



*Marcella Pixley*

## 336: Realistic Middle Grade: Balancing the Light and Dark

**Gabriela Pereira:** Hello, and welcome word nerds to DIY MFA Radio, the show that will help you write more, write better, write smarter. I'm Gabriela Pereira, instigator of DIY MFA, and your host for this podcast. Now, let's talk writing.

Hello. Hello, word nerds. Gabriela here, and welcome back to DIY MFA Radio. Our show notes are over at [diymfa.com/336](http://diymfa.com/336) because it's Episode 336. Also, if you enjoy the podcast, please subscribe on iTunes, Google, and you know, all the usual places where you might listen to a podcast, and please leave us a review. This will help other word nerds out there discover the show as well.

Today, I have the pleasure of interviewing Marcella Pixley, who is the author of four acclaimed books for young people. Her novel *Freak* was a Kirkus Best Book of the Year for 2007, *Without Tess* was a Junior Library Guild Selection, and *Ready to Fall* was a Bank Street of Education Best Book for 2017. Her most recent novel *Trowbridge Road* was just recently named as one of ten books for children for the National Book Awards in 2020.

Marcella first began her writing career as a poet and has published in several literary journals including *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and *Poet Lore*, plus she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her fiction has this beautiful lyric quality, which makes sense given her roots in poetry; and she teaches 8th grade Language Arts at the Carlisle Public Schools.

Today we're going to be discussing her most recent book, *Trowbridge Road*. Welcome, Marcella. It is so great to have you here.

**Marcella Pixley:** Thank you so much, Gabriela. It's so wonderful to be here.

**GP:** I am so excited to talk about this book. It is absolutely beautiful, and I have loved reading it. But before we dive in and totally geek out about *Trowbridge Road*, I wanted to hear about the story behind the story. What inspired this really fascinating book in the first place?

**MP:** Well, *Trowbridge Road* is a story about a girl named June Bug Jordan, who lives in a neighborhood that seems perfect from the outside, but really like all neighborhoods and like all families, things are rarely perfect. And so, in her home, she's suffering; her father has just died of AIDS.

The book takes place in 1983, at the beginning of the AIDS crisis. And her mother is grieving, but she's also suffering from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. And so, where this book came from, was my own experience living in a complicated family.

My father was very, very sick when I was growing up. He was diagnosed from the time I was four years old with really serious heart disease and later kidney disease, and was not supposed to live. And so, we always were in the midst of worrying about how long he had left. As it turned out, he lived to be almost 80 years old and just recently died this past April.



But because of his illness, my mother was quite depressed and was dealing with her own fears of losing him. And I also, because of the way my brain works, but also because of the circumstance of my father's illness, developed Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

And it wasn't diagnosed until I was a young adult, but I started having compulsive-obsessive worries when I was around eight years old. And this book came from my desire to tell the story of a family grappling with mental illness and physical illness; and showing a three-dimensional portrayal of what it means to struggle – and to show it with empathy, and to show it with love and also with joy.

**GP:** Yeah, that just sums up the book in such a beautiful way. And one of the things that I loved about this book is how it doesn't pull any punches in terms of showing the dark with the also love and hope. Can you talk a little bit about grappling with these big tough issues, and sort of how you wove together both the dark and the hope?

**MP:** It was really important for me to find a balance; and a large part of the editing process was making sure that this was ultimately a book about connection, even though June Bug Jordan's story has to do with yearning for connection that she can't have with her mother and with people in her neighborhood.

So, I worked really hard to make sure that there were enough moments of light in the story. And I also really wanted to show that there's this strange code that a lot of us live by, which is a code that says that we shouldn't tell that we are hurting; and somehow, that we should keep those things a secret.

I wanted to create a book that would give permission for people who are living in difficult situations to tell their own stories and to reach out for the help that they need.

**GP:** Yeah, I mean, one of the most, I think for me, one of my favorite moments in the story is maybe two-thirds of the way in, where June Bug reveals what's been going on.

Like, she sits down with Nana Jean, who's the grandmother of one of her, sort of, newfound friends in the neighborhood; and eventually, spills it out. And it's such a powerful moment, but it also models to the reader, this is what it looks like to share that hard moment.

**MP:** Yeah. It's, I mean, I wanted to give permission. It took me a long time to find help. I suffered with my own mental illnesses and with my own issues for many, many years before I realized that it was okay to say, "You know, there's something not right going on, and I need to have help with it."

