

## Stephen King Podcast Bonus Ep19

**Lou Sytsma:** Hello everyone, and welcome to the latest episode of the Stephen King bonus podcast. This is bonus episode number 19 and that's a special number for Stephen King fans. And so Kelly, you should be a little honored that you are on the 19th podcast.



**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Oh no, is this a quiz?

**Lou Sytsma:** You have to read *The Dark Tower* series and you'll get that reference.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I haven't read that one.

**Lou Sytsma:** It's only seven books or eight now, actually. So. They'll take you a while. Plenty of time. That's great. All right, so I have with me today, Kelly Brakenhoff, and she is an author of several series, which I will let her get into. Why don't you tell us about the stuff that you write, Kelly and a little bit about yourself?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Thank you. Thanks for having me. So like he said, my name is Kelly and I'm an extrovert. I'm super excited today to speak to someone other than my dogs. Normally when I'm not in quarantine, I'm an American Sign Language Interpreter and I live in Lincoln, Nebraska. My husband and I are empty nesters and we have two dogs.

I write two series. One is a children's picture book series featuring Duke, the Deaf dog, and I have a cozy mystery series featuring Cassandra Sato. The first one is called *Death by Dissertation*, and the second is *Dead Week*. The main character in the mysteries, Cassandra Sato is born and raised in Hawai'i, and she trades her life there for a dream job in Nebraska.

No one does that. Exactly. But she thinks that working at a small liberal arts college will help her get experience to someday become a university president. Two months in, a student dies and she has to help with the investigation. Mayhem ensues, and her job rapidly becomes a nightmare.

**Lou Sytsma:** We'll get back to that, but before we do, I just want to find out a little bit about yourself writing from what I can see on your website, it sounds like this was something that you wanted to do your whole life.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Definitely since I was little. But you know, life happens. I have four children who are now grown, and I worked as an American Sign Language Interpreter for more than 20 years, mostly in college classrooms. I've interpreted for 15 different majors. I actually get to attend classes with the deaf students, and I overhear all the class discussions and what the teacher's teaching. You would think I would learn a lot from all of that, but unfortunately, a lot of it kind of goes in one ear and out my hands, and then I forget about it.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay. I'm sorry to interject. Can you, what did you mean by that?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Over the years since I attend classes with students, I get to go through their programs with them basically. I've interpreted everything from, gosh, architecture to global studies, teaching PhD candidates, education. Yeah.

**Lou Sytsma:** I got you. Sorry, continue.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Let's see. So as far as the writing goes, that academic world, you know, has so much drama and intrigue. I've heard people say things or I've seen things that even a fiction writer can't make up. It's the perfect setting for a mystery series and Cassandra is a fish out of water. She grew up in paradise. Most of the people look like her.

She's ambitious, but she takes this job in nowhere in Nebraska because she wants to get some experience. She's overwhelmed by this story and is surrounded by miles of cornfields. I think as a writer, I like to write about that struggle to fit in. In her case, it's a new job, but I think all of us have to struggle to fit in somewhere like with classmates, or who you want to be when you grow up. I write about that. Actually, my children's books venture into that world too. I didn't really intend to go there, but that's where my writing has gone.

**Lou Sytsma:** Well, I say write what you know, and it sounds like you've definitely put that to practice. So reeling back a little bit, I understand that you always wanted to be a writer. Where did that bug come from, and how was it nurtured as you were growing up?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Yeah, so gosh, honestly, I don't remember not wanting to be a writer. I've been a bookworm since I was a little girl. I've read everything I could get my hands on. When I was a little girl, my sister and I used to make little homemade comic books. She's an artist and I would write the words, and our parents just kind of always were like, Oh, we have an artist and a writer, you know? But I didn't do that for most of my life. I've been doing something else, but I think it's the language that I am attracted to.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right. Okay. And after your comic book phase and sort of going into high school and whatnot, did you take any writing courses or were you writing at all during that time period.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Sure, in high school, and I majored in English in college, and so of course went through creative writing and stuff. I have lots of favorite authors, but I love Mark Twain, the Lord of the Rings, Hawthorn, Melville. I did this class in college where we read *Moby Dick*. Actually, I ended up reading it twice because I was in two different classes where we read that.

