



# Library podcast

## Heather Gudenkauf discusses 'Not a Sound'

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[00:00:36] Good evening I'm Stesha Brandon the Literature and Humanities Program Manager. Welcome to Central Library and to tonight's event with Heather Gudenkauf. Presented in partnership with a hearing speech and deaf center. We're grateful to university bookstore for being here tonight. We would also like to thank our author series sponsor Gary Kunis and the Seattle Times for their generous support for library programs. I would also like to thank The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors help the library to provide free programs and services that touch the lives of everyone in our community so to library foundation donors here with us tonight. We say thank you very much for your support. I'd now like to welcome James House communication specialist at the hearing speech and deaf center to say a few words about their work. So we have many brochures here on this front table and I'm from the hearing speech and deafness center. Which is here in Seattle and we provide a wide array of anything if you know of any deaf people hard of hearing people you know one out of five Americans has some type of hearing loss. Some of them might be completely deaf hard of hearing what have you but the services we provide are for. All of those people that can come to us and they can get

[00:02:07] Services such as new hearing aids we provide services for deaf kids we have education tools as well if people need speech therapy we provide that interpreting services you name it there's a wide array of services that we provide. We work with the state of Washington and we work to provide advocacy services as well. For example. Immigration issues anybody who might need their driver's licenses are having problem with the test for some reason we're able to help them with that help them pass the test. The list goes on and on. And my work is never the same. Every day something different and exciting so. That's what we do here at HSBC and we really are a great sponsor so thank you so much for letting us be here and be a part of this tonight. Thank you.

[00:02:59] Thanks so much James and Priya. And now. I'm delighted to introduce Heather Goodin cough. Heather is an Edgar Award nominated New York Times and USA TODAY best selling author. Her work has been described as masterful and intelligent and compared to the likes of Lisa Scott Elna and Jodi Pico. Her newest book not a sound introduces Amelia Wynne a former nurse who is

swept into an investigation that hits all too close to home. Here to tell us more. Please help me welcome Heather Goodin cough

[00:03:41] Thank you so much. I'm thrilled to be in Seattle today. This is only the second time I've been able to visit your beautiful city so I had a great time last night. I reconnected with a high school classmate of mine who I haven't seen in 25 years. So we were able to spend some time together last night and I had some time today to walk around the waterfront so beautiful. So thank you for coming out on such a beautiful night as well to talk about how I came to writing. I need to talk about. How I came to be a reader and it all has to do with a footbridge a library and a school. So when I was born I was born the youngest of six on Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota and my dad was a school counselor there and my mom was a school nurse and I grew up hearing stories of the wonderful people that my family worked with the families that they got to know their friends and we moved away from the reservation when I was very young. But these stories came with me and my family loved it there. But as things happen things change.

[00:05:00] We moved to Iowa and as a going away present my father's students built him and our family a beautiful toy chest made out of wood and sent it along with us to our new my new hometown.

[00:05:14] Mason City Iowa. So you may not may have never heard of Mason City Iowa but you may have heard of the musical The Music Man. Have you heard of that. So the music man is fashioned after my the town I grew up in. So in the musical it was River City Iowa. There's trouble in River City. You might be familiar with that song and it was written by Meredith Wilson who is a famous composer and so we moved to Mason City. When I was very young and many people don't realize that there really is a beautiful library in Mason City and you have to get there through a walking path a footbridge and in the story if you're familiar it's the story of a ne'er to do that salesman who tries to sell the town non-existent musical instruments. And there's this footbridge. This library and there is a librarian named Marian. Okay so there's a footbridge there's a library and even in high school I did have a librarian whose name was Sister Marion. But it wasn't at the public library so growing up I would watch my brothers and sisters I have five of them go off to school before me and I couldn't wait to join them. I wanted to have that book back. I wanted to have the school supplies. I wanted to know what they were looking at when they opened up their books and when they would write it on pieces of paper. And it was such a mystery to me. And I was so jealous I would stand by the door and wait for them to come home and you know here we'd play school. We would play. We had this in our garage. We would have a we had a big shelf where we would climb up and we would play a school there and I just couldn't get weight to get there one day. Well I finally got there and it wasn't what I thought it was going to be. It wasn't all that it was cracked up to be. I got to school and it was really hard. It was really really challenging for me.

