

Reading Is Fundamental

<http://katiedavis.com/rif/>

Hi everybody – It's me, Katie Davis. I'm an author and an illustrator, and I thank you for joining me on my Podcast where I talk about everything to do with Children's Literature, also known as KidLit.

(KATIE)

Well, as usual, I know you're bored of me saying this, but I have a great show today! I do, I really do! We've got questions from listeners. We've got a fantastic interview with Carol Rasco, who works for Reading Is Fundamental. It's really interesting talking all about literacy and that's our bag right? Spreading the gospel of KidLit.

We are also going to talk a little bit about the Highlights Foundation Workshops that you cannot miss, you really can't! And, what else...oh, and we've got a review from a new reviewer, Mr. John Schumacher – Mr. Schu, so I'm excited about that.

If by some weird circumstance, you cannot join us in person, at least join the Tweetchat. Everybody whose there is going to be in on it. My monthly Tweetchat with my co-host Elizabeth Dulemba and Dianne de Las Casas is every first Wednesday of the month, from 6 to 7 Eastern Time. So, on Wednesday, March 7th, we will be doing a Tweetchat with everybody involved and you've gotta come. The Hash tag is #KidlitPRChat, okay? KidlitPRChat and, of course, I will have a link in today's show notes and the day that the Tweetchat's happening, there will be something on my blog also.

Another debut we have today is our new monthly, Julie Hedlund segment.

All right, the show is sponsored by Highlights and not only that, but I will be appearing at a Founder's Workshop, which you may have known if you've listened to the podcast in the past. I just recently had an episode with all the people who are going to be at the Founder's workshop with me. It was Episode #81, and there will be a link in the show notes for this episode, but it's Katiedavis.com/makingthewebwork.

The thing is about this, it's March 4th - 8th 2012, and it's called "Making the Web Work For You," and what you may not know is what an intimate setting it is there, in the middle of the woods in Pennsylvania. There are only, I think it's only ten people are going, and they have two spots left. So run, do not walk, to your computer and go to their website. The link is in the show notes as usual, but it's Highlightsfoundation.org. I mean really, really great opportunity to just learn what you've been meaning to learn all this time. We're there for five days; it's just us, in the woods, you know we're

hanging out. I've seen the schedule, and we are going to be kicking it. It's not, we're not going to be like sitting in the sun...well, there's not going to be sun in March, but we're not just going to be lazing around. But it is, it's kind of like camp, you're all together, you're eating together...by the way, the food is to die! You're learning together. You really get a lot of intimate one-on-one attention to what you need to learn. It's all about media promotion and websites, blogs, social media, social cataloging – Skype and podcasts and building a, you know that word...*Platform*, um there are social marketing guru's there. Laurina Cashen and Bobbie Combs have a company called We Love Children's Books – they are a consulting firm, and Lindsey Leavitt, who is the author of the *Princess For Hire* series and she's a very popular blogger. You know, it's all about improving your social savvy and if you're just starting out, you can learn about website design and innovative, painless marketing techniques, and if you're already doing stuff, but you want to take it to the next level, there's stuff for you too. So, really, get....you're not at the computer?? What are you walking or doing laundry right now? Come on, go to the computer, sign up!

Now, there's one other thing I want to tell you about; another workshop you cannot miss. If you're writing multi-cultural books...or want to start writing them just to go to this workshop. It's called Creating An Authentic Cultural Voice, and they have space left. It's putting imagination, experience, empathy and research to work for you. It's April 26th - 29th, and I am a huge fan of every single person whose gonna be there! I'm not kidding you! The workshop leaders are Mitali Perkins and Donna Jo Napoli, so right there, oh my gosh!

