

SHELTERWOOD

★ “Wingate is at the top of her game.”
— Publishers Weekly starred review

DESCRIPTION

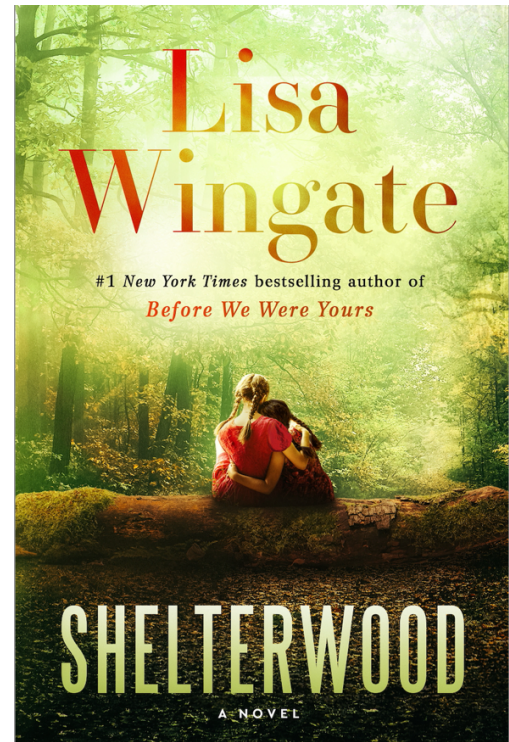
From the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours* comes a sweeping novel inspired by the untold history of women pioneers who fought to protect children caught in the storm of land barons hungry for power and oil wealth.

Oklahoma, 1909. Eleven-year-old Olive Augusta Radley knows that her stepfather doesn't have good intentions toward the two Choctaw girls boarded in their home as wards. When the older girl disappears, Ollie flees to the woods, taking six-year-old Nessa with her. Together they begin a perilous journey to the remote Winding Stair Mountains, the notorious territory of outlaws, treasure hunters, and desperate men. Along the way, Ollie and Nessa form an unlikely band with others like themselves, struggling to stay one step ahead of those who seek to exploit them . . . or worse.

Oklahoma, 1990. Law enforcement ranger Valerie Boren-Odell arrives at newly minted Horsethief Trail National Park seeking a quiet place to balance a career and single parenthood. But no sooner has Valerie reported for duty than she's faced with local controversy over the park's opening, a teenage hiker gone missing from one of the trails, and the long-hidden burial site of three children unearthed in a cave. Val's quest for the truth wins an ally among the neighboring Choctaw Tribal Police but soon collides with old secrets and the tragic and deadly history of the land itself.

In this emotional and enveloping novel, Lisa Wingate traces the story of children abandoned by the law and the battle to see justice done.

“An instant American classic.” – Adriana Trigiani
“Needs to go to the top of your list.” — Lisa Scottoline



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Early Praise for *Shelterwood*

“Wingate’s stellar latest (after *Before We Were Yours*) explores a centuries-long legacy of missing child cases in Oklahoma’s Winding Stair mountains. Wingate’s insightful depiction of her young characters’ vulnerability and resourcefulness enriches the intricate plotting, and her portrayal of the region’s history, culture, and landscape enthralls. Wingate is at the top of her game.” —***Publishers Weekly***, *starred review*

“With descriptions that engage all the senses and protagonists who fight for what they know is right despite inner conflict, Wingate’s latest shines a light on an important part of history and the deep connection between place and the people who call it home.” —***Booklist***

“*Shelterwood* is an instant American classic and a diamond in the crown of Lisa Wingate’s canon of atmospheric and emotional novels. The story of Ollie and Nessa is a page-turner.”—**Adriana Trigiani**, author of *Big Stone Gap* and *The Good Left Undone*

“Lisa Wingate’s riveting new novel is a complex and fascinating tapestry woven with threads of history, mystery, and menace. *Shelterwood* isn’t just a compelling story. It’s also an important one. This is a novel to be treasured, one that proves yet again that there is no finer storyteller at work today than Lisa Wingate.” —**William Kent Krueger**, author of *The River We Remember*