**Lou Sytsma:** Yeah. I have to admit, I've tried to read *Moby Dick* several times, but I just can't get past the first chunk of it. Maybe I should skip ahead to when he gets on the boat. I can't remember the name of the place now, but before he goes out on the boat, that section is like, wow, pretty dry.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** But my professor, that was his thing, and I think maybe he made it more exciting than it would have been without having someone guide you through. As far as mystery writers, I loved John Grisham, Mary Higgins Clark. I remember reading lots of her in high school, except she scared me to death. Stephen King also scared me.



**Lou Sytsma:** I was just going to say, it sounds like there's a gap in your reading. I haven't heard any King mentions yet.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Actually, have a story about that. When I was in college, I was reading *The Shining*. I don't know why I read in my dorm room bed at two o'clock in the morning. I couldn't put the book down, so there's one light and me sitting up reading in the middle of the night and I was just so scared. I woke up my roommate because I was like, Oh God!

**Lou Sytsma:** That sounds like a perfect recipe for reading a Stephen King book. I've done it myself when I was younger. Now I can't do that, but I used to get the book and read it in two days, staying up all night and stuff like that. But now I pace them out. Even though he's a prolific writer, they only come out every two while every year or so. So you have to pace yourself as well. I don't tear through them as quickly as I used to. Yeah. Those were the days when we were young and carefree. Right.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** In the morning after reading all night, I pay for it.

**Lou Sytsma:** So you're taking these courses and then you graduate. While you're taking the courses, were you part of any writing groups doing creative writing, or were you just basically applying yourself to your studies?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Mostly in college, I took creative writing classes, the workshops, and the critique groups. I didn't really do very much organized after college. When I first graduated, I was interested in sign language too. I didn't realize that was going to become my life's work, but it has. Like I said, I think it's the language part.

Linguistics dovetailed the English and American Sign Language. I had quite a few years there where I was just writing for myself and my family. My Christmas card letter was always popular but trying to write with small children. Wow, there's so many people out there that do both, but I could not. I just wrote short stories and articles and things like that, but just couldn't get my act together enough to do a book until my youngest was in high school.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, so once you started writing on a regular basis, were you part of a group? Did you become part of a group then or do you do this work in isolation?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I usually just work by myself, but the thing that really pushed me over the edge and made it possible for me to finish my first book was joining NaNoWriMo in 2014.

**Lou Sytsma:** Oh, okay.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Have you ever done NaNoWriMo?

**Lou Sytsma:** I've tried it a couple of times. Yeah. It's not my cup of tea, but I understand if it works for a lot of people. For me, it took the joy out of writing. It made it seem more like a chore that I had to get done every day, and maybe that's my issue. But I wasn't finding it enjoyable, so I haven't really done it again since that.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** For me, I think it was the challenge of I can do anything for 30 days. Like I had always wanted to be a writer and I'd always wanted to write a book, but there's a long space between wanting to do something and actually doing it. And the 30-day challenge was something that I thought, okay I can do this.

I might not write a whole book, but I can do this for 30 days. Right. Of course, once you get going and you do it, and I'm kind of competitive, so I don't want to give up. Then you get done and you're like, okay, I wrote 50,000 words. That's more than I've ever written in my life. I could see that it was possible, and so just kind of went from there. For me it pushed me over the hump of, if you just write a little bit every day, eventually you get somewhere.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right. Okay. So just before we get into your books a little further, I'm interested in your American Sign Language background as well. I'm curious how that informed your writing in any way. You said your love of languages was key, but were you learning ASL for any other reasons? Was there a family relation that you wanted to sign with or there's nothing related to that?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** When I was in high school, I volunteered at a summer camp that had Deaf kids, and I started off signing absolutely nothing except how to spell my name. By the end of the summer, I had picked up enough to at least talk to some of the students. I went home over the school year and studied, and I kept taking classes all through high school and college to try to get better at American Sign Language.

By the time I was done with college. The Deaf people that I had become friends with said, Hey, you know, I think you actually should think about this as a career. And I was like, Oh, but I think I want to write. But of course, when I applied for jobs as a writer with very little to no experience, that was a lot more difficult than I thought it would be.