The special guests are Kathryn Erskine and Alvina Ling. Alvina holds a special place in my heart because she helped me get *The Curse of Addy McMahon* to a completely other level. So, I know she's brilliant okay, because I've worked with her. I haven't worked with "officially," but I've worked with her unofficially, and you know, Kathryn Erskine is a National Book Award winner for *Mockingbird*, so this is no slouch line up all right? You really need to do this. And what I was told, when I was talking about this with one of the people that works at Highlights, and they were saying that when you're writing between cultures you need to do it in an authentic way, and that's what they're going to be talking about at this workshop. Again, it's the same kind of thing, the same intimate thing. What they're going to show you is how and why you need to spend a lot of time on research rather than just experience, because a lot of people feel like if they are part of a culture then they can write about it, but that's not necessarily true if you don't also have good quality research behind it. So, they're going to be doing it and Mitali says this thing "you should never write about a culture unless you've held what are their babies." You know, you *really* know the value that is embedded in the culture and is important to them so go on, I'll wait, I'll wait right here. (laughs)

I also want to say that today's podcast is also brought to you by audible.com yes it is! Yes, it is! They approached me and so it is now also brought you by audible.com and my listeners, my beautiful listeners of Brain Burps About Books will get a free audio book download at, and I my own very own special URL audibletrial.com/brainburpsaboutbooks.

You can get a bazillion, okay, not a bazillion, over a hundred thousand titles and you can get it for your iPhone, Android, Kindle or MP3 player; we will talk a little more about that later, but if you go to my website, and you click on where it says you can get the free...you can get a free audio book just to do this free trial. Okay? It's very cool and I've listened to their books. They're you know, I love audio books...*Hunger Games*, you can listen to *Hunger Games* when you're walking, but then you have to listen to me while you do your laundry, so...

All right, we're going to get to it now.

(Questions from listeners)

All right, here we go, we have a question from somebody who does not want to necessarily be named, but he says:

"Katie I have a question that someone of your experience can give an opinion on and I'm starting to write an illustrated children's book about sickle cell and I'm stuck about which angle to take. My thoughts were that since one of the ailments of sickle cell is making you physically weak, I would do the opposite for my character and make her strong, basically whatever the condition that hurts her is flipped to make her able to endure in a superhero kind of way.

The other idea was making her someone with a photographic memory who remembers things through songs and singing. They are two different ways I would like to handle the telling of a girl with sickle cell, I'm just stuck on which path to take. Any advice on this matter would be greatly appreciated and helpful. Thanking you in advance for your time both with reading this and podcasting."

(Katie)

All right so here it is, this is my opinion and it is just that, you have to remember that, it's one person's opinion. You said you were just starting to write it, so just sit down and write the thing. Just start writing whatever you feel the story needs, just let it take you. I'm not a plotter. I know there are people who sit there and plan everything out; I'm a plunger, I'm not a plotter. So my advice to you to just sit down and start writing it; plunge right in there get to it. It's a much different process thinking about should I go this way? Should I go that way? To take a story and then you're sitting and writing story different,

things happen when you're writing. Okay? Get a draft down and see if it's working. You can always change it. I know how it is, you're kind of frozen like Oh, which should I go? and then you never write it. So just write it. Write one of them and if you don't like it, change it.

Now, having said that, more specifically, if you create a character with the disease that manifests differently for her than for other patients, i.e. your readers, you might want to imagine how those readers will feel - like why is this happening to me but she has the same disease and that's not happening to her. I don't know. I don't know about this disease. I don't know, but my guy tells me to give her issues that are identifiable to your readers while giving her the spirit of a superhero would be awesome. Like her attitude... When you're hit over the head with bad health of any kind, the only thing you have control over a lot of times is your attitude and that is a really hard thing to maintain a good attitude and positive and so especially in extreme cases and Sickle Cell I know is an extreme disease, so I think that...think about the reader.

Okay we're going to go to the next question. I really like this question because I have strong opinion about it.

"Hi Katie I have a question about commenting on blogs. I'm looking forward to doing this and I've been advised to add my URL to the end of my comment to also help with exposure and promotion. As an author, do you suggest doing this?"

(Katie)

I think this is a very good question and I'm really glad you asked. I both personally believe what I'm about to say, and I've also read this and a lot of other places. You should not add your URL in a comment. It's considered very tacky and pushy. It is, that's just it. It's tacky. Now there are ways to do it that's respectful of the blog owner though. Now say if the post is about books with the subject of dancing bears, and you happen to have a site all about dancing bears, you *can* say "I love this post because that's exactly what I blog about, and I've been doing it for the last three years, keep up the great content." Then, if a reader or the blog owner asks you for the URL, because you have thrown that bait out in a major way, you're free to post it. Also if the blog asks people to include their URL, then of course you should. See what I mean? And again, these are just my opinions.