[00:07:28] I was one of those kids who was always 2 3 20 steps behind the rest.

[00:07:34] I was the one who was always nudging her neighbor saying what did the teacher say. What are we supposed to be doing. And I was the one who was always still sitting in her seat while everybody else was lined up for gym and music class. And so I would come home from school

absolutely exhausted just so tired and I didn't know why. I just knew that school was really hard and I was not as good a student as my classmates. So once a month. From our spy school my age our teacher would hand out our library cards and we would walk across a footbridge to the public library where this wonderful librarian was there ready to read a story to us in the children's section and then release us into the stacks to find books that are just right for us. And I love that time of day. I just loved it. And that time when we were able to travel to the library and we were allowed to check out a few books but it was only a few books and I know I understood why I couldn't just you know just have an arm fall and carry the carry that back to the school. And but we could check out three or four and I had to live with that and that was OK but I would come home from school with my stack of books.

[00:08:58] I would come home to a very busy household five older brothers and sisters. My wonderful parents and we always had animals. We always had a dog. There was a cat or two. Sometimes we'd have journals and hamsters. For some reason we always had hermit crabs. And I don't know if it was the same hermit crab that we had for like seven years but we always seem to have a hermit crab or it was being replaced and we once even had a tarantula. Now to my mom's credit she didn't know we had it intel when she did find out it got sent to the garage for a while anyway. And so I came home and just wanted to escape. I was tired of my brothers since I shared a room with my two older sisters and I just wanted my own space so I would go to the toy box. I would pull out all the toys throw them aside I would grab my stack of books from the library I would grab a pillow and a flashlight climb inside and close the lid. And look at the pictures. So that was really where my love of reading began and my love of books. But in the meantime school was still pretty hard for me still really difficult and I was you know just had a hard time with it and didn't enjoy it like I'd really hoped.

[00:10:24] I knew from the time I was a kindergartener that I wanted to be a teacher and this was this experience I was having in school was really getting in the way of that because I thought if I'm not enjoying it now how am I going to enjoy it as an adult. So but one day a big RV type vehicle pulled up in front of our school and our teacher said you're going to take a test. And I thought Oh great. You know another test for me to do poorly on but so one by one each of the students would climb into this RV and we were met there by a very nice gentleman who said he was an audiologist and he sat me down and said All you have to do is raise your hand when you hear the beeps. And I thought I can do this. This is a test that I will do fabulous that I can raise my hand. I will be all right with this. So he put the earphones on and every time I heard a beep I raised my hand raised my hand raised my right hand

[00:11:28] Raised my right hand. And when I was done. I felt really good. And I got off the RV the little bus and trotted back to my classroom and went home. Well soon after my parents got a phone call and it was from the school and letting them know that I did have. A profound unilateral hearing loss which simply means I can't hear out of my left ear. But things started to make a lot of sense then. That's why I sat so close to the television set. That's why I didn't know what was going on on this side of me all the time where people could call my name and I would have no idea. And my brothers and sisters had a lot of fun with that. And that is why school was really hard because with my type of hearing loss noisy situations are very challenging. Noisy classrooms noisy restaurants and so I was quickly fitted for hearing aid a set of hearing aids which really did help but I had a love hate

relationship with my hearing aids. I was an active kid and I would at recess and in gym they'd fly off my head while I was running and I'd have to stop and pick them up then and put them on again. And so there are many times when I came home on the bus that. I would accidentally on purpose. Leave them on the seat next to me and my dad would have to drive us back to the bus barn and we'd walk through the bus bus up and down the aisle and darned if we didn't always find those hearing aids. But they did help and I quickly began to catch up with my classmates and did quite well. And but still with that was my love of reading. Eventually I traveled to the University of Iowa. And I. I went to school for what I had always wanted to do which was to be a teacher and got my first job. And. Interestingly it was. Back in Mason City. Back in the same school back in the same classroom where

[00:13:44] I had traveled to the library once a month with my my fourth grade class. So with my my own fourth grade students once a month I would hand out the library cards. We would walk across the footbridge to the public library where this wonderful librarian was there waiting for us and she would read a book to my students in the children's library and then release them into the stacks so that they could find books that were just right for them. And very quickly I realized why we were only allowed to check out three books from the library on those trips.

