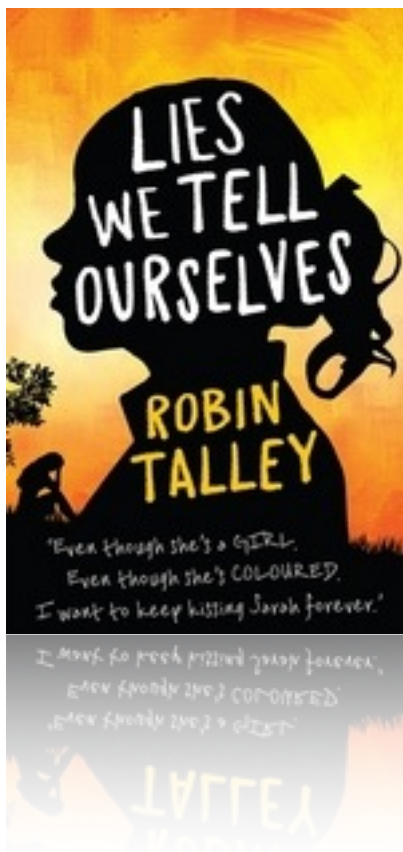


Q & A with Author Robin Talley

What inspired you to write *Lies We Tell Ourselves*?

I came up with the idea for *Lies We Tell Ourselves* while on a road trip with my parents. They both grew up in Virginia and were teenagers when their schools were first integrated in the 1960s. We were talking about their school memories, and about their fears that their schools might be closed due to the crisis over integration. I hadn't realized how real that fear was — that Virginia's governor really had closed schools to prevent them from integrating, sacrificing the educations of thousands of children in favour of a horrible, bigoted political agenda. I did more research on how it all happened, and as I read more about the details, I knew I wanted to write a story set against that backdrop. I wanted to explore what it would've been like to go through that. And I wanted to explore what it would've been like to be a gay teenager in 1959, keeping such an enormous secret in such intense circumstances.



What's your favourite moment in the book?

There's a lot of darkness in *Lies We Tell Ourselves*, but there's a moment in chapter 19 when Sarah, the main character, finally gets a chance to shine — to show everyone who she really is. It's one of the few times in the book when she actually allows herself to smile a little. Every time I reread that passage, I feel a swell of pride for her.

Who is your favourite character?

Lies We Tell Ourselves is full of characters I admire tremendously, but my favourite might be Sarah's younger sister, Ruth. Ruth manages to triumph in the face of impossible odds, and she does it all while remaining true to herself. As if being a high school freshman isn't hard enough even without being on the front lines of the biggest social justice movement of the century.

If you could go back to any time period what would it be?

Instead of going back I'd love to jump forward fifty years or so, to when we've achieved full equality for the LGBT community and come up with a plan to ensure that immigrants are treated fairly.

What was your favourite lesson at school?

I was a big nerd. I loved most of my classes, but English was always my favourite. Anything that involved reading!

If you could invite three people, dead or alive, to a dinner party...

George R.R. Martin, J.K. Rowling, and J.R.R. Tolkien. I would ask them to take turns telling stories all night while I listened, rapt, and refilled everyone's wine glasses.

What's your favourite quote?

"Writing is like getting married. One should never commit oneself until one is amazed at one's luck." – Iris Murdoch

Love is...

Love is recognizing that two very different people's imperfections can combine to make a perfect, unified whole.

What achievement are you most proud of?

I'm still quite pleased with the A I got in my Psychology lecture sophomore year of college despite having a B-minus average for most of the semester. Staying up all night cramming before the final exam pays off, kids!

Who's your favourite writer?

There are too many to list, but my perennial favourite young adult writer is E. Lockhart, author most recently of *We Were Liars*.

Who would play you in a movie about your life?

Can I request Alan Cumming in drag?

Where's your favourite place to write?

I usually write in a tiny windowless room in my house in Washington, D.C., with my cat curled up at my feet and my wife coming in to check on me every so often and make sure I haven't died.

What are your favourite films and book?

Some of my favourite recent films are *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *The Social Network*, and *Frozen*. My favourite recent books include *Out of the Easy* by Ruta Sepetys, *Rapture Practice* by Aaron Hartzler and *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell.

What one piece of advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Make friends with other writers, especially writers who have the same goals you do. It's crucial to have people you can confide in who understand what you're going through. Writing is otherwise very, very lonely.

Are there any particular songs you listen to when you're writing or that you feel particularly compliment your books?

Actually, no — I can't write if there's music playing. I'm too easily distracted! When I was writing *Lies We Tell Ourselves*, though, I listened to some music from the late 1950s, like Chuck Berry and Frankie Avalon, and I watched movies like *Some Like It Hot* and *Imitation of Life* to get a vibe for what the pop culture of the time was like.