One Thing – Literary Edition with Stuart Brown

EPISODE 7. LINDSEY ADUSKEVICH

https://stuartjbrown.com/podcast/one-thing-literary-edition-7-lindsey-aduskevich/

SUMMARY

In this episode, Stuart Brown speaks with Lindsay Aduskevich, a Junior Literary Manager at Martin Literary Management, regarding the persistence required to succeed as an author. The discussion centers on the psychological and practical challenges of the querying process and the vital role of community in maintaining momentum.

KEY POINTS

- **The "Thick Skin" Mandate:** Success in the literary industry requires an emotional buffer against rejection. Aduskevich notes that she sent between 300 and 400 queries starting in 2019 before securing an agent.
- **The Reality of the Timeline:** Even after securing an agent, the journey is long. Aduskevich shares that she is currently in her third year "on sub" (submission to publishers) without a deal yet, emphasizing that persistence must continue even after reaching major milestones.
- **Writing Partners vs. Critique Groups:**
    - **Writing Partners:** Provide daily accountability and deep industry research collaboration.
    - **Critique Groups:** Offer broader perspectives on market trends, writing standards, and genre-specific rules.
- **The Art of Receiving Feedback:**
    - **Professionalism:** The ability to take constructive criticism without defensiveness is a key indicator of how well an author will work with future agents and editors.
    - **Subjectivity:** Feedback should be weighed against the author's own vision. While it is important to listen, authors are not obligated to implement changes that do not resonate with their core story.
- **Finding Your Community:** Aspiring authors should actively "push" themselves into the industry via social media (using hashtags like #WritingCommunity or #KidLit), professional organizations like SCBWI, and attending literary conferences to meet peers.
- **The Shared Struggle:** Stuart Brown highlights that even professionals within the industry face high rejection rates, noting that he is personally approaching nearly 300 queries himself. This shared experience provides "solace" and confirms that a long wait is a common part of the process, not necessarily a reflection of talent.

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING THE "ON SUBMISSION" PHASE

Being "on sub" can be a lengthy and emotionally taxing period, often lasting years. To navigate this phase effectively, consider these approaches:

1. **Maintain a Growth Mindset:** Instead of viewing rejections as failures, treat them as opportunities to continue growing. Use the time to challenge yourself by writing better characters, stronger themes, and more engaging stories.

2. **Curate Your Social Perspective:** Actively pivot away from feelings of jealousy or self-doubt when seeing others' success. Instead, use their announcements as inspiration and proof that a deal is possible if you do not give up.
3. **Stay Immersed in the Industry:** Continue attending webinars, workshops, and conferences to stay up-to-date on market trends and what editors are currently seeking.
4. **Deepen Genre Research:** Read widely within your specific genre to ensure your current and future work remains competitive and informed by current writing trends.
5. **Leverage High-Frequency Accountability:** Establish a daily or highly frequent correspondence with a dedicated writing partner. Sharing feedback on smaller items, such as cover letters or interview prep, can provide constant momentum while waiting for larger news.

FINDING REGIONAL WRITING CHAPTERS AND GROUPS

Building a support system is critical for long-term persistence in the industry. You can find these communities through several channels:

- **Professional Organizations:** Groups like the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) provide regional chapters that host monthly meetups and events for members.
- **Conference Opportunities:** Many industry conferences feature "peer round critique tables" where writers can share manuscripts and exchange feedback. These events are prime locations to exchange emails and form new, lasting groups.
- **Social Media Outreach:** Utilize platforms like Twitter, BlueSky, or Facebook to put out a call for partners. Using targeted hashtags such as #WritingCommunity or genre-specific tags like*#KidLit can help you find writers in similar positions.
- **Community Facilitators:** Look for active community members on social media who offer to help form and organize critique groups for others.
- **Consistency Over Scale:** As noted in the discussion, the value of a group often lies in the consistency of its members rather than its size. Smaller groups – sometimes as few as five or six people – can offer more personalized and in-depth feedback sessions.

TRANSCRIPT

Stuart Brown: Welcome to Welcome to One Thing – Literary Edition, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents: What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors? I'm your host, playwright and author Stuart Brown. Information about all my work can be found at my website, stuartjbrown.com. On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Lindsey Aduskevich, a Junior Literary Manager at Martin Literary Management. Welcome to the program, Lindsay.

Lindsay Aduskevich: Thanks so much for having me, Stuart.

Stuart Brown: So Lindsay, what is your "one thing"?