[00:14:24] So twenty five fourth graders over open water walking across a bridge is kind of frightening for a for a classroom teacher. So it made a lot of sense and I did impose that rule myself but I never lost a book over that. The sight of the railing anyway

[00:14:42] So. Yeah. So really went full circle with the library and my love of libraries excuse me soon after my first teaching job in Mason City. I got married and I moved to a beautiful city on the Mississippi River. Dubuque Iowa. It's where Mrs. Erick sees me where Iowa. Wisconsin and Illinois meet and as a wedding present. My parents painted that toy box this beautiful cream colored they stenciled roses across it and filled it with linens and towels and all the things that we would need to start our married life together and sent that with us. And I began a teaching career in Dubuque. I talked just about every grade level. Second grade. Excuse me third grade fourth grade special needs. I even taught sixth and seventh grade four at a time and really just started to live my life as as an educator.

[00:15:47] And there was something that I did as a teacher that a lot of teachers do. This is nothing new nothing unique to what. I got the idea from another teacher but every day we would end our class day with the students with a little chant so I would start with have a good and then everybody would say night and I would say watch out for. Cars and there's a reason I said that because as someone with a hearing loss I could never tell where sounds came from. And I did get hit by a car once in junior high. Perfectly OK but that was something that I always said with my students so watch out for. Cars do your. Homework read a

[00:16:31] Book dream big and then our best Winston Churchill accent never ever give up and I can't wait to see you again. And we would say this every day no matter what it wouldn't matter if the bus drivers were honking their horns it wouldn't matter if you know we're still putting on snow pants and hats and gloves. We'd say it fast walking down the hallway to to leave but we had to say those words.

And after doing that for year after year time after time I realized that those words weren't just for my students dream big.

[00:17:12] Never give up. They were for me as well and as I mentioned I definitely was a reader first but I also always enjoyed writing as and I thought I had a story in me to tell and I thought about it for a long time but the day that school got out for summer break the last time that year we said have a good night. Watch out for cars. Take care of each other. Dream big. I. I knew I needed to act on it so I went to the store about a beautiful journal. And started writing my first novel. The weight of silence in longhand and by the time I went back and got my classroom ready that fall I had the first draft completed and. I stuck it in a drawer. Because I didn't know what to do with it. I was a classroom teacher I didn't know anybody in the publishing world. So I went back to school teaching my third graders. And I finally at Winter Break pulled it out. The manuscript that I'd finally had put into a word processing form and looked at it and ask myself What are you going to do. Is it going to stay in the drawer or are you going to do something with it. I decided I needed to try and do something. So what did I do. I went to my library and got a book called The writers Mark which is a book that lists all the different publishers and literary agents in North America.

[00:18:48] And I looked through and I landed on one agency. I thought I'm just going to start with one. I'm not going to go crazy here. I'm just going to start with one and just see what happens. And the agency that I chose to send a query letter to was one that represented. The kinds of books that I wanted to write mysteries and thrillers and it also represented an author that I loved. And her name is Mary Pope Osborne. And so some of you might know that she is the author of The Magic Tree House series which is definitely not a mystery. Well they're mysteries but not adult mysteries or thrillers they're books written for third graders and youngers but younger children. But as a teacher I loved her so I thought I'm going to try this this agency. So I wrote a letter sent off my first 50 pages. And a few weeks later I was fortunate enough to get a letter in my mailbox asking to read the rest of the novel. Well of course I was over the moon thrilled and so I printed off the rest of the manuscript and mailed it off to New York. And I waited and I waited and I waited. And months passed and I didn't hear anything. So finally I got up the nerve and I called the agency and I said this is Heather from Iowa.