“A seamlessly crafted tale of tragedy, resilience, and triumph. Lisa Wingate once again gives poignant voice to the ‘lost’ children of American history. This powerful and important novel needs to go to the top of your list.”—**Lisa Scottoline**, author of *Eternal* and *Loyalty*

“I barely put *Shelterwood* down as my new favorite heroine, Ranger Valerie, uncovered the chilling story of children displaced by land barons. This book has it all—two fabulous heroines, a little-known true story, and a setting to die for.”—**Martha Hall Kelly**, author of *Lilac Girls* and *The Golden Doves*

“Wingate’s best book yet! *Shelterwood* explores crucial societal issues against the nail-biting backdrop of early-twentieth-century Oklahoma, where the struggle for land and oil threatens lives. A spellbinding and important tale.”—**Marie Benedict**, author of *The Mystery of Mrs. Christie* and *The Personal Librarian*

“Riveting and powerful! Wingate brings to life the shocking tale of greed and little girls forced to save themselves. I couldn’t turn the pages fast enough. I doubt I will ever forget this story.”—**Vanessa Miller**, author of *The American Queen*

“Lisa Wingate has done it again! Wingate’s signature talent for deeply realized characters, awe-inspiring prose, and page-turning mystery has never been more manifest. This captivating story will absorb your mind and heart and won’t let go.”—**Patti Callahan Henry**, author of *The Secret Book of Flora Lea*

“Lisa Wingate works her signature magic in creating strong, smart, and willful children who survive at any cost. *Shelterwood* is as heartwarming as it is mysterious and utterly absorbing.”—**Sadeqa Johnson**, author of *The House of Eve*



Author Bio

Short Bio: Lisa Wingate is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Before We Were Yours*, which has sold more than three million copies and been translated into over forty languages worldwide. The co-author, with Judy Christie, of the nonfiction book *Before and After*, Wingate is an Oklahoma Book Award finalist, a Goodreads Choice Award winner, and a Southern Book Prize winner. She was named a 2023 Distinguished Alumni of Oklahoma State University. She lives with her husband in Texas and Colorado.

Long Bio: Lisa Wingate is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours*, which remained on the NYT list for more than two years and has sold over three million copies. She has written more than 30 novels and co-authored the nonfiction *Before and After* with journalist Judy Christie. Wingate's books have been translated into over forty languages and have appeared on bestseller lists worldwide. *Shelterwood* (2024) marks her thirty-third release.

Wingate is a Goodreads Choice Award winner, an Oklahoma Book Award finalist, a Southern Book Prize winner and was named a 2023 Distinguished Alumni of

Oklahoma State University. Americans for More Civility, a kindness watchdog organization, selected Wingate as a recipient of the National Civics Award, which celebrates public figures who work to promote greater kindness and civility in American life. "Booklist" summed up her work by saying, "Lisa Wingate is, quite simply, a master storyteller."

She was inspired to become a writer by a first-grade teacher who said she expected to see Lisa's name in a magazine one day. Wingate also entertained childhood dreams of being an Olympic gymnast and winning the National Finals Rodeo but was stalled by a mental block against backflips on the balance beam and by parents who stubbornly refused to finance a rodeo career. She was lucky enough to marry into a big family of tall tale enthusiasts who never let the truth get in the way of a good story. Wingate lives in Texas and Colorado with her family and her cuddly teddy bear of a dog, Huckleberry.

One of her favorite things about being a writer is connecting with people, both real and imaginary. Find out more at www.lisawingate.com. Or follow her on Facebook at LisaWingateAuthorPage, or on Instagram @author_lisa_wingate.

(Author photo credit: Wyatt McSpadden)

"There is no finer storyteller at work today than Lisa Wingate."

—William Kent Krueger

Talking Points from *Shelterwood*

Shelterwood was inspired by an obscure 1909 newspaper mention of a female elected official (a rarity in a time when women had no vote) who traveled to the hills of Oklahoma to investigate reports of “three elf children living in a hollow tree.” The woman would soon discover that the children were not elves, but oil wealthy landowners, under the care of a court-appointed guardian who was living lavishly on the children’s oil monies.