And so, hopefully, this story shows that the world is strong enough; and that hopefully, our families are strong enough to withstand our telling the secrets that we think we need to keep.

**GP:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the topic of mental health is one that's very near-and-dear to me because while I don't struggle with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, I have bipolar; and that also came out when I was very young.

And so, that ability to be able to talk about what's not quite right; and the idea that you might have this perfect neighborhood on the outside – and yet, there's a lot of stuff going on behind the scenes that people don't see. And that, I think it's powerful for a kid to read a story that shows that, and also models how to break through that facade.

**MP:** Yeah. Yeah. I think that in order for things to really change in this world, in terms of us having empathy for each other's circumstances, we have to realize that we're not the only ones who are suffering; we don't have to pretend that we're okay if we're not okay.



**GP:** Absolutely. You know, this brings up an interesting topic or a question for discussion, which is, you know, I think a lot of people who don't read Children's books and who don't read Middle Grade, in particular, I'm a big fan of Middle Grade.

**MP:** I love Middle Grade.

**GP:** I focused-- Yeah. When I did my MFA, I basically only wrote Middle Grade, so this is like my jam. But a lot of people who aren't well-versed in this category, often think that, 'Oh, it's for kids; it has to be light and funny and fun, and it shouldn't have dark things like death or illness or pain or things like that.'

And, of course, I can name, off the top of my head, at least, a few dozen books that have all of those things, and they are very firmly in Middle Grade. So, I guess my question is sort of two things; why do you think this misconception exists, first-off?

And secondly, for Middle Grade, we're going to write these dark topics in a different way – it's not going to be graphic – so, how does one still make it real, but temperate so that it fits with the sensibilities of a younger reader?

**MP:** Oh, that's such a good question. Yeah. So, there is a misconception that Middle Grade Fiction needs to be light; although, I think that that misconception is starting to change.

**GP:** Yeah.

**MP:** Just over the past-- I mean, it's always been there, but especially in the past few years, there's been so many more books written by #OwnVoices authors about serious topics – about what it means to be an outsider, and about racism, and about living in different kinds of circumstances that were once not written about.

And so, I think that that misconception is starting to change, but maybe it comes from adults who don't realize that kids who are 11, 12, 13 years old are ready to find themselves in literature. And I think that the books absolutely can have sadness, but what they have to have, is hope.

So, a good Middle Grade book can tackle with tough subjects, but there has to be an underpinning of love there, because I think that what the book needs to do is it needs to give courage; it needs to express courage, and the possibility of becoming your better self. So, does that sort of answer your question?

**GP:** Yeah, yeah. I think you mentioned hope and having that, sort of, light at the end of the tunnel. I also think there's sort of finding that balance, where things don't need to be wrapped up in a tidy bow.

**MP:** No, because they aren't in life.

**GP:** Exactly. I think sometimes that's another misconception that a lot of folks have about Middle Grade is like, 'Okay, you could have a bad thing happen, but then it's all going to be okay at the end.' And okay is different from, everything goes back to happy-go-lucky, perfect time.

**MP:** Yeah, things don't have to be tied up in the end. And it's good for kids to realize that sometimes, it takes time in their lives. And so, just having the indication that there's the possibility of healing and hope is a good lesson to know it might not be there at the end of the book, but the book shows that there's like a flashlight on through the darkness – so you can see that somewhere forward, somewhere in front of you, there's going to be a resolution.



**GP:** Yeah.

**MP:** And, sort of, wait for it; it's going to be there.

**GP:** Exactly. So, I wanted to dig into the craft behind this book. One of the things that surprised me in a really great way, I haven't seen a book do this in a really long time, and it just-- I like read it and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is amazing.'

So, the first chapter doesn't actually feel like June Bug's point of view until we get to the very end of that chapter, and we move into the second chapter. And I remember it took me a little by surprise. I was like, 'Wait a minute, I thought we were in this sort of third-person.'

You know, we're observing this street and this neighborhood. And, all of a sudden, like in Chapter Two is when we see June Bug, the protagonist. And this reminded me a lot of Tor Seidler's book, *The Wainscott Weasel*, where the protagonist doesn't show up until Chapter Two.

And you have this whole involved Chapter One, and then the protagonist shows up. And to me, that so underscored June Bug's outsidership in the story. Can you talk about that?

**MP:** Well, June Bug is an observer. So, she's a girl who doesn't feel like she fits into her neighborhood; and she spends a lot of her time feeling invisible. She sits up in a tree and watches things, and imagines that she was part of things when she isn't – she wishes she were.