Lindsay Aduskevich: So, advice I would give to new authors is going to tie into my querying journey. It's so important that you come into this industry with thick skin. I started querying in 2019 and sent out somewhere between 300 or 400 queries. I can't remember the exact number, but it took me a long time to get an agent. And I could say it was particularly difficult to watch my fellow critique partners and everyone else I followed on social media make all their agent announcements or announce their publishing deals. But instead of paying attention to any negative thoughts like jealousy or self-doubt that popped up in my mind, I focused on the

positive ones. I allowed myself to be truly happy for everyone who was able to acquire an agent or a book deal, and I even used these announcements and achievements of my fellow creatives as sources of inspiration. I told myself the only way these things would ever happen for me is if I didn't give up. Simple, right? Well, not when you have to go through hundreds and hundreds of rejections to get there.

So, how did I stay positive through all that? I reminded myself that we don't all start out perfect at something. Very few of us are perfect at anything, but the most perfect thing a person can do is continue to grow. Through all the rejections I received, I kept writing and kept challenging myself to do better – to write better characters, better themes, better stories. I stayed active with critique partners, attended webinars, workshops, and conferences. I also read widely in the genre I write. But most importantly, I still haven't given up. I have an agent; we are going out into our third year on sub, and I still don't have a publishing deal. And every one of you out there who has one or is getting one soon, you all continue to be an inspiration to me and to everyone else trying to make it in this industry. So, my advice to you is to get out there, find your people, keep honing those writing skills, never forget this industry is subjective, and most importantly, never give up.

Stuart Brown: I think a lot of people out there can relate to what you're saying. I'm looking at my spreadsheet right now; I don't think I'm at 300, but I'm getting close. And when I've talked to other agents and people at conferences that have had literary agents, they say, "Yeah, I'm in year one, year two, still looking for that deal." So as frustrating as that can be, it does provide a little solace that you're not alone – that this happens to people, and especially people in the industry. Here you are, there are other literary agents – the exact same story. So I think telling people to keep at it and to stay positive is a very positive "one thing."

Lindsay Aduskevich: Thanks. I hope it helps anybody who's thinking about pulling back or giving up to just keep going. The only way you're ever going to get there is if you just keep going.

Stuart Brown: So what recommendations would you give besides that positivity? Maybe looking for a writing group or other individuals that can help you on your journey? Can you talk a little bit about what you did to get those people in your corner?

Lindsay Aduskevich: So, when I attended my first conference in 2019, I met who I refer to as my writing partner because we're a little bit more than critique partners – we communicate multiple times a day and share everything, not just our writing, but like interviews or cover letters or things like that. Anything we share with each other, and we give feedback, and we're constantly cheering each other on. And we actually took on researching agencies and kind of doing a lot of industry research together. I met her in 2019 and we banded together right away. I loved her writing, she was very inspiring, she was a wonderful person. Because I also joined other critique groups at the time, but that daily correspondence that we had allowed for an accountability that I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else. And it was on both ends – so like I kept her accountable, she kept me accountable, and it kept us very active in the industry.

And I think joining the critique groups too was another way of accountability and just keeping yourself immersed in it, because you want to stay up to date, you want to know the current market, you want to know the writing trends, you want to know what editors are looking for. And all of these things come with daily or weekly or monthly – however you want to handle that with your critique partners – correspondence and participation in writing the stories and getting the feedback and receiving feedback. All that helps you grow and become more prepared for a career as an author.

Stuart Brown: I think if you can find that critique group, it's so important. I'm involved with one right now and I always marvel that this call for the monthly critique group goes out to, I think, 175 people. Six people show up. And this has been consistent for months; this isn't a one-shot thing. And I don't understand why more

people don't do it. Conversely, it's great for the five or six people that show up because you can read maybe ten pages. If you had twenty people, that might be difficult; you might not even be able to read for that particular meeting. And I have found it so encouraging and so insightful. I consider myself more a playwright than a book author, and when it comes to writing plays, I'm no expert, but I feel I have a little more expertise. With books, not so much. So people point out things and I am so grateful that they are giving me this feedback.

Unfortunately, then I have to go back and rewrite what I did or add to it. And I think one other thing you said, having a thick skin – a friend of mine who is an artistic director at a theater complimented me because I always send him my work for comments, and I always thank him. And he said, "You know, Stu, I can't tell you how many playwrights get so mad if you give them constructive feedback." And I'm like, "Isn't that the whole point?" Like you said, we're not experts necessarily and we need that. So finding, I think, a critique group and listening and having that tough skin – because it might not always be what you want to hear – is very important.