Through interviews, court transcripts, newspapers, oral history interviews, and more, Lisa scoured the hidden history of her home state and discovered that native children and orphans were commodified by “guardians” in a system of legalized robbery that ran rampant for decades. Lisa’s passion and attention to historical detail makes for an immersive retelling of history. *Shelterwood* is also an incredibly timely story, exploring our nation’s indigenous history and turn-of-the-century activism among women.

Lisa is available for interviews to discuss the real-life inspiration and history behind *Shelterwood* – some discussion topics include:

- **The “elf children.”** Land-wealthy orphans and minor children of Eastern Oklahoma’s tribal nations were once forced to flee their abusive guardians to survive.
- **“Oklahoma Kate” Barnard.** Her rise to power as an elected official in a new state at a time when women couldn’t vote. Kate’s fierce battle to protect indigenous children and orphans from embezzlement, abuse, and neglect at the hands of court-appointed guardians.
- **Exploited child laborers.** Kate’s success in winning statewide education and child labor laws, and her efforts to take the battle nationwide. After the early 1900s passage of prohibitions against employing child workers in dangerous jobs, many states have returned to this debate today. With the loosening of child labor laws, the ethics, benefits, and risks of employing children to fill worker shortages are in-the-news topics.
- **The Clubwomen.** The Oklahoma Federation of Women’s Clubs and the General Federation of Women’s Clubs carried forward Kate Barnard’s work. Gertrude Bonnin (a member of the Yankton Sioux Nation and a research agent for the Women’s Clubs) had a significant effect on the effort to bring public attention to the land grab in Oklahoma. Bonnin’s report was used by the Women’s Clubs in their campaign to force Congress to act on behalf of indigenous landowners.
- **Our national parks.** The Winding Stair National Recreation Area in Oklahoma, as the fictionalized Horsethief Trail National Park in the novel, would represent the only national park in the “national parks black hole” of the Central US states. Lisa’s research turned up many fascinating facts about the mission, history, stories, and challenges of our national parks and NPS rangers while researching the book. Lisa is happy to discuss.
- **The Winding Stair Mountains.** Once a hideout for outlaws and a dangerous territory for travelers, the Winding Stair was the setting for the Western classic, *True Grit*. *Shelterwood* explores this fascinating area and pays homage to the original novel and film.
- **The value of history.** Lisa structured *Shelterwood* in two timelines, one set in 1909 and one set in 1990 to show the importance of understanding our history, even hidden history, and its relevance to today’s generation.

“There were many tricks played here, and in fact all over the territory, regarding claims.”

– George, B. Smith, 1937

Press Release

For Immediate Release

NYT bestselling author Lisa Wingate's *Shelterwood*, offers a sweeping story inspired by true events

From Lisa Wingate, No. 1 “New York Times” bestselling author of “Before We Were Yours,” comes “Shelterwood” a novel inspired by the untold history of women pioneers who fought to protect children from land barons hungry for power and oil wealth. In a starred review, Publishers Weekly said, “Wingate’s stellar latest explores a centuries-long legacy of missing child cases... her portrayal of the region’s history, culture, and landscape enthralls.”

Available June 4, 2024, from Ballantine Books/Penguin/Random House, *Shelterwood* traces the story of children abandoned by the law—and highlights the battle to see justice done. *Shelterwood* continues Wingate’s stunning use of little-known history to bring important stories to life.

For Wingate, who grew up in Oklahoma, where the story is set, *Shelterwood* is an intersection of history, mystery and serendipity. “Writing *Shelterwood* was a study in secrets hidden in plain sight,” she said. “As a child, I had a sense of things unspoken and unseen, of shadows lurking in tumbledown homesteads, on vine-covered railroad beds, in old timber mills decaying along secluded streams. Long before the days of cell phones and video games, we kids explored those oddities in detail, appropriated them as backdrops for our ‘let’s-pretend’ games. We gave them names and stories.”

She continues: “But the true history of the land, which had been governed by the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole nations prior to Oklahoma statehood, was even more fascinating, more beautiful and more sinister than anything we could have imagined.”