And so, when you say that she's an outsider; and it shows her outsider status, I definitely, definitely agree with you. So, the first scene in *Trowbridge Road*, she's sitting up in a tree and watching a new neighbor come to the neighborhood; she watches a boy named Ziggy, who's going to become her friend and also her lifeline be dropped off by his mother.

And she makes an immediate connection in her own imagination with this boy with whom she wants to become friends. So, June Bug is an outsider, and she is a very observant person. So, the book is filled with what she sees and what she imagines as she sort of sets apart from other people in her neighborhood.

So, that first chapter in the book is one chapter that's written in the past tense as though it was a third-person narrator, but it isn't. It's June Bug's memory of what took place in the neighborhood, in this one summer where everything changed for her. But you don't realize that you're hearing the words of the narrator until the very end of that chapter.

So yeah, I think that it sets us up to realize that June Bug is going to be someone who sits apart from other people, and who is wanting and craving the ability to interact with the world, but there are things that are holding her back.

**GP:** Yeah. You know, what's also really interesting is it almost feel-- Like when I was reading it, when I first turned the page to Chapter Two and suddenly, I'm like, 'Whoa, that was June Bug's brain that I was just in, that wasn't just a disembodied third-person narrator brain that I was seeing the first chapter in.'

It also kind of underscores, I think her being kind of disenfranchised from the story at first. Like to me, it felt like a lot of the book was about her being able to tell her story. And the fact that she's not really present in Chapter One – until sort of retroactively, we put the pieces together – underscores that in just such a really visceral and elegant way.



**MP:** Thank you. Yeah. I mean, she believes she's invisible; and in a lot of ways, she is invisible to the others in this neighborhood. They don't know what's going on in her life. I mean, if they knew how much she was suffering – that her mother was keeping her indoors, that she wasn't getting the kind of nurturing that she needed – they would've reached out.

These aren't horrible people in this neighborhood, they're just people who are living their life. So, June Bug's desire to remain invisible is one of the things that plays out in that first chapter.

**GP:** Absolutely. You know, one of the other things too that I thought was really awesome was June Bug and Ziggy's friendship. And you alluded to the fact that Ziggy becomes her lifeline; I think, in many ways, she also becomes his.

**MP:** Yes. They rescue each other.

**GP:** Yeah. You know, it reminded me a little bit of that book, *Bridge to Terabithia*, where the two kids have that magical world; and here, they're going to the Ninth Dimension. Can you talk a little bit about their adventures and that other world that, sort of, crafting that other world?

**MP:** Sure. Well, first of all, I'd like to say that as a kid, I played make-believe all the time. And so, the relationship that Ziggy and June Bug have together, and the kinds of imaginary magical games that they play are almost verbatim, the games that I played with my good friends in the neighborhood that I grew up in.

So, a lot of these scenes come straight from my early imagination and my memory of those imaginary times. So, both June Bug and Ziggy are living in home situations where they don't have a lot of control over what's going on in their lives.

Ziggy's been abandoned by his mother, and he's living with his grandmother. June Bug is starving for love from somebody who is available to give love to her; and they find each other as friends. And even though they don't have a lot of control over what goes on in their home lives and in their circumstances, their imaginary games are filled with magic and power.

And it's like through these games, they're able to find some agency for the first time. And so, when they first meet each other, Ziggy introduces June Bug to his imaginary world called *The Ninth Dimension*; and teaches June Bug, how to move objects with her mind, teaches her about telekinesis and moving leaves and milkweed and clouds and things that kind of move on their own, anyway.

[laughter]

**MP:** But June Bug is really ready to play this game with him because it's what she really needed all along, was to sort of tap into her power to being a powerful, having a powerful mind that can make things change, which is what she needs and what she eventually does in the novel. So, their make-believe gives them practice for saving each other and for saving themselves.

**GP:** Yeah. And it's amazing also to see June Bug's growth through the story too. Like, you know, really what you were saying about her kind of coming into her own and practicing being powerful; and then, sort of the small subtle ways that she starts to assert herself in this complex living situation that she finds herself

**MP:** Through her imagination, she learns how to fly; she learns how to scream and how to transform. And all of those things are things she needs to learn how to do in order to get away from her mother's



house, and to tell a neighbor – and in this case, it's Nana Jean – that she's hungry, and that she is shaking, and that she's scared. And so, she transforms that way.