Okay, we're going to go into the inaugural review from Mr. Schu.

(Book Review)

Petunia, the star of Paul Schmid's, *A Pet For Petunia*, is back and ready for round two. This time around, she's not convincing her parents that she will absolutely die if she does not get a pet skunk. Nope, this time she must convince them that there was some sort of a mistake. You see, Petunia really should've been born an animal. She's wild and feral. She growls, snorts, roars and bathes in the mud. She's not a fan of being careful, clean, and quiet. One day, she decides that she needs a cave of her own, but once

again, Petunia's logical parents stand in her way. They ask where she got such a crazy, ridiculous idea. "Come on Petunia, that's not how nice little girls behave." Petunia needs to escape, but will her parents spoil her plan? Will her persuasive skills set her free to roam in the wild? Of course, I'm not going to tell you, however, I will tell you that I read *Petunia Goes Wild* to an enthusiastic first-grade class. They laughed and identified with clever and smart Petunia, and they smiled at the light and airy illustrations. Mr. Paul Schmid, you have once again created a splendid picture book that engages young readers and makes them want to read again and again. You better believe that I'll share Petunia with anyone who'll listen to me.

(END)

(Katie)

Yeah Mr. Schu!

Mr. Schu is in the house – that was awesome! Thank you so much John.

Okay, so before we move on to the interview, I just want to remind you that for you, my listeners of Brain Burps About Books, Audible is offering a free audio book download with a free 14 day trial, so you get to check out their service. Do you know of a better deal? Really. I don't think so.

If you want a newer book, I highly recommend *Hunger Games* like I said before for anyone over say fourteen or so, oh my gosh I love that book. Or Junie B Jones for younger ears, and I did listen to *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, and I have to say I started reading it, and I listened to it, and I preferred it to reading because Tim Curry reads it, and it is delicious. Now Daniel Handler, he read I think it was books 3-5, and I understand now what actors do because Tim Curry nails it. Now I revere Daniel Handler, I have to say, but Tim Curry – good they hired him because he's awesome. So go to my blog, I've got the link and everything and click on there and it'll bring you straight to audibletrial.com/brainburpsaboutbooks.

Okay we are going to get right into the interview.

(Katie)

Today we are celebrating learning to read with the CEO of RIF, Carol Rasco - you may know her as Rasco from RIF, which I always liked because it's alliterated.

Reading Is Fundamental is the nation's largest nonprofit children's literacy organization. The programs prepare and motivate children to read so, of course, we love it here on this show, and I'm going to read you a little bit about Carol.

In November of 2001, Carol Hampton Rasco was named President and Chief Executive Officer of Reading Is Fundamental, America's oldest and largest non-profit children's and family literacy organization. It's

really cool because their having their 45th anniversary and I remember the commercials from when I was a kid in the 70s and 80s all about “Reading is fundamental” so, on my site you’ll see a video.

Throughout her life, Rasco has been a devoted advocate for children, youth, and families as a professional and as a volunteer. Prior to this position, Rasco was the Executive Director for Government Relations at the College Board. From 1997 through 2000, Rasco served as the Senior Advisor to US Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, and as Director of the America Reads Challenge, a four- year national campaign to promote the importance of all children reading well and independently by the end of the third grade. Previously, Rasco worked for four years in the White House (which I want to find out about) as Domestic Policy Advisor to the President, and directed the Domestic Policy Council.

So I want a welcome you Carol!

(Carol)

Thank you, I’m delighted to be on the show.

(Katie)

And, I’m very excited because you’re my first guest with a beautiful southern accent! I love southern accents!

(Carol)

(laughs) Thank you! When you grew up in Arkansas, and I was actually born in South Carolina, and have relatives there, I mean it’s here to stay.

(Katie)

Right, right, there’s no getting around it!

So let’s talk about RIF and everything - there’s a lot to talk about and I’m very excited. I was saying to you before we started recording that I feel certain that I’ve met you in person but neither of us can remember when that would’ve been, and it’s just the power of Twitter and the internet and Facebook and connecting because I feel like I know you so well.

(Carol)

Well it certainly is. I, these days, often run into people and we realize we’re meeting in person for the first time ever, but we feel like we know so much about one another and it’s a wonderful thing.