That history, involving grafters who flooded into Oklahoma by the thousands, seeking to obtain lucrative guardianships over land-owning children of Eastern Oklahoma’s tribal nations, shows up in the breathtaking tale of *Shelterwood*. At its height, the system of what was later referred to as “legalized robbery” involved lawyers, judges, sheriffs, merchants, and elected officials, with the land and oil belonging to minors, especially orphans, the most sought-after commodity. “The newspapers were filled with ads offering the sale or lease of land allotments belonging to minors,” said Wingate. “Some grafters obtained guardianships of over one-hundred children. With little oversight to ensure that their wards were fed, clothed, housed, educated, or protected, the grafters did as they chose. *Shelterwood* tells the story of the children and the remarkable women who went to war against an entrenched system on behalf of imperiled kids.”

Oklahoma, 1909. Eleven-year-old Olive Augusta Radley knows that her stepfather doesn’t have good intentions toward the two Choctaw girls boarded in their home as wards. When the older girl disappears, Ollie flees to the woods, taking 6-year-old Nessa with her. Together they begin a perilous journey to the

remote Winding Stair Mountains, the notorious territory of outlaws, treasure hunters and desperate men. Along the way, Ollie and Nessa form an unlikely band with others like themselves, struggling to stay one step ahead of those who seek to exploit them . . . or worse.

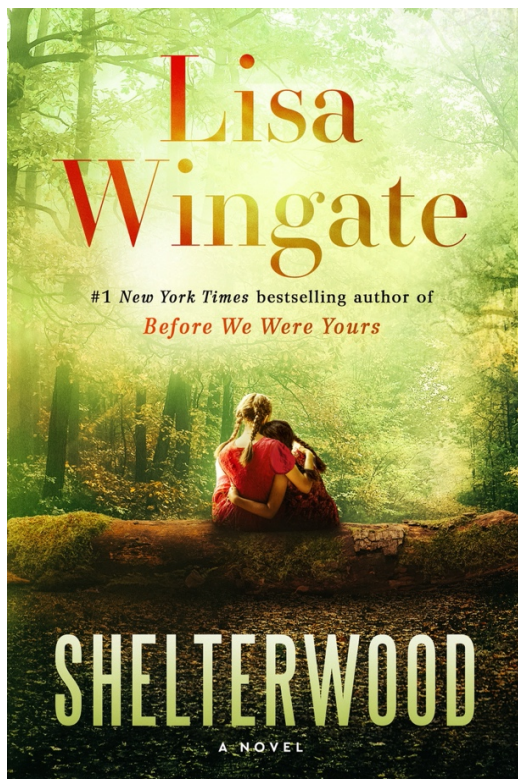
Oklahoma, 1990. Law enforcement ranger Valerie Boren-Odell arrives at newly minted Horsethief Trail National Park seeking a quiet place to balance a career and single parenthood. But no sooner has Valerie reported for duty than she's faced with local controversy over the park's opening, a teenage hiker gone missing from one of the trails and the long-hidden burial site of three children unearthed in a cave. Val's quest for the truth wins an ally among the neighboring Choctaw Tribal Police but soon collides with old secrets and the tragic and deadly history of the land itself.

Early readers of *Shelterwood* call it “a spellbinding and important tale” and “as heartwarming as it is mysterious and utterly absorbing.” Adriana Trigiani, author of “Big Stone Gap” and “The Good Left Undone” dubbed it “an Instant American classic.”

Author Lisa Scottoline, who wrote such novels as “Eternal” and “Loyalty,” calls *Shelterwood* “a seamlessly crafted tale of tragedy, resilience and triumph . . . Lisa Wingate once again gives poignant voice to the ‘lost’ children of American history.”

William Kent Krueger, author of such books as “This Tender Land” and “The River We Remember,” says *Shelterwood* is “a complex and fascinating tapestry woven with threads of history, mystery and menace that proves yet again that there is no finer storyteller at work today than Lisa Wingate.”