**GP:** Yeah. You know, one of the things that I also wanted to talk about was the, sort of, role of parenting and, sort of, caregiving in this story because you've got a lot of care and not caregiving characters - like caregiving characters who shouldn't be the ones caregiving; and then caregivers who should be giving care, but who are actually needing to be cared for.

I'm thinking of like Ziggy's mom, June Bug's mom that, you know, it's almost like they're less the parent and more the child in the caregiver equation. And then, Nana Jean kind of stepping in and caring for June Bug; and obviously, also caring for Ziggy.

Can you talk a little bit about, sort of, that turning of the tables? Because as a mom myself, that's something that I've often, I think about; like, what happens if I'm not able to step up as a parent because something tragic or traumatic is going on? And then, how do you grapple with that – like still letting kids be kids, but also taking care of one's own needs?

Marcella Pixley: Yeah. I mean, that's something that I think all families go through because all mothers are real; all people are imperfect. I mean, that's not something that we usually think about when we're children; we see our parents as being all-powerful.

So, realizing that sometimes a parent can try and miss the mark isn't such a bad thing to discover, so that you know that your own parent might not be the only one who's not quite able to give what you need. Yeah. So, there definitely is a turning of the tables in terms of caregivers in the story.

As you said, Ziggy's mother and June Bug's mother are both people who are kind of broken and love their kids, but they're dealing with their own stuff so that they can't always be there in the way that their kids need. But both kids are really lucky because they find help from the outside, like they find family that they kind of have to create a new primary care relationship.

So, Ziggy has his grandmother, Nana Jean, who gives him the stability that he was never able to have with Jenny. And also, she has this wonderful ability to show her love through cooking and wonderful meals that she creates. And June Bug has this fabulous uncle, who's the brother of her father who's died, Uncle Toby.

And Uncle Toby visits often enough to realize that something's not right, and that he needs to get himself involved so that she can be cared for. And I won't give away what happens in the end, but the good news is that both of these children, even though their own parents, their own primary caregivers can't be there for them, they do find other people who stand in as a surrogate.

**GP:** Yeah, absolutely. And like you said, it's not about, like we talked about earlier, it's not about tying it all up with a neat little bow, but more about showing that flashlight and the light going forward.

**MP:** Yeah.

**GP:** So, let's talk a little bit about, one of the things that really makes the story come to life are the details. And one of the things for me that really stuck with me was sort of the mechanics of navigating around her mother's stuff, sort of, all of the details of how that worked.

Like, even just the backpack that June Bug puts together of necessities, things that she needs so that she can then scrape off the outside world before she walks back into the house with her mother. There's such specific detail.



Can you talk a bit about crafting those detailed moments? Because you know, the tendency for a lot of writers is either to go info overload or to just skirt the surface. Like, how do you find that balance between really bringing certain details to life, but then also letting the story kind of move at its own pace?

**MP:** That's where the editing process was really, really important. My own process as a writer is really weird; [laughs] in that, I write really slowly – and I write in, I kind of in layers. So, I'll write a paragraph, and then I'll read it and think about which details I want to bring out; and I'll add, and I'll read it out loud so that the language sounds the way I want it to.

And then, I'll move on to the next paragraph, once the first paragraph rings the way I want it to ring. And as a result of this process, the book could have been really like heavy with language.

And one of the really important parts of the editing process was to go through all of that, and to shave away everything that wasn't absolutely necessary so that those details are there, but they have space to be noticed and heard. And that was--

I loved working with my editor Liz Bicknell from Candlewick Press; and that was one of the things I thought that she was just amazing at, was helping me to shave the words so that what was left could shine.

**GP:** Yeah. Since you brought up the topic of process, I'd love to dive a little deeper and get, sort of, a picture of what the process looks like. I mean, you describe the drafting process of going sort of paragraph by paragraph.

What does it look like from getting that initial concept that you described at the beginning of our conversation, but then actually putting it into, embodying it in characters and a story?

**MP:** Yeah, it is a strange process. And I've talked to a lot of writers who draft, I mean, who outline, and who know when they're in the beginning of a story, where things are going to go; and they're organized. And I wish I was like that, but I'm not.

And so, I usually begin with a question of some sort that has to do with the way human beings live their lives. And so, in this case, it was the question of, what would happen if a girl wanted so much to be fed and nurtured, but couldn't get what she needed?

What would it be like to live a life where you didn't get the sustenance that you needed, both physical and spiritual? And what if that person made a friendship, and was able to get what she needed through this friendship?

