

“Lemons” is a sweet summer read

The Yak is always on the lookout for new books and great writers to share with you. And “Lemons,” the debut novel by Melissa Savage, is one of those special recommendations. Like a cool glass of lemonade in the summertime, you’ll drink this one up and be thirsty for more.

Melissa managed to squeeze plenty of juicy characters into “Lemons,” including its star, feisty and resilient Lemonade Liberty Witt (or Lem for short), who is dealing with the loss of her mom and starting a new life with a grandfather she’d never even known. Lem’s new life brings her to a tiny town in rural northern California, which happens to be the Bigfoot Capital of the world. It is a summer of healing, growing and unexpected adventure as she joins a quirky neighbor boy, Tobin Sky, the CEO of Bigfoot Detectives Inc., to become his assistant Bigfoot detective.

We loved Melissa’s book and wanted to know more about her – and her story – so we caught up with her by phone recently. Melissa, who lives in Minneapolis, told us that like Tobin in her story, she is also a fan of cryptozoology, which Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines as “the study of and search for animals and especially legendary animals (such as Sasquatch) usually in order to evaluate the possibility of their existence.”

As a Bigfoot backdrop for the novel, Melissa says, “I just think it’s so fun, it’s such a fun mystery.”

In addition to writing, Melissa is also a child and family therapist, and hopes to use her background to write “purposeful,” helpful books for young readers.

Melissa wrote “Lemons” in part to overcome her own loss. “Tobin is a very special character for me and was named after my son, Tobin. My son passed away in 2012 at nine months of age.”

“Just like Lemonade wanted her mother to remain a part of this world, I wanted my son to remain a part of this world, too,” says Melissa. “The character Tobin is what I imagined the real-life Tobin would grow up to

be. Stoic and brave, as he was, but also scientific like his dad and as big a fan of Bigfoot and cryptozoology as his mommy!”

Melissa was born and raised in Minnesota and says she’s wanted to be a writer since second grade when she wrote her first book, “The Lost Pony,” for a class assignment. (She still has it and even shares it on her website at melissadsavage.com) “I was hooked,” she says. At that time, “I said one day I would be a writer.”

But another book sent her in a different career direction. “In elementary school, I read a book called ‘Don’t Hurt Laurie’ about

child abuse and I was so moved by that book that I went to school to be a therapist,” says Melissa who became a child and family therapist. Melissa studied art in her undergraduate studies and earned a master’s degree in counseling and psychotherapy. Melissa uses art and play therapy in her job to help young people express their feelings. In 2008, Melissa returned to school to earn a second master’s degree in writing for children “because I still wanted to pursue writing and wanted to learn how to be better at writing.”

In fact, her novel “Lemons” grew out of a class writing exercise. She entered that assignment in a writing contest and ended up landing an agent who wanted to read more than her 15-page entry, she wanted to read the whole manuscript!

Melissa got busy, writing the first draft of “Lemons” in about five months. After working on editing and revising the story, she sold it to a major publisher a few months later. Sweet!

Now Melissa is at work on her second book. She described it like this: “My next book is also a middle-grade novel about two 10-year-old boys, Mylo and Dibs, who come upon the (possible) UFO crash site in Roswell, New Mexico... I thought it would be fun to write a story about kids finding the wreckage in the field, and even more important, a story about who they find among that wreckage!”

Fun indeed, that sounds like another great mystery!

By Janis Campbell

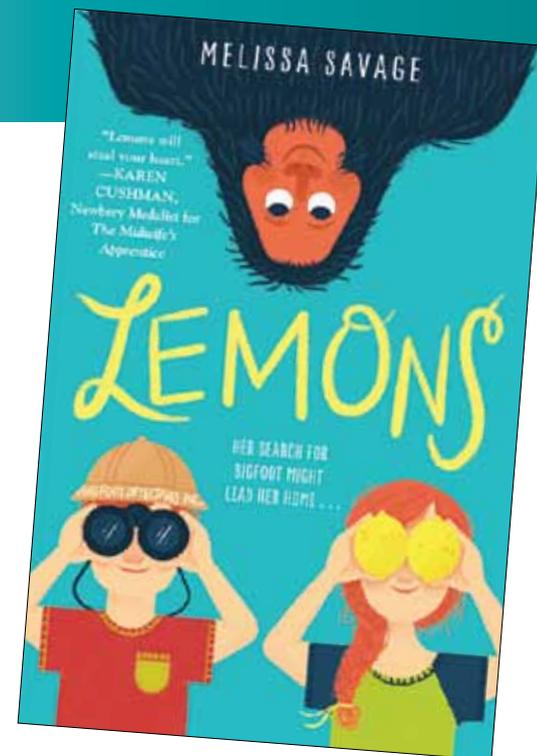


Photo Courtesy of Crown Books for Young Readers

Melissa Savage says her debut novel “Lemons” is “a book about friendship, it’s a book about feelings of loss, and it has a lot of hope in it.”

FAST FACTS

Home life: Melissa lives with her husband, Jeff, and their two dogs, Sedona and Gatsby, in Minneapolis. She has two grown-up stepchildren, Mike and Amanda.

Advice for young writers: “If you love to write, never, ever stop writing. And never stop learning what it takes to be the best writer you can be. I continue to read books on craft and take courses to improve my skills as a writer, and that’s something I will always do. I don’t believe you can ever know enough. And never stop when someone says it’s not good enough. The first drafts never are. Sometimes it isn’t right on the second draft either. But keep going!”

Source: Crown Books For Young Readers/Random House Children’s Books