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Historical Images – The Story Behind the Novel



"Oklahoma Kate" Barnard

(Photos from *The American* magazine Oct, 1908, Wingate Media Collection)

After sweeping into office by the largest majority of any candidate on the ballot (in an era when women had no vote), Kate was arguably the most powerful politician in the newly-formed state of Oklahoma. Though small in stature and only thirty years old, she held broad public support and was known for her forward-thinking ideas and her passion for the protection of children, orphans, workers and the poor. She was Irish by extraction and relished what she called "a good shindy" (a fight). She was at the height of her power in 1909, when she traveled to the hills of Southeastern Oklahoma to investigate reports of "elf children" living in a hollow tree, and discovered that the destitute children were, in reality, wealthy land owners. Their court-appointed guardian had been living lavishly on their oil monies, while the children survived in the woods and became so malnourished and pitiful that people thought they were elves. In prosecuting the guardian, who held legal guardianships over fifty-one wards in total, Kate and her small staff would uncover an unimaginable system of graft and greed... and then go to war against it.

"I have been compelled to see orphans robbed... for money. I decided long ago that ...no citizen...cared whether or not an orphan is robbed or starved or killed - because his dead claim is easier to handle than if he were alive." – "Oklahoma Kate" Barnard



The Clubwomen

(Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

In 1909, the newly-united women's clubs of Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory joined the General Federation of Women's Clubs, an international organization still active today. Kate Barnard both courted the support of the Oklahoma Federation of Women's Clubs and criticized their reluctance to move beyond "hand wringing" over the land grafting issues in Oklahoma, particularly as it pertained to indigenous children and orphans. The General Federation of Women's Clubs would eventually send a team of investigators to Oklahoma to travel the state, conduct interviews, scour court documents, and compose an eyewitness report.

"It took courage to be a club woman in those days. Customs were not, as we so casually take them now. The charter members of our club were daughters of women who never appeared alone on the street, and had never dreamed of any purely feminine moment—serious, or festive. Affairs for men-only were frequent, but women had to take their pleasure under the chaperonage or guidance of husbands, fathers, brothers, or what have you."

-- Tabatha Milner, 1929, *Texas Federation of Women's Clubs*



Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkála-Šá)

(Library of Congress)

Gertrude Bonnin, also known as Zitkála-Šá (Red Bird), came to Oklahoma as a research agent for the General Federation of Women's Clubs. A member of the Yankton Sioux (or Dakota) Nation, she was a well-known speaker, writer, and advocate. She traveled the state with two male investigators. Their 1924 report, authored in large part by Bonnin, put forth a searing indictment of grafters, guardians, probate courts, and the decades-old land grab. Rather than simply handing the report to Congress, where lobby money and political ambitions would inevitably have quashed it, the Clubwomen sought to force action by sending their report straight to every newspaper in the country.

"It is common talk in eastern Oklahoma, that judges who are elected to office go in with the understanding that they are to distribute among their friends the guardianships."

– Gertrude Bonnin, 1924

A Conversation with Lisa Wingate

Lisa Wingate is the award-winning author of “Shelterwood” (June 4, 2024, Ballantine Books, part of Penguin Random House). She is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of “Before We Were Yours,” which remained on the NYT Bestseller List for over two years, has been translated into more than 40 languages worldwide and has sold more than three million copies. She has penned more than 30 novels and coauthored a nonfiction book, “Before and After: The Incredible Real-Life Stories of Orphans Who Survived the Tennessee Children’s Home Society.” For more information, see www.lisawingate.com.

Congratulations on your new novel, *Shelterwood*. This powerful story unearths another piece of little-known history—and is set in Oklahoma, the state where you grew up. What was it like to write about land you knew so well?

“The most shocking stories are the ones that hide in completely familiar places, yet over the course of years and decades, you’ve never heard even the faintest whisper. Writing *Shelterwood* was a study in secrets hidden in plain sight. As a child growing up in Oklahoma, I had a sense of things unspoken and unseen, of shadows lurking in tumbledown homesteads, on vine-covered railroad beds, in old timber mills quietly decaying along secluded streams. Long before the days of cell phones and video games, we kids explored those oddities in detail, appropriated them as backdrops for our ‘let’s-pretend’ games. We gave them names and stories. But the true history of the land was even more fascinating, more beautiful and more sinister than anything we could have imagined.”

Early readers praise *Shelterwood* for its strong characters, evocative setting and engaging plot. *Publisher’s Weekly* hailed the book as “Wingate’s stellar latest” in a starred review. Where did the idea for this novel originate?