(Katie)

It is. Of course it goes directly against what I tell my children – never meet people who you only know on the internet. I’ll say, “oh I love this person she’s my best friend” and my daughter will say, “Do you know her in person?” Uh... no! (laughs) Teenagers are too clever you know.

Let's go chronologically. I'm very curious about your time the White House. I don't think I've ever had anybody on who worked in the White House. That's very cool.

(Carol)

Well, I had been Bill Clinton's Policy Director in the Governor's Office for ten years before he was elected President. I spent a lot of time coming back in forth to Washington to work on issues of importance to Arkansas. Working when he was an officer in the National Governor's Association, working with him there, and prior to him being elected Governor the first time, I had worked with Hillary Clinton in an advocacy group that she helped form in Arkansas called Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, so I had gotten to know them through that kind of policy advocacy work.

Then my son, who is now thirty-eight, but was much younger then, he wears the label of Cerebral Palsy and moderately retarded and I was very very active in the State in education for children with disabilities and early intervention services from birth forward. So I got to know them also through him – my son and Bill Clinton became big buddies. I would talk to them a lot about my dreams and hopes for him. My son was in that first group of children to have the advantage of the Federal Education Law. A group of us had been pushing at the same time on getting an Arkansas law, and by the time Bill Clinton became Governor, we had that law, so our ties were in several areas of policy, my concern and advocacy for children overall, education and health and then the disabilities.

So, I served as his Policy Director at the State level for ten years, and then he asked me to come to the White House and be his Domestic Policy Advisor and I feel like the Ph.D. I never took time out to go earn, that I earned five times over working in the White House. It was not only a great honor driving through those gates every morning, and I need to tell this fast, if you lose the tingle of driving through those gates, we need to have a big talk because we're here to serve people and this is very special, to be able to do it here, but you work very hard. Most days started between six-thirty and seven at the office and you worked long hard hours into the night, but, like I say, it was a wonderful opportunity and I learned a lot.

(Katie)

That's great, so then you stayed in Washington and started with RIF?

(Carol)

Well, I was in the White House the first four years, and then the President and Secretary Riley asked me if the second four years I would implement The America Reads Challenge, and so I worked with Secretary Riley to start this heavy emphasis on having children reading well and independently by the third or fourth grade, in that range, and we did a lot of early childhood work in that. I feel strongly still that's where it all has to start. We knew that we had a very short window to initiate some things in that movement, so I did that for four years, and then worked briefly with the College Board here in their D.C. office as kind of a bridge until I decided whether I was going to stay here or go back to Arkansas. The RIF job opened and I came here, as you said, in 2001.

(Katie)

Wow. Well, you've had an illustrious career.

(Carol)

Well, you know, as I tell people, I feel very very fortunate. For a little girl from Dewitt Arkansas, a town of about 2000 when I was growing up there, but I was very fortunate that my parents and my grandparents always taught me and my two sisters that we could be anything we wanted to be, and they stressed education and my grandparents did a lot of travel and would take two of the three of us with them on any one trip -- they were quite smart and didn't take all three at any one time! They really tried to make sure that we knew as much about people and the world as possible and reading was a big part of that. There was not a single holiday or birthday that both my parents and my grandparents didn't give a book, and I still have some of those books! They are falling apart, but their handwriting is in it and they're just very special.

(Katie)

Right, I have those books also and I can look at them, and immediately the feeling washes over me of what it felt like to sit my mom's lap and be read to, and I can hear her voice and I can I can get that flash of feeling.

(Carol)

Right, and well you know, one of the little books I remember getting in upper elementary, because I was big in Girl Scouting and the camps, I still have, and it's one of those small books. There's a whole series of them on birds and insects and trees, and it was a bird identification book and it still has the smoky searing where it got a little close to the fire at Girl Scout camp, but my grandmother had written in it, and you know, our house and their house, the back yards joined and when I was much younger I would sit and they taught me to learn the birds that were the most common in that area. They gave me this book, and we would take it on trips across country, so like you, that particular book, I can still hear the discussions we'd be having about it.

(Katie)

Right and it's that kind of visceral reaction that we want all kids to have and that's why RIF is such a great organization.

