

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

>> This is Sheryl Cannady at the Library of Congress. Late September will mark the 12th year that book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, D.C. to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival which is free and open to the public will be two days this year, Saturday, September 22nd from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Sunday September 23rd from noon to 5:30. The festival will take place between 9th and 14th Streets on the National Mall rain or shine. For more details visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. And now it is my deep pleasure to introduce R.L. Stine whose latest book is titled Goosebumps Most Wanted #1: Planet of the Lawn Gnomes. R.L. Stine has sold more than 100 million books making him one of the best selling children's authors in history. Thank you so much for joining us.

>> Well, Sheryl, it's a pleasure, pleasure to talk to you.

>> Your hugely successful Goosebumps series sold more than 300 million copies alone and was named the world's best selling book series of all time in the 2003 Guinness Book of World Records.

>> I got very lucky with the scary stuff. Turns out kids like to be scared.

>> Now, tell me what's your secret, what's the key to your appeal?

>> I do it by volume. I turn them out every month. That's my secret. I do it by poundage. Not by any literary work, just by poundage.

>> Well you're obviously very prolific.

>> I'm kidding, of course. But I think we all like to be scared, right? We all like a good scary story, and I just was lucky enough to stumble on to something as just a way of getting to kids and not scaring them too much but entertaining them. It was just a lucky thing I think.

>> Well, you said that kids really like to be scared, but they also want to feel safe. Now, how do you make that happen?

>> That's true. What I do is I make sure they know that nothing is real. I make sure that the real world, which is a pretty scary place to kids these days, doesn't enter in. And the kids know when they read the book they're reading some of this creepy fantasy. But they have to know that it's not real at all. That's an important part of it for me.

>> Now, is there one subject that's totally taboo that you would never write about?

>> Oh, there are many that I would never do for kids. I would never do child abuse or I would never do suicide or anything like that. I'm pretty conservative actually. The books don't look it but I actually am.

>> Now, you see a close connection between humor and horror. Why is that because you started out --

>> You know, when you go to amusement park and you walk up to the roller coaster what do you hear?

>> Screams.

>> Yeah, screaming and laughing at the same time. It's a very close emotion I think. And I don't know, when I go to a movie theater I don't get scared by horror films. They always make me laugh. The shark jumps up and chews up the girl I laugh. I don't know. I always think it's funny. When I was a kid there were these really creepy comic books called Tales From the Crypt and the Vault of Horror. And they were gruesome, bloody comics. I loved them when I was a kid, and they all had every story, no matter how gruesome it was, every story had a funny twist ending. And it was this great combination of scary and funny these books. And I think that was a major influence on me and on my writing.

>> Now, you want your books to give kids the shivers but, of course, not nightmares. How do you make certain that you don't cross that line especially when everyone's fear factor is different?

>> I've been here doing appearances for a long time. And I study kids, I spy on them all the time, and I make sure I know kids really well. I think after doing it for so many books I don't think it's a problem.

>> Now, regarding your creative process why do you start with the title first?

>> That's how I get -- everyone always says, Bob, where do you get your ideas? Where do you get so many ideas? They all come from thinking of the title first. A title will pop into my head, and then I'll try to think of a story to go with it. Maybe that's backwards for most authors. But, you know, I'm starting this new Goosebumps series. The brand new one is just out. It's called Planet of the Lawn Gnomes. And I'd already done a lawn gnome book, Attack of the Lawn Gnomes many years ago. And this is sort of the sequel. It's Goosebumps most wanted stories. And I had to have a title. I had to think what will my story be? I've already done lawn gnomes. And then I had this title Planet of the Lawn Gnomes, and it led me to a brand new story.

>> Well, now help me sort of come up with a title that you think might get your creative juices going. For example Eating for Olympic Gold or Eyes That Hear and Ears That See.

>> Sheryl, I think you have to write those.

>> Okay, understood.

>> Yes.

>> Now, what are the rules for writing for teens and children? Are there any rules that you apply?

>> Well, I broke a lot of the rules. The old rule was when you write for kids your characters have to learn and grow, and that was a pretty solid rule in children's books. The characters have to learn and grow. And that doesn't happen in my books. In my books the characters mainly run away. There's no learning or growing. I don't really have any lessons in my books. There's no real moral lessons to them. They're entirely reading motivation. They're entirely to get kids to say, hey, it's fun to read a book. Hey, I can read, I can read this book. That's all they're about.