Shelterwood was inspired by two unbelievably bizarre pieces of history unearthed during the final fact checks for a previous novel. The first bit of stranger-than-fiction history was the story of Sarah Rector, a little girl whose home was a ramshackle family cabin on Oklahoma scrubland in the early 1900s. At eleven years old, Sarah was receiving marriage proposals from men all over the world.

The second history bit was the 1909 newspaper mention of a female elected official (a rarity in a time when women couldn’t even vote) who had received reports of “elf children” living in a hollow tree in the hills of eastern Oklahoma. She went to see for herself who the children were and why they were there.

The one thing these two stories had in common – the discovery of oil on property that had passed into the children’s hands when the lands of the five tribal nations of Eastern Oklahoma (the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole) were forcibly divided up and parcels were assigned individually to each tribal member. The process, known as allotment, applied to all members on the rolls, men, women, and children regardless of age.

In the early 1900s, around the time of Oklahoma’s statehood, the loosening of regulations on the sale of allotment land created a new and wide-open fast lane to riches. Grafters flooded into the area by the

thousands, seeking to obtain court-ordered guardianships of children with land allotments, particularly orphans. Soon, everyone in almost any official capacity—judges, lawyers, merchants, political officials, and the guardians themselves—had their hands in it. A system of legalized robbery flourished. Newspapers were filled with advertisements posted by court-sanctioned guardians seeking to sell land and oil owned by the children in their care. Some skilled operators successfully obtained guardianships over as many as one-hundred “wards.” With little oversight or motivation to ensure that their wards were fed, clothed, housed, and protected, the guardians exploited their opportunities as they chose. Some decided that their wards could be more easily managed dead than alive. Others locked their wards away in asylums or chased the children off their own land and left them to survive alone. It was an incredibly dangerous time to be a child with property in your name, particularly if that property contained oil, timber, or other valuable resources.

Tell us how you began writing fiction inspired by real-life events.

“I’ve always been fascinated by pieces of ‘hidden history.’ I love the idea of lending relevance to the past by weaving it into the lives of fictional characters and allowing readers to live through events with the characters. Experiencing history in this way, in story form on a personal level, has multi-layered value. It not only grows our understanding of the world, but also fosters and strengthens a sense of empathy, a feeling of having walked in someone else’s shoes.”

What are the challenges of fictionalizing true events, such as those in *Shelterwood*?

“*Shelterwood* is fiction heavily based on real accounts in official records, newspapers and other sources. The stories of the children who were mistreated and robbed not only of their childhoods but of their family property are haunting. It’s important to do justice to their experiences while bringing characters to the page, to show struggles and suffering, but also resilience and triumph. Real children lived through these circumstances. Some, like the “elf children” discovered in the hollow tree, fled to the woods to survive. While a brief description of the day the “elf children” were discovered does exist in old newspaper accounts, the details of their lives before and after that day have disappeared from history. Who were they? What happened to their families? Where had they lived before? Who were they running from? Why were they so traumatized that, when they were found, they were terrified to be touched? Fiction allows a reimagining of their journey, a means of answering those questions and breathing life into children whose experiences have been reduced to a paragraph of newsprint from over a hundred years ago.

You have spoken about the extensive research you do for each of your novels. Tell us about the process for *Shelterwood*.

“I enjoy research so much that I am prone to jumping down rabbit holes and spending hours combing through old newspapers, documents, and books. I also do location research, and so I traveled backroads, walked along old train tracks, followed the rivers and hiked the mountains of Southeastern Oklahoma while working on this novel. I also used online collections; studied primary documents from university libraries and historical archives; and combed through vintage newspapers. The history of the “Elf children” and “Oklahoma Kate” Barnard, the elected official who discovered them in the hollow tree, fascinated me.

Kate Barnard was at the height of her power in 1909, without question the most popular politician in the state. She’d swept into office by the widest margin of any politician on the ballot. She was young and small, only

five feet tall and barely thirty years old, but she had the heart and spirit of a grizzly bear, particularly in matters involving children. In her first year in office, she had successfully won passage of compulsory education laws and regulations to end the widespread use of child workers in dangerous jobs. The day she took on the case of the children from the hollow tree, she fired the first shots across the bow in what would become the battle of a lifetime.