So, I started off with a question; and then I started just crafting scenes, and the character of June Bug developed – and it took a while, but eventually, the character drives the story. And in order to answer the question that I have, what if, what would happen if a girl needed to be fed and couldn't find what she needed? The story takes shape to answer that question.

**GP::** Yeah. So, did you start by writing scenes, sort of, as they came to you? Did they sort of happen more chronologically as they appear in the story?

**MP:** Yeah. It did happen pretty chronologically. It's sort of like following a trail that's leading in one direction. And I think that often what would happen is I would write a scene that didn't work, and I would know that it wasn't the right scene because the next one wouldn't happen.



You know, it was sort of like a kink in a hose; like, not coming out, there's something not right. And so, I would be able to move to the next step that would lead to the next step, and the next step too.

**GP:** I love that. And what I love, first off, I love that it gives writers permission to not know where the story might be going. I know that, you know, there's often a lot of debate among writers like, are you a plotter or a pantsier, and that whole thing.

**MP:** [laughs] You can be a pantsier, okay.

**GP:** Exactly. And that, that there's a litmus test that there is a method to the pantsier madness; that it's not just you write whatever comes into your brain, but like what you just said about you knew that there was something not right with the scene you just wrote, if the next scene didn't immediately follow.

**MP:** Yeah.

**GP:** Like that's a very logical process that someone can, in a very left-brain manner approach, as opposed to just throwing spaghetti at the wall.

**MP:** Right. I'm not sure the 'spaghetti at the wall' would work either, [laughs] unless really, really talented at spaghetti-throwing

[laughs]

**GP:** Exactly.

**MP:** But yeah, this is how it works for me. And I think that it's good to know when you're writing your first novel that some of us are sort of process-oriented; and it's a discovery chapter-by-chapter, where it is that the book is going to end up – and you'll know it's right because when it's right, the next chapter comes easily.

**GP:** Yeah, absolutely. So, you mentioned also the editing process; and obviously, you worked with an editor, but I'm guessing there might have been some revision that happened before.

**MP:** Yes, there was. There was.

**GP:** What does that look like?

**MP:** Well, before this book found Candlewick Press, there were a lot of different versions of it. It was in present tense for quite a while.

**GP:** Interesting.

**MP:** And so, the feeling of the book was really different in present tense; and I discovered it had to not be in present tense in order for us to realize that June Bug was going to be okay.

**GP:** Yeah.

**MP:** So, the book was in present tense. It was too frightening. There was no ready answer to, does she end up being okay? So, it being in the past tense, ended up meaning that we know that she survives this and can look back on it. And that was one of the revisions that happened before the book was published or before I started working with an editor.





I worked a lot on June Bug's voice because June Bug's so much like me. Like there's so many things about her that are so much who I was and how I felt when I was 11 years old that I had a habit in the early drafts of the book of just kind of lapsing into author talk and just kind of bringing my adult voice and my adult perspective into the pages.

One of the big revisions that I did before the book was taken was really just focusing on June Bug's voice and making sure that it was the voice of an 11-year-old girl, even though she is a very observant 11-year-old girl. So, there were a lot of rounds.

I remember one of the revisions had to do with the adult characters and just going through the whole manuscript looking at one character, one secondary character like Uncle Toby – and just creating a real life for him; and who is this guy, and what was his relationship with his brother like, and what are the things in his life that he hasn't figured out yet?

Just to make each of the characters three-dimensional, and have each of them have their own journey and arc. And so, there was a lot of that that went on before the novel went out.

**GP:** It's interesting also you brought up the subject of voice, and you know, this is an interesting topic, especially for writing for young people, right? Because there is a very distinct Middle Grade voice or a distinct YA voice that's different from adult narrator voice; and it's very hard to describe.

Like, I can't even put into words exactly what makes something feel like a Middle Grade kid voice versus a Middle Grade adult narrator voice. Do you have any sense-- Like, do you have any input to offer our listeners like, how they can know when the voice isn't landing?

**MP:** Oh wow. That's a really good question, and it's something that I really struggled with through this book actually. Well, I think that you need to know how a child speaks and sounds, but I think most important, you need to be able to remember who you were when you were that age.

Like Middle Grade is a real specific creature; when you are 11 and 12 years old, when you're pre-teen, you are old enough to think really deeply about things, and to understand what you see.

But you're still young enough to love make-believe, and you're young enough to want to play; and not yet be able to have the ability to make choices for yourself because you're still at the mercy of adults.