(Carol)

Well thank you, yes, it is exactly that kind of motivation that we're all about here because RIF is very careful to respect the role of the parent and to respect the role of the teachers and education system. We are not teachers of reading. We never want to portray ourselves that way, but we really are here to help, particularly those children at risk of struggling to read, whether it's the poverty factor, some kind of disability, lack of access through that poverty to books. We want to give them those kinds of visceral experiences, as you say. I often say to have them hang on until they have that "aha" moment that children have whether they always realize it or not....when all those little squiggles finally make some sense and they realize they can read a sentence.

(Katie)

It's such a thrill; I mean I remember the feeling of watching my children have that "aha" moment and it is just a thrill.

(Carol)

Absolutely.

(Katie)

So tell me about, I want to know what your typical day is... so you get to work and then what? What you do?

(Carol)

Well it really depends, but, for example, on Monday mornings, like today, the first thing we do at RIF at the regular opening time, which is 9 o'clock, we have what I call and "all hands on deck" meeting. It's a stand around meeting - - nobody sits down. We just gather in the center of the open cubicle area and each department head is called on to say, "What were your two or three successes last week?" and "What are the two to three things you're going to work on this week?" If they ran into a major snag on something, we want them to bring that up to talk about...how do we all begin to think about overcoming it? This is just kind of quick, staccato and they put these things briefly on tear off pad sheets that we hang in the middle of the office. We can all, all week, see this is what everybody's working on.

Then I go to work, and everyday can look different, but I have regularly scheduled appointments with, or one-on-one sessions with my senior team. There are eight others on that team.

(Katie)

Wait, what would be a typical subject of discussion? I'm trying to figure out...like how does RIF move forward? You've been around for forty-five years, well, not you, but RIF has been around for forty-five years, and its stayed current and its stayed important and its stayed productive, so I like to see how do things like that happen when people complain like "How come nothing is getting done," but there are places that things are getting done and I want to know how.

(Carol)

Well, in these one-on-one sessions, we jointly build the agenda a day or two in advance, and of course you can bring up things that have come up, but it's a chance to really take a moment aside from just a hurried passing by the desk saying "Here's what we need to think about today.." and this meeting is usually thirty minutes to an hour, once a week, and it's to talk about the major projects.

So, if it's the Development Leader, we're talking about what's the latest thing planned for the Gala in May. What worked in the end of year Giving Campaign this year? What didn't work, and what might we change next year? Who are the major corporate people who we're going out to see right now? So that

if anything has come up that might something in my head, about someone that RIF has known in the past, that that new Development Head doesn't know.

For the Literacy Services person, who doesn't do books, but does training and family engagement events...we might sit there and share articles that we've read most recently that we just haven't gotten into each other's hands, but we've highlighted stuff and said "should we think about putting this into our training?" or thinking about it.

Of course, over the last year, we have spent a lot of time in each of these meetings, and then in our collective every two-week management team meetings together talking about how we reinvent RIF because we lost the Federal grant, and that was the book money.

(Katie)

How you got books to distribute to kids?

(Carol)

Yes, and we gave 15 million books last year, and we've lost the \$24 million grant that allowed us to carry that out along with some training and things.

(Katie)

..and I don't know much about grants, but can you reapply? And why did you lose it?

(Carol)

We're told that the reason the President left it out of his budget was that there were those who felt it is not appropriate for agencies or organizations like us, and we weren't the only ones this happened to, where we are written into the law as the *receiver* of funds, that we ought to have to go through a competition. So we said fine, make it a competition. None of us are here still who were around when this grant got started thirty-four years ago. We're happy to make it a competition. In fact, we did work with our legislative champions and other literacy groups, and did get a competition in the most recent budget that was passed.

It's not for the full sum for literacy private non-profit, but it's for the full sum to be split half to school libraries for them to buy books and materials, and they'll have a competition of some kind, and then half to national literacy organizations that work with parents and children. So there are no guidelines on the competition yet, and we're just kind of waiting to see if we will be eligible.

(Katie)

So without this grant, when did it end? When did you get the last...?"

(Carol)

Well organizations are buying their last batch of books right now. We did not have to close it out by the end of the fiscal year, September 30th, that would have kind of been impossibility since the budget

wasn't passed until April, but they're spending the last of it. So we will be spending private dollars and corporate dollars that we are out raising as usual, but we will cut back on other kinds of projects with private dollars, if the donors agree, and pour more money, for now at least, into the books.