Sadly, Kate Barnard, her remarkable life and career, and her fight to regain the landholdings and oil monies belonging to hundreds of indigenous orphans, had been successfully buried by the time I grew up in Oklahoma, less than a half-dozen decades later. In history classes from grade school through college, I never heard a word of her. Within a few years of her campaign to prosecute dishonest judges and guardians, the grafters, their networks, and their accomplices had purchased almost every sizeable newspaper in the state. They systematically sullied her reputation, attacked her work, and saw to it that her office was defunded. She slowly vanished from the public consciousness and became a mere footnote in the history books. That made the research for *Shelterwood* harder to find, but it's there if you dig deep enough. I love to dig."

You're known for layering fascinating facts and details into your novels and transporting readers to a different time and place. What does that mean to you as a writer?

"Books, at their best, are portals through which we step into another place, another time, another life. When we know how it feels to live within the mind and heart and body of another person, we look at the world differently. Hopefully we're not so quick to judge or to adopt a negative view because we can identify with a broad range of experiences on a personal level. As a writer, that's the journey I travel with each story, and that's the experience I hope to pass along to readers. For me, a good story—whether you read it or write it—becomes a life experience.

I am a big believer in the idea that one person, or a few people, can make a difference for good, and it's inspiring to learn about people who stepped forward when they were needed. In *Shelterwood*, these are real-life women pioneers, like Kate Barnard and the women of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, who eventually carried forward many of the causes Kate fought for. They're women like Gertrude Bonnin, who traveled Oklahoma as an investigator for the women's clubs, documented the ongoing land graft, and co-authored a report that would finally help to shame Congress into getting involved. These women found the courage to confront seemingly insurmountable odds and a deeply entrenched system of theft and exploitation."

***Shelterwood* is a historical novel, set in different eras, similar to "Before We Were Yours." How do you weave such stories together?**

Shelterwood takes place in two timeframes—1909 and 1990. Valerie, a park law enforcement ranger in newly-opened Horsethief Trail National Park, finds herself confronted with the shocking history of Oklahoma's remote Winding Stair Mountains after the long-hidden burial site of three children is discovered within the park boundaries. Val's investigation leads her to the 1909 life of Ollie, a desperate young girl on the run with the family's six-year-old Choctaw ward, Nessa. The reverberations of Ollie and Nessa's experiences linger even eighty years later, but to understand them, Ranger Valerie must first discover why the girls fled and what they were running from. For me, the underlying theme of this kind of story—in which a current-day character discovers the lives of people long past—is that, whether we understand the history of our families and communities or not, we are affected by it. Only by knowing where we've been and who came before us

can we understand where we are today. A historical story becomes broader and richer when we can see how the threads of the past life reach into our modern lives.

It is, however, a challenge to balance dual time frames and a story within a story. This sometimes feels like double-the-work and double-the-risk—almost like writing two novels. But it also is double-the-fascination and double-the-reward. There's twice as much research, but in doubling the research, you also discover twice as many interesting facts, unanswered questions and nearly forgotten bits of history. Those fascinators add depth to the story. For me, the biggest challenge is ensuring that both stories are fully satisfying and that the historical story serves a purpose in modern-day characters' lives.

I hope readers take away a greater love of history from my novels—not just the big events of world history, but the smaller, more everyday events. I've always had a fascination with history brought down to the personal level. I'm interested in how people lived and what they thought, how they survived hard times and celebrated prosperous ones. There's so much to be learned from those who came before and those who've simply walked this earth a little longer.”

Despite the tough pieces of history, you've written about in *Shelterwood* and earlier in *Before We Were Yours*, your novels glow with the feeling of hope. Is this something you deliberately strive for as an author?

“For me, hope is the most important element in stories and in life. We can survive roughly three days without water, three months without food, but without hope, we surrender and perish. In some literary spheres, ending a story in a place that is stark and bleak, even hopeless, is considered to be more literary, a reflection of the human condition. My heart doesn't live there as a reader, a writer or a human being. When I invest my time in something, I want to emerge with a renewed sense of optimism, understanding, and, yes, hope.”