Even though I think that a lot of Middle Grade books ultimately, have to do with learning to find your own voice and learning how to use your own strength to change the course of your own life. So, I think that's sort of the sweet spot of Middle Grade.

**GP:** Yeah. You know, it's interesting also what you said about remembering what we were like. Like often, when I'm writing something that falls in that Middle Grade zone, I'm not writing so much for kids now – like my son, now; I'm writing more for who I was when I was 8, 9, 10, 11.

**MP:** Oh yeah.

**GP:** So, question for that because obviously, the people reading the book would be kids now, as opposed to you when you were that age. I mean, obviously, this book was set in 1983; that's a very deliberate choice, in part, I think because of the events, and what's happening, and sort of the fact that it's right at the beginning of the AIDS crisis.



But how does one navigate that when we're-- If we're thinking of writing Middle Grade, but we're thinking of writing for ourselves when we were middle graders, but we're adults now, how does that then sort of bridge the gap with the actual readers of the book now?

Marcella Pixley: Well, I think you have to have faith that the stories that you need to tell that comes from inside you, that has to do with friendship or that has to do with a desire for connection or that has to do with finding your own way, that these are universal experiences that are part of what it means to be a preteen; that all kids that are 10, 11, 12, 13 years old are dealing with that.

And so, if you can find the truth, and it shouldn't really matter whether your story is taking place in the 1980s – like this one – or in the present-day because I think that a really good Middle Grade book gets to what's universal about that time period in a person's life, at least when we're talking about realistic fiction.

**GP:** Right. Right. Yeah. I mean, you could be writing fantastical stuff that is not set in any time period. You know, that also brings up a thought that we can't not talk about it, given that as we record this interview, we're still in the middle of a massive pandemic. I can't imagine you had that in mind when you were first writing this book.

**MP:** Oh, no. And thank you for bringing that up, because I started writing the book probably 10 years before the pandemic was ever, you know, something that anyone would ever, thought could happen.

**GP:** Yeah.

**MP:** Maybe that's another way that the gap is bridged in this book is about the AIDS virus; and it's about how the hysteria that existed around the AIDS virus ended up othering people and making it so that there were outsiders that didn't have the ability to find their place in a society.

So, the AIDS virus, that was as much about homophobia and prejudice as it was about any real illness. Now, we're in 2020, and we're all experiencing a new virus that is causing a different kind of fear in people – and is causing insiders and outsiders in all kinds of complicated ways.

And so, sometimes writing about something that happened in the past, can find a place in the present because there are echoes. And unfortunately, there are echoes right now in 2020 that allow this book to feel current, even though it's sort of historical.

**GP:** Yeah, it's weird. As someone who grew up in the 80s, it's weird to think of the 80s as historical fiction, but-- [laughs]

**MP:** I'm with you. I can't believe that it's being thought of as historical fiction either.

[laughs]

**GP:** I feel like we could keep talking about this book for the next however many hours, weeks even. But in the interest of time, I wanted to open up and ask you, like, how can our listeners learn more about you, about your books and about your work?

**MP:** Oh, I really want to encourage all listeners who are interested to reach out and get in touch with me because I love being a support for people who are wanting to learn more about writing. So, one way that you can do that is by friending me on Facebook.



So, you can find me as Marcella Pixley on Facebook. You can find me on Twitter at @MarcellaPixley. And you can also find me through my website, which is marcellapixley.com. And I'll be your cheerleader, if you want some support in this strange world of writing.

**GP:** I love it. And thank you for being so generous and open to connecting with writers. I have a feeling you may end up with a landslide of folks taking you up on that offer.

**MP:** Do, up on it. We all need a community; and the only difference between a writer who is published and a writer who is not, is that the writer who is not, is just not yet. So, you just have to keep on trying and build your community, any way you can.

**GP:** I love that. And that's so inspiring just to hold onto that, not yet idea

**MP:** Yeah.

**GP:** So, this dovetails beautifully to the question that I always like to end my interviews with, which is, what's your number one tip for writers?

**MP:** My number one tip for writers is do not give up, because we were all in a place, at one point, where we didn't know whether we would ever be published or not. That's, every single writer has that in common. And all you need to do is keep on writing and keep on trying; you're going to get better and better. So, don't give up

**GP:** Such good advice. And thank you so much, Marcella, for being here today.

**MP:** Thank you so much for having me. It was really a pleasure.

**GP:** All right, word nerds. Thanks so much for listening. Keep writing and keep being awesome.