>> Now, you've started a writing program and created a writing classroom kit. How do you get kids excited about reading and writing?

>> You have to realize kids have to write more than any living humans. Kids write all the time. They have to write essays and book reports and all kinds of things. They have to write. Every week they're writing. And all my mail from kids is where do you get ideas? Where do you get your ideas because they need to many ideas. They think that there's some secret that will help them. So teachers are very concerned about kids with reading and writing. So I wrote this 16 page writing project which is on my website actually, RLStine.com free. You can download it for free. It's 16 pages of all my writing secrets, all tips and secrets and all kinds of writing projects. And teachers use it, and you can download it for your whole class, do whatever you want with it. I hope it's helpful.

>> Well and certainly it is very, very helpful. Now, with emailing and tweeting and texting people are obviously writing more, but writing is becoming more condensed and thus less descriptive. Is technology making us better or worse writers?

>> That's a really good question. I don't know. I mean we started asking that question when computers came around. And people said, well, writing on the computer does that make your writing better or not? And I don't really have an answer for it. For a writing it's certainly a lot more convenient and a lot easier to revise, and I think maybe the easier it becomes to write the more good writing we'll see. I don't know. I don't have a good answer for that, Sheryl.

>> Well, obviously you do a lot of tweeting. Both your and the Library of Congress's twitter feeds were named among the best twitter feeds by time.com. Have you seen any change or influence by social media and technology, has it influenced your writing at all?

>> You know it doesn't for a couple of reasons. For one thing a lot of it hasn't filtered down to kids yet. I mean a lot of them have cell phones and they text and that kind of thing. But things like ebooks, technology hasn't really filtered down to kids that much. You don't see kids walking around with Kindles or iPads. It just hasn't really happened yet. And I have to be really careful in my books not to put too much technology in mainly because six months later it's all out of date. Everything changes. And if I have kids in the books listening to music on an iPod or something who knows what they're going to be listening to in two years, right?

>> Right.

>> So I have to be very careful about that. Luckily our basic fears never change. You know we're still scared of the dark, scared something's lurking under the bed, that kind of thing. That has nothing to do with technology. That will be good for a long time.

>> What book and/or movie would you rate highest on the scary meter even though you have a tendency to laugh?

>> Oh, what do I think is the scariest?

>> Yes.

>> Well, a book I always recommend to kids is a really creepy book and a beautifully written book is a Ray Bradbury novel that I just love called *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. And it's a very scary book about a boy who sneaks out of his house. He lives in the Midwest, sneaks out of his house in the middle of the night and goes to where this creepy carnival is setting up and gets all involved with all these evil characters. It's just a wonderful really creepy book I think.

>> I have just a couple of things sort of related to the theme for this year's National Book Festival. And it's a celebration of the book. So one question is what book most influenced you as a child or as an adult?

>> That's very hard. I have to say the author that I just mentioned, Ray Bradbury the science fiction author, was a major influence on me, major. Up until when I was nine or ten I discovered his stories. And they were so creative and so imaginative. I mean Bradbury really turned me into a reader.

>> And why are most readers so passionate about books once they discover the joy of reading?

>> I mean once you discover how wonderful it is then you're hooked. And that's sort of the whole point of my career. And all the Goosebumps books that I write is to get people to that point where they say, hey, reading is really fun. I don't have to watch television. I don't have to sit in front of my computer or play video games. Reading is really entertaining. Once they discover that then they'll read and read.

>> Well, obviously you are a popular author with our National Book Festival audience. You've appeared at the Book Festival several times, and we are all looking forward to your appearance again in September. Is there any particular thing that you would like to share with your fans?

>> Oh, well, thanks. I love this book festival. It's just one of my favorites. I look forward to it all the time. And it's just so wonderful, so many authors just spread out on the mall. It's so much fun and thousands of people. It's just wonderful to see people come out to enjoy books. And I'm happy, I always have fun. I usually tell a ghost story or write a ghost story with the kids and talk about the new Goosebumps book and that kind of thing. So I can't wait.

>> We've been hearing from author R.L. Stine who will appear on Saturday, September 22nd in teens and children's pavilion and the family story telling stage at the 2012 National Book Festival on the National Mall. Mr. Stine, thank you very much.

>> Thank you, Sheryl.

>> This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at loc.gov.