[00:20:15] Like I'm the absolute only Heather in the state of Iowa. It took her a few moments to figure out who I was. But we she asked a few questions and figured it out. And she said yes I think we can work together but your manuscript means a lot of work. And she was right of course. So she and I spent the next year and a half working on the manuscript the weight of silence and getting it in better shape. And so how that would work at the time so this was back in. Oh 2006. I would print off the manuscript. Send it to Maryanne. She would write all over it with all her red marks and suggestions and she wrote on it a lot and she would mail it back to me and then I would make my changes print off the manuscript mail it back to her and this went back and forth for a year and a half until I had a stack of papers about this high in my basement which my husband loved by the way. And about. A year and a half year of years worth of work. And finally finally the day came and she said I think we're ready to send it on to publishers. And of course again I was thrilled. And so she how that works is that my my agent would send the manuscript off to a few publishing companies and then wait to hear a response.

[00:21:47] And I thought OK you know this is good. And then the rejection letters started coming in one after the other. And so Marianne would send me copies of the rejection letters and she would always write these very lovely notes on them. She would say their loss or they say they like your writing or you know they really liked the story. And those came one after the other and after the other side of course was very disappointed. And I did what many many people do when they're faced with disappointment. I went into our pantry which had a pocket door that slid shut. I pulled the phone in with me back when phones headquarters and I called my mom and I cried and I said they don't like my writing. And of course as moms tend to do. She had wise words. She said you want to ever. Picks up your book if they do to love it as much as you do. And of course she was right. So after a year and a half at Mira Books I. Decided that they wanted to publish the way to silence. So of course again over the moon very exciting and the publishing processing process was in place and I went on with my education life.

[00:23:11] And I started to think of ideas for for a next novel and by this time I have. Had three children three grade school aged children and so they were very excited for for me as well as was my husband. But as life tends to do during the good times and it. Comes it comes to a kind of hit us in the face once in a while reality. And so at the time my my oldest my son was 13. And he is a tall kid so he probably was just about six foot in seventh grade and he grew really fast that fall and he was a active kid who played basketball and football and wrestled and he started complaining of like pain and like the good mom I was I said take an aspirin. I said you know put some ice on it you're fine. It's growing pains. And he continued. To say it hurts so I did make an appointment with our family doctor and our family doctor just kind of looked at it and said well you know I don't know what could be wrong but I'm going to send you to the orthopedic doctor just to take a closer look. And so we made an appointment for a couple of weeks later and somehow my mom spidey senses kicked into gear finally and I decided I didn't want to wait a couple weeks. And so I called and was fortunate enough to get.

[00:24:48] An appointment within a few days. So we went and we saw the orthopedic they took x rays he messed around with his leg a little bit and while we were waiting for the x rays to come back Alex and I were just chatting about school it was conference time it was spring and talking about you know what the next sport he was going to play that summer. When the doctor came back in and he walked in and said. This is not good. This is not good at all. And he put the x ray up on the screen and even from my nonmedical I could see that there was a big problem tumor which I remember it as being this big word more reality it was about this big on his leg and. I pulled the doctor out into the hallway and I said is this cancer. And he said well we can't know without a biopsy but yes. It's cancer. So within a few days we were at the University of Iowa hospitals and clinics. My son had a biopsy a port put in and started chemotherapy even before the biopsy came back and he was diagnosed with osteosarcoma which is bone cancer. And so once again you know life how it tends to to wake us up once in a while and we learn what's really important. So yes I did have a book coming out but of course it didn't matter and we spent the next nine months in Iowa City.

[00:26:24] Two weeks there when we come home a week there we come two weeks there for his treatment. And during that time I started my my second novel these things hidden which really was. In

a way a blessing. Because what 13 year old child wants his mom sitting next to him staring at him the entire time you know he's getting treatment. So I would go off into a little corner and do my writing and he would watch his top of his computer or play games and such and. Do his part in trying to heal and get better. So when the book came out in June my son was getting chemotherapy. We had just decided that our course of action would be an amputation above the knee amputation. It was just the best choice for him and he ultimately made that decision. We gave him the options and we're crossing our fingers that that's what he would choose. And he did. And I got the call that the way to silence had landed on the New York Times bestseller list and of course it was thrilling and it was bittersweet. But my son was getting chemotherapy so I said thank you. This is very exciting. But I I have to go. I'm thrilled to say though after nine months of treatment Alex

[00:27:59] Did great. He was considered cancer free. A few years ago. So now he is eight years cancer free. He is a going to be a senior at the University of Iowa. And nothing can hold him back.