I ended up interpreting. And sometimes one thing leads to another, and you find your thing. That's what happened to me. I've learned so much from being around Deaf people for most of my life, and I love the language. **Lou Sytsma:** Have you worked sign language into your stories in any way yet, or are you planning to, or that's just something in the background you haven't thought about yet?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Yeah, definitely being around all of these Deaf people my whole working life has become a part of how I see the world. A lot of Deaf people experience frustration and oppression, being a minority group, people think they have a disability, and having obstacles before them. All of my books have characters who are Deaf and sign. I love to put them in the books. One of the things that people have said, the readers of my books have said they really like is that I throw in things about what it's like to be a Deaf student and learning in a class through sign language or attending college as a Deaf student.

Or I have a professor who's Deaf, and so I put in the story things that I know from my job about sign language and Deaf Culture. Just enough so that people learn a little bit about that while they read the book.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right. Very cool. And from a craft perspective, I'm curious because anytime you write a story where you're dealing with different cultures and languages, you have to explain things.

In this case, it would be a much more of a mechanical explanation, like with the signing with your hands. Do you describe that a little bit or do you just reference the fact that you do certain things with your hands to make a particular word or phrase? Then after that you say, and then I signed the statement, instead of breaking it down into all the details, because that would get clunky.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I know exactly what you mean. Because my first attempt at it was pretty clunky. I had to really think about that a lot because the first book, *Death by Dissertation*, it not only has people speaking English and signing, and one of the characters in the books is an interpreter, like what I do. Then the book also has people communicating by texting and by email. And my first go at that, I wasn't sure how to do that. I ended up with all these different fonts, italics, and indenting. A couple of my beta readers were like, no, just stop. Please.

What I ended up doing is everything is in quotations. Texts are in quotes. Signing is in quotes, talking is in quotes, everything is in quotes. Then I identify what type of communication it is. So I'll say, so-and-so texted quote, and then I write it, or so-and-so signed, and then I write that. I do sometimes describe the gestures that people make, probably more than other writers do.

I have noticed that I add a lot of gestures in my books because my characters are paying attention to those things. But you have to pick and choose, and if you do it too much, as a reader, it's annoying. I think you have to use it sparingly. But yeah, the quotes seem to be the most straightforward way to show all of that for me.

**Lou Sytsma:** This puts you in an interesting position as a writer, because a lot of times writers have to write about things that they don't know about. And of course, it doesn't matter how much research you do, unless you've done it, or it's been a vocation of yours, you're bound to make mistakes. And readers just love to point out mistakes to writers.

But you're in a unique position where if a reader would do that to you. You obviously have the background to say, no, that's not correct. This is actually how it is done. Is that ever happened to you?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** You know, that was a big concern of mine. I mean, I think that happens to any writer when you write about a character that isn't you. You have to, like you said, do your research, and I was concerned that people would be like, you live in the middle of Nebraska. Why are you writing about Hawai'i? Why are you writing about an Asian woman? And writing about Deaf people from their perspective? But yeah, I've done enough research and I really work hard at making the things that I include authentic. I haven't had problems so far.

I haven't had anybody challenge me as far as the different. I know other people do this too. I don't necessarily call them sensitivity readers, but all the different things that I do in my

books that I'm not an expert at, I make sure that I send it. Even if I am an expert, I still make sure that I send it to someone and say, Hey, would you look at this chapter and make sure that I did this right, or I said this right, or that kind of thing.

Especially the second book I wrote was called *Dead Week*, and there's quite a bit of it is about the Deaf community protesting accessibility to emergency information, which we're seeing right now with the Coronavirus updates. I don't know if you've noticed, but most of the press conferences, they'll have an interpreter off to the side. A lot more people are becoming aware of what we do just because of watching those press conferences. Deaf people have been very strongly demanding that they need access to information at the same time as everyone else gets it and complete access. So I actually wrote about that last year in my book. I wanted to be strong about my feeling that, they deserve, they need, they want access, but I didn't also want to make them sound like jerks.

I sent the book to several of my Deaf friends and I was like, okay, there's a few rants in here. Can you look at this and make sure this is what you think? And every single one of them wrote back to me and said, yes, please, this is what we want people to know. I thought that was cool.