Lindsay Aduskevich: 100%. It is so important that you're able to take feedback and take it in a positive light. And vice versa, it's important that you're giving feedback positively as well, because again, with this being a subjective industry, everybody has a different opinion. And so being able to give and receive in a positive way is also a huge indicator about how well you're going to work in this industry with an agent or with an editor. Because if you can't take feedback in a positive way and it stresses you out and that shows, then people are going to be a little bit more hesitant to work with you.

And then again, touching back on feedback from critique partners or beta readers: it's also important that receiving feedback positively doesn't mean taking everything they said and making those changes. It means taking what resonates with you and making those changes. If this feedback is not resonating with what you want for this story, you do not have to take it; you do not have to move forward with it. This is your story. If you're getting an entire group who's saying, "You know, that's really against this genre's rules and it's not making sense," you may then want to consider, if it's not resonating with you, approaching it in a different light.

Stuart Brown: I agree. For both my plays and for the book, people if they make comments, I'm always very thankful. But then I have to weigh that to say, "Well, I don't necessarily say this to the group, but when I'm alone with my laptop to say, 'Okay, is this really what I want to say?' or 'Do I need to change this?'" or as you said, it's very subjective. So for that person, it might not be working. But for me, I think it does. So it's really weighing what people said, not necessarily "Oh, if someone gives me feedback, I automatically have to change it." You met your partner at a conference. So let's say someone is listening and they're thinking, "Gee, I need a partner," or "I need a writing group." Is there a way to easily maybe not get that writing partner, but putting let's say a call out for a critique group or maybe through a professional association or something?

Lindsay Aduskevich: Absolutely. You can do this so many ways. If you are on any social media – if you're on Twitter, BlueSky, anything, Facebook (I think the KidLit industry is active on Facebook too) – put a post out there and say "I'm looking for a critique group," and hashtag it #KidLit or whatever genre you write — #WritingCommunity if you write older genres. And people are going to respond or people are going to share it.

And if you're not having luck there, if you're part of SCBWI, they have regional critique groups that you can join. I attend still, not regularly, but as much as I can, I still attend a monthly meetup through New England SCBWI that one of my critique partners hosts monthly. And I'm trying to think… going to conferences. If you go to conferences, there is usually an event and it's a peer round critique table, something like that. And joining in and having your manuscript and giving feedback and receiving feedback is another great way to make those

connections, and you're going to exchange emails at the end and you're likely going to form groups with whomever you're connecting with. I joined a few critique groups that way.

And I'm sure there's a few other ways. There's a lot of people who are doing events for KidLit on social media who also form critique groups for you. So just immersing yourself in these organizations and online, you're going to find it hard not to join critique groups; you're actually going to be trying to say, "No, I'm sorry, I've joined too many." So it's definitely not hard if you're pushing yourself and getting yourself out there.

Stuart Brown: Well Lindsay, I think this is such important information and as you said, thick skin, continuing with your writing, having faith in yourself is very important. It's hard. It is very, very hard. But to really have that attitude that "I can do this and it's going to take time, but this is what I want to do." So thank you very much.

Lindsay Aduskevich: Of course.

Stuart Brown: I've been speaking with Lindsay Aduskevich, a Junior Literary Manager at Martin Literary Management. You've been listening to One Thing – Literary Edition, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents: What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors? I've been your host Stuart Brown, playwright and author. Information about all my works can be found on my website at stuartjbrown.com. I hope you will join us next time for another edition soon.

ABOUT THE HOST

Stuart J. Brown is an award-winning Connecticut playwright whose 10-Minute works have been staged across the country. He's also written four full one-act plays. You can see all his work at stuartjbrown.com.

Brown is a theater critic with the Outer Critics Circle and the Connecticut Critics Circle. Additionally, he operates the 24/7 online Broadway radio station, Sounds of Broadway (soundsofbroadway.com), featuring the best from Off-Broadway, Broadway, and London stages. His 'On Broadway' podcast features discussions with figures from the world of music and stage. He's aired more than 700 episodes since 2006. (broadwayradioprograms.com)

Additional podcasts include "One Thing with Stuart Brown" (stuartjbrown.com/podcast) with the latest edition focusing on the publishing and writing world. He asks a simple question of seasoned literary agents…

"What is one piece of advice you would give to new authors?"

For questions & press inquiries, email stu@stuartjbrown.com. Follow on Instagram @stuartjbrown_author. More resources available in the Press Room at stuartjbrown.com/press-room.