[00:28:15] He he has ski. He. Yes. Thank you. He skis he

[00:28:22] Wrestled in high school. He does jujitsu now which I think is amazing and kind of scary to me. But he he does really well with that and his two younger sisters who you know sometimes siblings of cancer get kind of left. Behind a little bit. And they of course were such great troopers but they're doing great as well. And next year I just had this past Saturday my youngest graduated from high school. So I'll have I'll be an empty nester coming this fall and I'll have three children at the University of Iowa which I'm thrilled that they're all going to be in one place. Funny that you know people say to us we should get like an apartment for them or a house a fixer upper so it'd be cheaper than living in the dorms. But I said they they worked 18 years to get away from each other. I don't think they want to live in the same place. But but Alex is doing great and now I am. Now I am. Six novels and. Just finished my seventh novel and. It's been wonderful. Back though to that toy box. So now when I get together with my siblings I my five older brothers and sisters we all live within the Midwest and several of us in Iowa. Will get together and we'll talk about. Do you remember the time when Molly my sister released her and her bird her parakeet out into the wilderness to set it free just two minutes before a hailstorm or somebody will say Do you remember when Patrick got in the fender bender when mom and dad were in Minneapolis at the Neil Diamond concert and somebody will say Do you remember the time when Greg brought home the track Charla.

[00:30:16] And I would say no I don't remember that I don't remember that at all and my brother Greg of course would say that's because you were always in the toy box. So I'm thrilled to say I'm out of the toy box but I do I do still have that toy box. Of course my children played with it stored their toys in there but now I keep it in the area where I do my writing and I put those stacks of manuscripts that I print out are stored in there while I'm working on a project along with my other writing supplies. But I'm thrilled to be here today with you. So excited to share. Not a sound with you as was mentioned. It's about a story about Amelia Winn who was a nurse who was deaf and due to. A hit and run accident and we meet Amelia a few years later. She had lost her hearing. She'd lost her career her family and was just pulling herself out of this abyss mostly self-inflicted. And we're meet. We meet her when she's.

[00:31:25] Paddle Boarding along a river. Much like the Mississippi River where I live with her service dogs ditch and they come across a frightening discovery as they're traveling down the river. And very quickly I pulled into a mystery that could cost both of them their lives. And so for many reasons this novel has been a very it's a very personal one to me and I won't go into big details. I don't want to give any spoilers away but it really is one of my favorite books. I love the characters of Amelia and stitch. I think they're quite the team and I'm hoping that one day I can write some more about their adventures together. I would love to answer any questions that you may have. And anything about writing reading. Whatever you want to ask about. That's the question is am I still teaching I am still involved heavily with education. I'm not in the classroom anymore. I am our title 1 Reading coordinator for our school district. So I work with reading programs for children in high poverty areas in our inner city so I I work 88 percent of the time is what my schedule is of four days a week. Oh my goodness so the question is what is the best sentence structured sentence I've ever written. I have no idea. I could not answer that question. Hopefully there's one in there. Yes.

[00:33:04] So the question is I wrote a book a few years ago that came out right about the same time as a school shooting. And the name of the book was one breath away. And it is based. It's a story about a school intruder and it came out just a few weeks before Newtown and which was just horrible. And. Immediately I called my my publisher and said you know do what you have to do. We don't. We can pull it from the shelves whatever needs to happen. And they didn't do that. But of course it was a very difficult time. So the story is about a very small town and they don't have too many of these schools anymore.

[00:33:48] But there are there are a few left in Iowa where they it's a k 12 building. So it's. And I don't know if they have those around here too once in a while usually in rural or smaller communities. And so it's the story of an intruder in a school. I really got the idea from I was at the University of Iowa at a time when one of the first. Well publicized or well covered school shootings took place and gang glue was the name of the the young man who opened fire fire with a gun in classrooms at the University of Iowa. And while I was well away from the danger I was on campus that day and saw the police presence the ambulances. And that really had a huge impact on me especially as someone who was going to go into the classroom as a teacher. And when I started teaching I started at a very small private parochial school. Where I would work till midnight with my windows open the door propped open. You know there was no school there wasn't such thing as school security back then.