**Lou Sytsma:** I was wondering now about your two series. You have the Cassandra series, and then you have another series that's for school children. I don't know what the age group on that one is. It's a grade school?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Probably preschool, age three to about second grade is where it's geared at. Definitely where an adult is reading out loud to a child. They're not something that a child can read aloud to themselves.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right? And that series is called Duke, the Deaf dog, which is a very new concept. And is that something that you thought up on your own or how did that come about for you?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** That's kind of funny that you asked because I didn't really intend to do that. Originally, I had started writing the mystery series and I published those last year, the first one in April and the second one in December. And once I made the decision to publish it, I had to set up my own publishing imprint and do all the paperwork and get that all started.

And I thought about things that I was passionate about and things that, like you said, I'm an expert on or know about. I just woke up one morning, as weird as it sounds, and I thought what kind of children's books for Deaf kids are out there? In this age group, there are very, very few children's books that have Deaf characters. And like I said, I have four children, and they had their choice of pretty much every book in the world that they could open up and see someone like themselves in the book.

I thought why do they have three books that they can open up and see someone who's like them? The more I researched and thought about it, I thought, this is what I really want to do is have a book that a deaf child can connect with and see themselves in it. It's grown from this seed of an idea into something that I'm excited about and super proud of.

**Lou Sytsma:** And is that book available yet?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Yes. The first one is called *Never Mind* and Duke does not like being told, never mind. But when you're hard of hearing or deaf a lot of times you miss something the first time someone says it. And then people get frustrated and they say, Oh, never mind.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right, right. Oh wow.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** It's a universal thing that happens to pretty much everyone who's Deaf or hard of hearing of any age. No one really likes to be brushed aside. It's turned out to be something that a lot of people can relate to.

**Lou Sytsma:** Oh, cool. And are you aiming to get this into any school systems like that, or are you just selling it generally to everybody?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Both. It's available online through any bookseller. Before we were all staying at home all the time, we were going to school visits and libraries and reading it out loud. Unfortunately, that's been cut off the last couple of months, but I hope to get back to more school visits. So far, the reception has been really positive.

**Lou Sytsma:** And at the risk of creating tension between you and your sister, is she the illustrator of this book or is this somebody else.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** She is, which is funny because when we were little, our books were not very good, but now we've both grown into adults. Yes, my sister is an excellent artist and she captures, all the characters in the book are dogs, and she has the most precious facial expressions on all of them. She does a great job. She really makes the books come alive.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right, so you've come full circle from your childhood days.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I know. Isn't that funny?

**Lou Sytsma:** That's pretty cool.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** It is pretty cool. I never would have thought that. I remember I used to kind of roll my eyes and my parents would be like, Oh, she's going to be a writer and she's going to be an artist. But oh my gosh, they were right.

**Lou Sytsma:** Yeah. That's pretty cool. Is that your sister's full-time occupation?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** She's a freelancer, and she does some interior design. She also does commercial murals, really large ones. And then she also does illustration too. She does everything. I think she's really enjoying the books. She's got a soft spot in her heart for dogs, so there we go. Right. It checks boxes for her.

**Lou Sytsma:** Yeah, that's pretty cool. I think that's really cool to kind of have been able to do that. Let's circle back to your other series. Can you tell me where the idea came for the character and why you set her? You already said you like stories about seeing an outsider coming in. Where she came from? Is her last name, inferring that she's Oriental or Middle Eastern?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Sure, Cassandra Sato, that name is actually of Japanese origin. When my husband and I were first married, we lived in Hawai'i for five years. And had a great time. We met lots of fun people, loved it there. When we eventually moved back to Nebraska, of course, we kept in touch with a lot of people that we were friends with in Hawai'i. I fantasize about people coming to visit me here in Nebraska, but of course. Like we said before, who would do that? No one would.

In fiction, I can do whatever I want because I'm the author. So yeah, I thought, wouldn't be funny if a person moved from Hawai'i to Nebraska and what would that look like? Using that germ of an idea. I know when I moved to Hawai'i, it was quite a culture shock. I thought, well, I bet it would be as shocking if not more if a person moved here. Taking my experience interpreting in Nebraska and experience living in Hawai'i and mashing it all together is how I set up the mystery series.