(Katie)

So people on your site obviously, people can donate by mail or phone or online and all those things will be linked in my show notes for the podcast.

(Carol)

Great, that's great! And what we remind people is, every \$2.50 helps us put a new paperback book into the hands of the child, and that \$2.50 covers our overhead for handling it as well as the book. Our publishers that we work with, and we work with about 140 of them, they have been wonderful about saying they will still give us the deep discount and give local programs that won't be getting grant money, and maybe won't get private money because we can't raise that total \$24 million overnight each year. But they're going to give the deep discounts so really, for \$2.50, we can provide that book, and again, that is including the overhead and the distribution.

(Katie)

Also, I read on your website that 90% of every donation goes straight to serving the kids.

(Carol)

Absolutely, we work very hard at keeping our administrative costs down because we're, you know, you can't work here very long that every day you feel stronger about the need to put those books in kids hands. As the research gets stronger, we see through our local programs how much it can mean. This is also, and one of the things that we really stress as well, is that this is a partnership. Under the Federal grant, we cover 75% of the cost of the books, and the local community had to raise 25%. We are in the process of implementing that same match with private dollars now because we feel it's very important to include that partnership. Now, we have under the Federal grant, and we will continue "waiver" authority. If it's a community that's been hit really hard, and they can't come up with their full match in a particular year, they know how much this means to their kids, and they'll raise what they can, we will work it out to waive the match.

(Katie)

Wow, that's great. So what can authors and illustrators and writers do to help?

(Carol)

Well, I think the first thing is..

(Katie)

and teachers too.

(Carol)

Right. Just, when there are appropriate times on blogs, or Twitter or when they're in public meetings or out meeting with people, just make sure that people out there know that RIF, which so many of them have such great fondness for, has run into this bump in the road and we get very excited when things come over the wire or the envelopes are opened with checks small and large, and so, right now, it seems that many people seem to think one of two things: they aren't aware of any of these bumps and they just think we're here doing work as usual and we're going to be fine or they think because we lost the grant, we're done...we're dead,

So it's very important for all of us to let people know RIF is here, RIF is going to continue to move toward that mission of inspiring and motivating all children to read and to love reading, and to do that primarily through the book distribution and that our numbers won't be as high for the next few years, but that we're here to do everything we can to continue working on it because we know the need continues to be great.

(Katie)

And I love the things you're doing to inspire people to be involved and to basically carry out your mission, like you have monthly activity calendars that teachers or parents can use with all kinds of reading and writing activity suggestions on every day.

(Carol)

First and foremost, anytime we can create a situation where a child is in conversation and sharing with an adult, and we always like to say with a caring adult, for many of the children that we're targeting most, that kind of conversation is not occurring enough. That is critical to being able first to build vocabulary, to begin to build their rudimentary steps of critical thinking and cause and effect.

When they go to school, they may have *the* best teacher in the world who can teach that child to begin to say the words and then put those words together in a string to make a sentence, but if they do not have a good strong vocabulary, when they enter the schoolhouse doors....I don't care if you can say a word, short or long, if you don't have any meaning associated with that word when you hear it, or see it there in print, then you're not going to know what you've read. The whole purpose will have been defeated in teaching you how to sound it out.

The other thing is that, if you have to struggle with sounds, and we're not asking parents to do flashcards to teach sounds, but the role parents have in that again, is the conversations. You know, when you're out walking around, point out everything you and the child see that starts with a "B." You are building vocabulary in an informal, non-stressful, no pressure way. It's creating a very positive interaction between parents and their child.

(Katie)

I have a son who was very difficult to take to stores shopping, marketing, whatever, and I remember when they were little I would have contests to sort of distract them so I could grab the food I needed to get and get out of there. Things like whoever can find the first “M”, gets to ride in the basket, or whatever. They would be looking all over to try to find the “M” and then matching things like what else, what starts with an “M” and stuff like that. So it's also a great way to integrate it into your efforts a way to keep your kids from having a tantrum in the supermarket.

(Carol)

Absolutely, absolutely. At some point, the child that does love to read, if it doesn't make them ill, they're gonna read a book in the car. It's really so very critical. I don't know if you've ever had pointed out to you the book, *Meaningful Differences In the Everyday Experiences Of Young Children*, by Hart and Risley? I think it's such a wonderful example of this whole vocabulary piece.