Did an elementary teacher really inspire you to become a writer?

“Yes! The wonderful Mrs. Krackhardt, my first-grade teacher in Northborough, Massachusetts, put the idea of being a writer into my head. She found me writing a story one day during indoor recess in a new school, and she took the time to stop and read it. When she was finished, she tapped the pages on the desk to straighten them, looked at me over the top of the paper and said, ‘You are a wonderful writer!’ That was a defining moment for me. In my mind, from then on, I was a writer.

When we moved away, she jotted on my report card, “Keep that pencil working with that wonderful imagination, Lisa! I expect to see your name in a magazine one day.” I still have that report card, and I never forgot those words. I began trying to track her down when my first book was published and I was eventually able to thank her for teaching me that being a writer was something special. Mrs. Krackhardt and I stayed in communication through many years and many books after that. During the pandemic, I sent my latest novel to her, so she'd have something new to occupy her time while her retirement home was on lockdown. In reply, she emailed a photo of her on the patio outside her room, smiling and holding the book. She was nearly one-hundred years old, a lifelong reader.

Is it true you take a daily walk— whether in the hills of Texas or the mountains of Colorado? Does that influence your writing process?

“I walk every day, in almost any kind of weather. Sometimes I walk solo and discuss history nuggets, story muddles, or plotlines with my literary pup, Huckleberry. At other times, I walk with my husband or a close writing friend and do the same. Walks open my mind and enhance creativity. Physical activity also helps me recover from hours at a computer and creates renewed focus when I settle back in. Outdoor time particularly helped to shape the setting of *Shelterwood*, as the story involves characters who spend much of their time in the forest. Details from those walks found their way into the manuscript. To write about a place, to create that world in all five senses, you must experience it that way, in various weather, at different times of day. Having grown up in Oklahoma, I already had a feel for the setting, the plants, the animals, the passing seasons— redbuds and dogwoods in the spring, pecans dropping in the fall— but there’s no substitute for walking through your setting with your senses heightened (and your camera out).”

Tell us about your writing habits. Do you have any writing rituals? Has writing become any easier for you over the years or is every book different?

I write every weekday if I’m not traveling. I don’t battle writer’s block nearly as much as I battle writer’s laziness. For me, the battle isn’t so much about what to write as it is about getting myself to the keyboard and getting down to business.

In terms of writing a manuscript, I set a daily word count and stick to it. Even if I feel that what I’m creating that day isn’t particularly great, I’ve learned to push through it and put words on paper. I can always revise it later, and there’s nothing better than reaching a goal and then rewarding yourself with time off. I don’t think writing ever becomes any easier. Every book is a challenge, and a bit of a terrifying mystery until the first draft is on paper. In the first draft, I’m finding the characters and the story. In the second draft, I know the characters and the story, and I’m refining the story to send it out into the larger world.

As we wrap up, is there anything else you’d like to say to readers about *Shelterwood*?

“My most important message to readers about *Shelterwood* and all of my work, over twenty years and thirty-three books now, is thank you for sharing these journeys with me. I can never predict what each reader will see in those pages; no two people read the same book. Each reader sees the world, on the page and beyond it, through a unique individual lens of personal experiences. Stories, in that way, become both ever-changing art forms and intimate friends. Stories are there to entertain us, to make us feel something, to keep us company when we’re lonely, to cheer us up when we’re sad, to celebrate with us when we’re on vacation or relaxing in our favorite spaces. The reader takes in words on paper, black and white, and from those words, life and color spring forth—people and trees and birds singing, an entirely unique world of sounds, sights, smells, and emotions. That is the mystery and the beauty of books. They are the closest thing to real magic, and I never cease to be grateful for my small part in bringing them into the world.”

“Experiencing history in this way, in story form on a personal level, has multi-layered value. It not only grows our understanding of the world, but also fosters and strengthens a sense of empathy, a feeling of having walked in someone else’s shoes.” – Lisa Wingate

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Penguin Random House:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/745528/shelterwood-by-lisa-wingate/>

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