**Lou Sytsma:** Cool. And you had the idea of as this being a series right from the get-go, or was it when you started writing this book, and you thought, I think I can turn this into a series.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** My favorite writers as far as mysteries are Sue Grafton and Janet Evanovich. I love those long running series where you get to see the character, her development over years and different situations. Pretty much from the beginning, once I started envisioning this, I thought it needed to have a series. I have five books planned so far, and if those do well, I could add more because she's in a place and a job that could go on for a long time.

**Lou Sytsma:** And so Nebraska is a place of a lot of crime, apparently.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Yes, you do end up with that whole Cabot Cove problem. Eventually, we can do a study abroad, and of course Cassandra's going to have to take students back to Hawai'i for a trip, like a study abroad. We'll have to have the murder and mayhem move around. It can't all be in Carson, Nebraska, or people might kind of wonder.

**Lou Sytsma:** Are the stories interrelated or is each book a separate mystery?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** They stand alone, but of course there's continuity of characters. So it helps if you read them all, but a person could just pick up a book and start it and still be able to enjoy that mystery.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay. And beyond Cassandra's long-term goal to become a Dean of a college ...

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** President of the university . . .

**Lou Sytsma:** Is there an overarching character arc for her in terms of a mystery with her family or any sort of relationship issues that she's trying to deal with? Like I don't know if she has father issues or mother issues or whatever, but is there something that's going to be stalking her over the course of your books, or is she just pretty well, a career-oriented person?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Yeah, I think that career thing is what was the trigger for her to move, but as far as her character development she is a loner, a very competent person who can stand



on her own and independent. But over time she has to learn that relationships and a team will get you more in the long run than just trying to do everything by yourself. Even if you are really smart and you are really good, you still have to learn how to depend on other people.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, and can you give a quick synopsis for, you have two books so far, right? Can you just talk about what the first one and what the second one is about?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Sure. The first one is just her getting used to being in Nebraska. The mystery is the Deaf student dies two months after she gets her job, and it has to do with a research lab on the on campus. There's a cancer biological research lab and something funny is going on there, and she has to figure out what's going on with that. There's negative publicity and it's a very small private college. They don't want any publicity because they want tuition dollars. It's called *Dead Week* and it takes place. I don't know if Alberta has Dead Week at your colleges, but a lot of the colleges in our area, the week before Finals Week, we call Dead Week because teachers can't give new assignments and you can't have big project. It's supposed to be a quiet study time before finals.

**Lou Sytsma:** Yep. I think we call it study week or reading week or something like that, but dead week is probably what the slang term would be.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Dead Weeks sounds a lot more sinister and students gets hurt several times. There's a past mystery that comes into it too. The students are supposed to be studying, but they're not. They're having a party in the library and doing other things, and so she's got all kinds of problems. Her mentor thinks he's a superhero. Her new boss talks to her dead husband. We've got all kinds of things going on here, so you know. This is kind of one of those stories.

Both books are about Cassandra trying to do something straightforward. She's very smart, and every time she's got her act together, then 10 things get dumped in her lap. College administration is a crazy job. You never just to show up at work and do what you thought you were going to do that day. You get bombarded by all of these other things that become more important throughout the day that you hadn't ever really planned on doing. You're at the whim of whatever crisis comes up. In each book, she might have the one thing that she's working on, but five other things pop up. They take over the episode.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay. What point of view do you write the books?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** They're all from Cassandra's points of view.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, first person.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** It's actually third person, very close. Everything is filtered through her, which is a lot more of a challenge than I realized it was going to be at the beginning.

**Lou Sytsma:** She has a confidant or somebody that she talks to help externalize her internal conflicts?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Sure. She has kind of a whole group of friends and sidekicks. They get together and she bounces ideas off them and they help her.

She's gotten to be really good friends with the campus security. Her best friend is that interpreter that I mentioned, and so she's got this group of people that she works out the crimes with.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right. And do you ever leave her, do you ever leave her point of view for the revelation that you need to do that she can't be privy to or anything like that?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I have not done that yet. Like I said, it was really a challenge at the beginning to figure out how to do that. But I'm working on my third book in this series, and that's how I think of everything is through her, what she knows, and what she can find out. When you put on those constraints, it opens up other ways to be creative, I guess..