They did this study, some years ago through the University of Kansas, I think in '95 they put out the first writing on it. What they found in that one, among many other things, was that you could project that the low-income child, or the child in a welfare family, would know the meaning of about 3,000 words at age five or six. That sounds like a lot of words for a little five or six year old. Then when you tell them when you get to an upper middle-income family, that child on average will have what we call the listening vocabulary, we don't expect them to be able to spell it or use it sentence, but that child has that listening vocabulary of 20,000 words.

(Katie)

Wow, that's a huge difference.

(Carol)

That 17,000-word gap is very significant because quite frankly, that's about the size of the gap in lay terms that we see in their reading ability in the third or fourth grade. I mean again, we can teach them how to sound the words and put the words together to make a sentence, they can do it by rote memory, but if they don't have the meaning behind the main words in that sentence, then that's when we begin to see the struggles...the light goes off, they tune you out.

They say that by age three, a low-income child will have heard ten million words, now that includes everything. Then you get between twenty and thirty million as you get to middle income and higher income. So, there's a big difference there.

(Katie)

Why is that? I mean people aren't, the parents don't...

(Carol)

Struggle for survival. Many of them are in households where there may be only one parent. That parent might be working two jobs...

(Katie)

So just not around to talk to them? So then what ...

(Carol)

and also, there's two pieces to it. There's the busy and maybe out of the home. The other is lack of belief that they have any role to play. When you spend time as I have with reading researchers, visiting with low income moms and low income dads who care as deeply about their children as you and I do, but you visit with them, and they really don't believe they have what it would take to help their child develop.

When we've gone in and done Parent Education courses with them to show how they can be a part of their child's education and they need to form a partnership with teachers, we've literally had them cry and thank us saying, "You're the first person that ever told us we had anything to offer our children in education."

(Katie)

Wow, that's pretty powerful.

(Carol)

It is. It is.

(Katie)

You know, people can help RIF also in a really easy way. When you're wasting your time on Facebook people, there is something that Gerber Life is doing. They are doing this really great thing on Facebook where if you add a photo to the project Open Book Mosaic, one photo equals one dollar donation to you, and you can also win \$1000, which then you can of course choose to donate back to RIF. (laughs)

(Carol)

(laughs) Right, and, you're going to see a lot more of that kind of thing coming from us, not only because of the loss of the grant, but because companies have realized that we have a wide reach. We are in all fifty states, our people are highly committed, the Alumni group, people that got RIF books as a child, and the incredible stories that some of them tell...

So, companies know that we have this incredible core of people that believe in us, and as companies try to move more into social media, they're calling on us to do things like the Gerber Life piece. We really appreciate people helping spread that word.

(Katie)

That is a really good thing, and I'm gonna do it! I'm going to do it and I don't do a lot of likes....I'm picky about Facebook.

I think that we're about out of time, so first I want to ask what you cover in your blog. Just you know, sort of a quick overview, and then we're going to go to my last big question.

(Carol)

Well, I try to cover a diverse audience, which I know does not follow perhaps the rules of blogging, but at RIF, we do have a number of audiences – you know, the people who coordinate our programs, teachers, parents, young people who are doing mentoring or reading with children, so it's really a variety of things. I try to do some book reviews. I love beautiful covers, and I start almost every Monday morning by just featuring a cover that I've seen, that I really like, and I probably have not read the book, and I'm not going to discuss the book much, if any, I'm just going to show that cover and maybe tell something about the artist that did it.

I try to also take it broader than books...things that we need to be thinking about in our community.... I try to talk about RIF programs that have done exciting things; some sharing among other RIF programs, or maybe a community that doesn't have RIF, there may be something they can use in their community.

(Katie)

All right, well that's good. I'm glad to get a little plug in for the blog because it is good that it's got this overall basically...just basically pushing literacy in all different ways...sort of an umbrella thing, which I like.

Okay now you know the last question, you ready for that?

(Carol)

Yes. I'm Ready!

(Katie)

All right. If you can go to the yard sale of any character in history of children's literature who's would you go to, and what would you buy?

