks for listening



today. I'm so glad that we're back with another season of fantastic episodes for you. I can't wait until next Tuesday. We'll be back with episode 111, all about how to handle interruptions during read-aloud time, because we all get constantly interrupted during read-aloud time, right? We're going to tackle that next week, same place, same time. But until then, go make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.