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, that's very cool. Now, you mentioned that you have five books planned in the series, so I'm getting a little more into now. You've got your writing process and your craft. Are you a plotter or a pantsier?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I have a confession. I am a failed plotter. I love order and organization. I have tried every kind of outline method you've heard of. I mean, you've got the snowflakes, saving cats, four acts. I've tried all of it. Right. I'm on my third book and I can finally admit I'm a pantsier. I make the outline. I know the beginning. I know the rough middle, I know the ending, but once I start writing the first draft, I add and change things.

Then I have to go back and figure out how to get from point A to B. It's really painful. And I say this with deep emotion right now because at this stage right now, I'm in book three. I have two thirds of it finished, and now I'm just here like, okay, now how do I do that?

**Lou Sytsma:** Well, you've got the middle part of the book, then that's usually the hardest part, right?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Well, for mysteries though, the hardest part I think is wrapping it all up, and you have to go back and make sure that the clues all match and the red herrings, and all the reasons why that person is in that place at that time. There's a lot of retrofitting,

**Lou Sytsma:** Right? And a typical workday for you? Do you have a word count that you try to reach or no? Do you work in the morning, afternoon, evening? How do you do that?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** You know, this has been really unusual. I don't normally have all day to write, and I've been off work since our college classes got moved to online.

I haven't been interpreting, and so having this wide-open day has really messed me up. I thought, oh, I'm going to have this book knocked out in two weeks. It's going to be great. And you know, the reality of that is it's been a really stressful time. You can't be creative until you've filled up your well, you know? You have to have a certain amount of, I don't know, calm and collectedness about you before you can go out and create.

I really struggled with that for the first week or two. I've found that if I impose a structure on myself that seems to be helping. Remember all those little schedules that were going around the internet at the beginning for what you should put your elementary school child on a schedule a half an hour of this and a half an hour snack time and a half an hour. . . I'm

thought, okay, I need one of those. Now that I've imposed a schedule, it's really helped a lot. I spend the mornings doing things like research and then I have my writing time. I try to not necessarily look at time as much as it's just trying to get a couple thousand words a day in and that that seems to be working much better.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, cool. How long are your books so far?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** about 75K or 80K words.

**Lou Sytsma:** And do you have beta readers?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I do. I have a few awesome beta readers. Well, the first, I guess you call it the alpha reader, is my mom, because she is a voracious reader and she loves mysteries. She's a good reader because she can tell me the truth, whether something's working or not.

So I usually send her things as I'm writing and she'll tell me if I'm completely out of my mind or not. And then I do the first draft and I have a developmental editor, and then I send it to my beta readers, and then I send it back to the line, the editor, and she does like line edits. And then I do another.

I have some proofreaders too, so I have like a whole village to make my book.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right. And

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** a lot of wine.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right. And do you, uh, are you with a publisher or are you self-publishing?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I self-published, yes.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, and that's fun, right?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Oh, it is. It's like another part time job.

**Lou Sytsma:** Do you get your sister to do your cover art then?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** No, actually I have this whole little team I've assembled. I have an editor and I have a cover designer who I just love. I've invested. I think starting my writing career a little bit older helped. I have a full-time job, so I wanted to make the best book that I could.

I've invested some financially by getting a good editor and a good cover designer, and I think that really helps. I know it's really helped with my stories making sense. Because beta readers have all the best intentions, but my editor is amazing, and she has the patience of a saint. I couldn't do it without her.

**Lou Sytsma:** Do you mind saying how you found your editor?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Oh, sure. When I was first trying to decide if I wanted to get an agent or if I wanted to do it myself, I did quite a few Twitter pitch contests like #DVPit and where you have to put your whole book into 147 characters and see if people like it.

**Lou Sytsma:** I'm not familiar with that, but that sounds very cool.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Oh, they're really fun. It is. It's really fun. It's a great exercise whether you actually enter the contest or not, because trying to put an 80,000-word book into one sentence that will actually attract someone's attention is a challenge.

