

Meet the Author | Laura McBride

Since the age of seven, Laura McBride knew she would write a novel but it wasn't lack of discipline that prevented her from writing until now, aged 53, it was that there were so many other things to do in life. She once thought of herself as an adventurer, travelling far from home but now lives what she describes as "a very suburban life" in Las Vegas.

A graduate of Yale and a composition teacher at a local community college, McBride had always been creating stories in her minds as she went about her day. Perhaps that's why after hearing a local news story that stayed in her mind for several years, when she did eventually sit down to write a novel, it only took three and a half months to write *We Are Called to Rise*.



The buzz coming out of the US about this novel is huge. The Hoopla is delighted that Laura McBride joined us to tackle our three quick questions.

As a child, which book(s) did you read time and again?

The one picture book I remember, possibly because we owned it, was called *The Troll Music* by Anita Lobel. It featured a mischievous troll who cast a spell on some travelling musicians, and I loved it. I can still see the detailed illustrations (coloured ink on ecru paper) in my mind.

When I was in elementary school, I read Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* over and over. Charles Wallace and Meg were real people to me, and I might still conceive of the universe in AWIT terms. It's sort of unnerving to look back and think about the impact that book, or books like the Narnia tales (which I also read over and over) had on my sense of the world. Would I have been so shaped by any engaging book I read? Was I that susceptible to influence? Or did those books affirm something I already intuited?

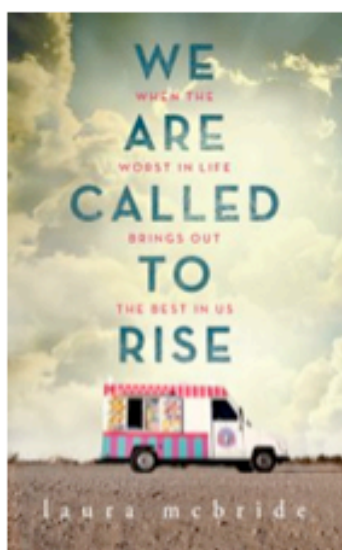
The Chronicles of Narnia actually led to a moral crisis for my nine-year-old self. I started saying my night-time prayers to Aslan, and then I realised that I had committed the mortal sin of praying to a false idol, and honestly, this was traumatic for me. I kept this secret for months, praying (sometimes to Aslan!) that I wouldn't die before I got brave enough to confess, and then when I did tell a priest in a confessional, he treated it very lightly. He didn't even want to give me a punishment (which might have been because he was in on the secret about C.S. Lewis intending the story as a Christian allegory) but his careless absolution did not reassure me. (Perhaps everything daring I did after that year stemmed from the fear that I had already lost my immortal soul.) When I was an adult and learned about C.S. Lewis, I was aggrieved: did he realise what a position he might have put a devout child in?

Somehow, I remember all these reading experiences, and yet they still seem to have happened to a person other than me. The world—my world—has changed so much.

If you could invite any author (living or dead) or fictional character to dinner, who would you choose and why?

Hmm. This is a puzzler. I immediately thought of Virginia Woolf, but then maybe she would be really intimidating and upper-crusty, or George Eliot, but again, perhaps I would rather imagine these women than meet them. It would be interesting to put to rest all the questions about Shakespeare's authorship by meeting him, but along those lines, I might really prefer to meet Sappho. After all, who was she? The only woman among the nine lyrical poets of ancient Greece. Yes, I'd love to meet Sappho. But then again, I would like to hear Emily Dickinson speak her poetry aloud; how did she hear her dashes and exclamation marks?

If I am forced to choose just one, then Sappho—because she is the most removed from our lives now, and the one we can know least about without a little time/space magic.



Can you tell us a little about your new novel and the inspiration behind it?

We Are Called to Rise is a contemporary story set in Las Vegas: a place where I live an ordinary life but which many others see in quite un-ordinary ways. The plot hinges on a tragic moment, which connects the lives of an immigrant child, a middle-aged woman, and a recently injured soldier. Las Vegas is a boomtown, and this is a boomtown story. Boomtowns have energy and newness and interesting collisions of unlikely folks; they are also chaotic places, which lack infrastructure, and in which small absences can lead to large imbalances.

I wanted to set my story in Las Vegas, because it is an interesting place and because I have lived here so long, but I bounced from one story idea to the next for a long time. I had too many ideas, and I think almost any of them would have made a good novel. In the end, I just had to grab an idea and get started. The one I chose was the least developed of all. I knew about a particular tragic incident, some years before, and I had never quite forgotten the sense of anguish and frustration I felt on first reading about it. So I used a similar incident as the genesis of my story, and then I made up a story around it. Who would have been there? How would it have happened? How could the story have progressed after that point?

The idea I had chosen was quite sad, and it bothered me to think that I would write something that could hurt a reader who might have too much pain in her own life. But I'm not a Pollyanna, and I don't like stories that make life seem too sweet or too easy. So the razor's edge I sat on as a writer was: could I write a sad story that still left a reader feeling hopeful, and could I do that without relying on treacle?

[BUY THE BOOK](#)