[00:34:55] And then after Columbine of course that all changed. So I've seen the change over the years of very tight no security to very very tight security where parents have to have background checks to get into some of our schools. And so I wanted to write about that in not a sound but. Unfortunately. Sometimes these terrible things do happen in real life.

[00:35:24] What other questions. Yes thank you. So the comment was to thank thank me for representing a deaf character



[00:35:36] Accurately somewhat accurately in this situation. I hope I'm capturing it that way. And I had a lot of help obviously and my number one goal was to be as respectful to those with hearing loss as I possibly could because I can hear a struggle you know admittedly in noisy situations but I can hear. So I did call on a lot of people to help me. I visited with a deaf and hard of hearing teacher in our community. Speech pathologists. My brother is a doctor of Cardiology largely because of my hearing loss. He went into that field and I had early readers who are profoundly deaf who were able to give me some really good information and hopefully I captured that in an accurate and respectful while telling a hopefully compelling story.

[00:36:35] So thank you for that. Those kind words. Yes.

[00:36:40] Thank you. Thank you. So I tend to write most of my books are written from multiple perspectives so it's the stories told from multiple points of view. And I always compare it to a relay race where the characters are passing the baton to the next character to tell the story and I really enjoy writing that way. Not a sound is told from one perspective it's one of the few books that I've done that way. But I tweet a tweet around with telling it from the point of view of Jake that the police officer from the other characters in it but it really is this. For this particular book it's Amelia's story and I really wanted to have her voice represent the story but thank you. So the question is

[00:37:29] After 6 and 7 books what has been the biggest shift for me and what have I learned. I think I have learned that it's possible to do several things that you love at once. It is a balancing act. I'm first and foremost a mom and so that always takes precedence. I love my education life. I come from a family of educators My dad was a teacher. My great aunt was a teacher in a one room schoolhouse at one point and I have a brother who is a teacher and some nieces that are our teachers and I love that life.

[00:38:08] I love the education life and I love my writing life but it's a balancing act so knowing how to balance those it's been a challenge and I don't always do it well sometimes they do it horribly. But keeping in mind that to do the things that you love is very important and that's important to me

[00:38:28] The question is what authors do I read today. I read just anything I can get my hands on. I love Anita Shreve and Ann Patchett is a favorite of mine. I love Barbara Kingsolver. Mystery wise. I am a big fan of test Gerritsen Louise Penny is a Canadian author who writes a mystery series that I love. It's called the US inspector Ghosh Marsh mysteries and it's set in Canada and a town called Three Pines and this is how I described the series.

[00:39:04] I think there's 10 books about 10 so I say oh the after I read the first book I thought oh these are interesting characters. The second book I wanted to to go and visit three pines by the third book. I wanted to move there by the fourth book. I wanted to buy into the bookstore that one of the characters owned and so I'm pretty sure I'm going to retire there but I don't think it's a real place but it's a great series by Louise Penny.

[00:39:35] I'm also a big fan of non-fiction. I read a lot of non-fiction historical. Works. Candice Malard is one of my favorites and a book that she wrote called River of Doubt is the true story of how Theodore Roosevelt Teddy Roosevelt traveled down the Amazon River

[00:39:57] After he was president with his son. And it was the most harrowing book I think I've ever read. I mean and it's true I never learn that in in high school history class but sold lots of books I really really loved to read lots of authors What did I read as a child.

[00:40:16] Oh yes I read the Little House on the Prairie books over and over and over again. I loved Nancy Drew. And I was a big fan of the Ramona books. Ramona Quimby by Beverly Cleary. Those were favorites of mine as I got a little bit older and I I liked. Like. Jump like from. Jesus and Ramona to Stephen King. Much to my parents. You know. They didn't like that very much. But I have always had love to read. And one time my mom caught me reading the thorn birds and I was in junior high and she said What are you doing. And I said well it's the second time I've read it. So. So I had a wide range of likes as a young reader to

[00:41:10] I would love to sell if you have any questions about writing or books that you'd like to ask me personally I'd be happy to. Or if you'd like me to sign a book I'd be glad to aswell but thank you so much for coming out on this beautiful night. I know many of you probably want to be out there because it is so lovely but thank you for coming. Thank you.

[00:41:35] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.