One of the contests that I entered was called #RevPit. I think they're gearing up for that again in May, I believe. I think five or six freelance editors put on this contest. The authors put out tweets. I forget how many tweets total of your book, and then the editors request books that they connect with. I had a couple of editors request pages from me. I submitted 10 pages for judging. And each editor chose one person that they wanted to work with for free. Each of the editors chose somebody.

**Lou Sytsma:** Wow. That's pretty cool. I've never heard of this before, so this is good information.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Yeah, it's #RevPit. Okay. I made it to the finals, but I wasn't the last person chosen. But since I made it to the finals, I think, I can't remember if she edited 50 pages of my work? At the time, I had already been interviewing editors. I just loved the way that she did it and the way that we connected. I contacted her afterwards and said, would you please help me? And so ever since she's worked with me, and I just love her.

**Lou Sytsma:** That's awesome. I've never heard of that before. That's a very unique way of getting an editor. All the listeners out there. That's something for you all to track down.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** There's actually a list. If you Google Twitter pitch contest, there's a published list of all the main legit contests. It's pretty neat because some of them are geared towards getting an agent or getting a publisher, getting an editor. They all have a different topic or theme, but It's a great way.

Plus you get to meet other writers and you form this supportive community by cheering for other people. And you get to see what other people have written. I studied how they took their book and put it into a sentence.

It's a great learning experience to see what works and what doesn't. A lot of these contests, the people who are running the contest will put up, the top 10, or this is why this pitch works, this is why this synopsis works. This is why this pitch did not work. It's a great learning exercise. It's all free.

You get to see in the minds of agents, editors, and publishers as they're making those decisions. When they look through people's first pages or first lines. I've really enjoyed it and I got a lot out of paying attention to all of that.

**Lou Sytsma:** You sure did. That's what I love about doing this podcast is finding out these new nuggets of gold that I was not aware of before. So, I'm glad that you came on the podcast and shared that with us. Thank you very much.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Oh, good. I'm glad. Twitter is a great, a great resource.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, so you've. You've got your two series going and you're working on the third book. Is it the Cassandra Sato series? And do you have any more books in your Duke, the Deaf Dog series?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** The third book of the Cassandra Sato series is going to be out this fall, and it's called *Dead of Winter Break*. It takes place over the break between the semesters. Cassandra has her first encounter with a large snowstorm and her first holiday away from home. And the second children's book comes out this summer. The first one was called, *Never Mind*, and then the second one is called *Farts Make Noise*.

Ha-ha. I have three sons, and I know more about this topic than I probably need to know.

**Lou Sytsma:** (laughs.) Well that's awesome. And your books are available on all the major online outlets I take it?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Yes. The children's book is available everywhere, both in paper and eBook. For the mysteries, the eBooks are available on Amazon and free for people who are members of Kindle unlimited, and then paperbacks, you can order anywhere.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, and do you do autographed copies?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Yes, I have signed copies I can send to anywhere. If people look at my website, there's a place where you can request signed copies.

**Lou Sytsma:** Right. And you also have a signup list, I assume, for your newsletter?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** I do. You can get a free recipe, and I also have coloring pages that people can download of the children's books on the website too.

**Lou Sytsma:** Excellent. Excellent. All right, so I think that's everything I have. Is there anything that you would like to mention at this time that hasn't come up yet?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** There's one last thing. Because I know a lot of parents and teachers have gotten a crash course in homeschooling and remote learning lately. I made a video on YouTube of me reading my children's book and my Deaf friend signing it in ASL. If anybody at home read the book can help a child feel more included at home, or, you know, make them interested in ASL, I would be really excited. You can search the title, *Never Mind* on YouTube and the video should come up, but I'll give you the link too.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay. Very cool. All right. Anything else?

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** No, that's all. I appreciate you having me on today. Thank you.

**Lou Sytsma:** It was a blast. I had fun talking to you and I'm sure that my listeners will enjoy everything that you had to say as well.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Great. Thank you so much.

**Lou Sytsma:** Okay, thank you. Take care. Have a great day. Who knows? We'll maybe we'll talk again down the road. I've already interviewed a couple of people twice, so you might, when you get your next book done, maybe we can talk again.

**Kelly Brakenhoff:** Sounds great. Thank you.

**Lou Sytsma:** All right. Take care. Enjoy the rest of your day.

*This transcript has been edited for filler words and clarity.*