(Carol)

Well I would go Heidi's in Switzerland....I would buy their little bitty chalet.

(Katie)

So now, we are going to have a Take5 marketing tip from Dianne de Las Casas.

(Take5 Marketing Tip From Dianne de Las Casas)

Hey, its Dianne de Las Casas with your Take5 Marketing tip. Take 5 minutes out of your day to market your book and your work.

Today's Take5 is all about the app called Evernote. It is cool when you look at it on your Smartphone screen - it's got this Elephant and it's in green and it's really wonderful because it allows you to remember, actually, you don't have to remember, it remembers for you, anything that you want to know.

For instance, let's say you're in a bookstore and you really love this book and you want to remember the title, you just snap a picture of it from Evernote, and it will remember it for you. It will even attach the GPS location of where you are at that time and place when you took this picture of this book! I mean it's really amazing! And when you're in the search box, if you don't remember, you can just type in something like "book", and all the things that are related to book will come up in your Evernote.

It's just technology amazes me. Wow! Evernote.....I ever love it!

This has been your Take 5 Marketing tip, have a great day!

(Katie)

I love Evernote and I use Evernote and I don't use it like that, so thank you Diane for once again opening my eyes to something - I hope her tips help you as much as they help me!

So the next thing is our newest segment. Now wait til you hear the intro, I love it, it's my son by the way. We wanted to do something funny, and I don't have intros for other things, but I am going to do an intro for this because, when you hear it, you'll know why I'm saying this. I really wanted to do something funny and Julie agreed because doing a segment on what she is going to be doing it on which is being grateful, it can come off really sappy, and as Julie says, she hopes people don't start calling her "The Grateful Lady" – like akin to Saturday Night Lives' the Church Lady.

Julie feels grateful and has been blogging Gratitude Sundays for years now and I read it and I thought this is a tough business, I really think that I should have something like this on the show and then she came on the show as a guest and I thought, perfect I'm going to have her on. So it's going to be a new monthly thing and her first one today is and intro to the segment so you'll know how she came to practice gratefulness. Though it won't be maudlin, just so you know, this is how she started writing it.

Welcome Julie.

(Recorded Intro - - Julie Hedland Gets All Grateful On Your A)**

A little more than four years ago, my father passed away and I went back to Northern Michigan, which is where I'm from, and it was the beginning of October. So for those of you who grew up in the Midwest,

you know that that time of year can either be a glorious Indian Summer or it can be gray, cloudy, rainy, cold, and snowy and any other form of God awful weather, and it just so happened that this particular year it was glorious Indian Summer.

My dad lived on a lake, a really pretty lake, so on the morning before his funeral, I went down to the shore to be alone and to practice my eulogy of him. Needless to say, this is one of the worst days of my life, but I sat at the lake, I looked around, and it was so beautiful. The sun had come up and it was already starting to get warm, and the trees were just at their absolute peak of fall color; just a riot of reds yellows and oranges and the lake was like glass and so it was perfectly reflecting those trees in the water.

Just as I was noticing this, a pair of loons swam past and they started singing to each other. Now if you have never heard a loon call, I will tell you that it is one of the most mournful, haunting, aching and yet, ultimately hopeful sounds you will ever hear. All of the sudden in that moment, I just felt a rush of almost unlimited gratitude that nature had presented itself so beautifully on this day, on this awful time.

The beauty and the warmth that I felt just made it a little bit easier to bare that loss, and I was so grateful and right then I had an epiphany, which was if I can be grateful on this, the worst day of my life so far, then I can always find something to be grateful for. One year later, I left my job to write full-time, I started my blog, including the Gratitude Sunday series, and I have had so many blessings along the way, all, I believe because I consciously practice the art of appreciation. So next time, we'll talk about why every writer needs a gratitude practice, and how you can get one.

(Katie)

Well, I hope you liked that, our new segment...monthly segment.

So, that's the show for today. I remind you to sign up for the Highlights Founders Workshops you guys...do it, whether it's the one I'll be at or the multi-cultural workshop, or another, but the setting that they've created there, you get sooo much information in your head, it will explode. In a good way. And remember to download your free audio book today – go to audibletrial.com/brainburpsaboutbooks. That's your free audio book!

Okay, well, enjoy, keep reading and see you next week!