

**FOR RELEASE DECEMBER 29,
2017:**

INTRODUCING LOWLY

The angst of the high school years – trying to fit in, wanting to be popular; yet hoping to live up to your values. Lola wishes for her junior year to be different. But she still has to face bullying by the Demented Duo, embarrassment from love song-writing crushes, and too public put-downs from her best friend. How can Lola control her anger and act like a Christian when everyone at Sunset High seems out to get her?

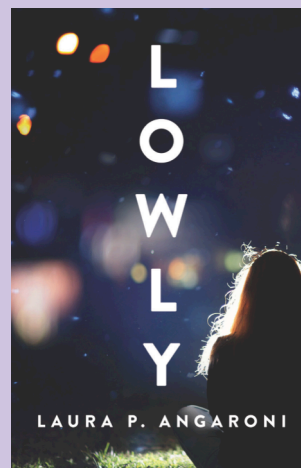
And then George strides in, and like magic, everything is better.

If only it lasted.

How will she ever clean up her mess and make amends?

Can anyone still love her?

Lowly contains timeless messages about bullying, grief, knowing when to ask for help, and finding redemption.



Praise for *Lowly*

“Identity. Belonging. Significance. *Lowly* gives us a deep glance into the world of adolescence and bullying with grit and grace. With the eyes of a parent and the expertise of a youth worker, Laura Angaroni masterfully takes us into the dark places of the teen heart and leads us to a place of redemption and grace. *Lowly* is a hopeful read for teens and parents affected by the world of bullying.”

—Dr. JJ Jones, DMin, Family Discipleship Pastor, Fellowship Nashville, Franklin Campus

“We really love *Lowly*. Laura expressed the feelings of a young girl so remarkably, along with some wonderful humor and a beautiful life lesson on forgiveness. We give *Lowly* a BIG thumbs-up.”

—RUSS AND LINDA MURPHY,
Russ Murphy Ministries; Russ is an award-winning inspirational singer-songwriter and author of *Not Alone: Finding the Love of Your Life*



Laura Angaroni was raised in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas and is proud to be from what some would consider the wrong side of the tracks. She attended Baylor University, where she acquired her economics degree and met her cute, New Jersey-born husband, Craig. Their first kiss was at the bear pit, and it wasn't long before she decided it wouldn't be so bad to have a last name that might be confused with a type of pasta.

Their many adventures include the birth of their firstborn, a daughter, and later, a seven-year-long vacation in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, where their son was born. They've since touched down in the Houston orbit. Laura writes, coaches her teens, reads too much, and distracts the librarian at her son's school with chitchat instead of shelving books. She just completed a four-year commitment with her church's high school ministry and plans to chase preschoolers around the church nursery for a bit before returning to work with young adults. Find out more about Laura at laurapangaroni.com.



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1. What inspired you to write *Lowly*?

As my daughter approached adolescence, it triggered thoughts of issues and hardships I experienced during my teen years. With the firm belief that God redeems the tough circumstances in our past, I began writing fiction for the first time, broaching these subjects with honesty and, I hope, humor. *Lowly* is the result.

2. Where did the name come from?

My original inspiration for the name and nickname came from a friend's, preschool-age daughter while we lived in Canada. She couldn't pronounce my name properly, so she called me Lola. It stuck, and my friend calls me by it to this day.

Therefore, when I decided to use the name Lola (a decidedly out-of-date name for the time period of the book), I thought it would be ironic if her best friend—a boy she's known since they were preschoolers—had difficulty pronouncing her name at first acquaintance, calling her Lowly instead. As teens, he still gets away with calling her Lowly even though she wouldn't put up with it from anyone else. In fact, when he stops using the nickname during the course of the book, it makes her sad.

More importantly, the name works as a great metaphor for the low self-esteem weighing down the chronically bullied. Although Lola is often spirited in her actions, her inner thoughts betray her low opinion of herself. Lastly, it reflects how low she stoops once she gives in to anger.

3. What inspired your characters; then how did they evolve?

Believe it or not, my high school-era friends inspired most of the main characters—friendships that I continue to cherish. However, the characters had to evolve and change to fit the story as it progressed and vice versa. It's a skewed chicken-and-egg conundrum. Do the characters shape the story, or does the story shape the characters? In my experience, it's both, blending in an almost miraculous way to produce characters that I end up loving as if they're real.

4. What lesson(s) would you like people to take away from this book?

For teens: Ninety-nine percent of the time, your friends are not equipped to help you through a serious challenge or situation. Seek help from caring adults when you need it. Speak out. Sometimes we (adults) don't catch the clues that you're in a harmful place. Make it clear! Furthermore, if the first or even the second adult doesn't take you seriously, be brave and keep telling your story until you find the person ready to take action for your good. You should probably start with one, both of your parents, or your guardian, but if help is not forthcoming, try your school counselor. Additionally, look up the local community and school district crises numbers and websites; then you should program them into your phone in case you or your friends need immediate help. *For parents:* Your teens love you more than you realize. They want you to have a good opinion of them. Therefore, more likely than not, they'll not tell you everything that's going on in their lives. Promote open communication with them in any way possible. Do fun things together and try to tamp down on the shock when they report some of the crazy things they experience at school while at the same time not approving harmful behavior. It's a balancing act. Pray, pray, pray, and when they do come to you with issues—harassment, bullying, depression,

anxiety, etc.—I beg you to reassure them that you love them, you’re on their side if they’re the victim, you forgive them if the situation warrants it, and that you’ll work with them to move them back to a safe state by pursuing professional therapy, advocating for them with their school, and/or removing them from a bad situation.

5. Where is your favorite place to write?

I usually write at home, but being alone at home too much can be, well, for lack of a better word, lonely. So sometimes, I end up at a local café where, if I order a meal, they’ll let me hog a booth as long as I would like. It’s awesome!

6. What were your literary inspirations for *Lowly*?

For this book, I had two in particular. The first one was *Emma* by Jane Austen. I love all Jane Austen books, but *Emma* speaks to me in a personal way because of how the main character, so flawed but at the same time admirable, grows and changes during the course of the book, demonstrating a story of reconciliation and redemption. I named my daughter Emma, by the way.

The second one is called *The Wednesday Wars* by Gary D. Schmidt and was a gift from my sister. Not only is the book hilarious, heartwarming, and at times, poignant, but Schmidt does a masterful job of weaving the sixties time period into the story, giving it even more interest and character. If I’m able to evoke even a smidgeon of that success while weaving my teenage place and time—Oak Cliff in the eighties—into my book, I’m happy.

7. Did you listen to music while you wrote *Lowly*? If so, what?

YES! I listened to Cold Play on and off while writing. Their music is quiet, and the lyrics are often things I can relate to my observations about the human experience. In particular, I love their *X & Y* album. For an eighties alt-rock junkie, it’s the equivalent of comfort food for the ears. The time period of my book, however, is the *early* eighties. Lola and her friends listen to pop radio tunes from the late seventies and early eighties like Foreigner, Elton John, and Rick James. Despite my love for it, I was unable to insert little in the way of punk or alternative rock references—that revolution was only beginning—but some of my favorite eighties alt-rock bands are Simple Minds, U2 (Everyone should have *War* in their music library.), The Police, Peter Gabriel, Tears for Fears, Talking Heads, and that’s just the tip of the iceberg.

8. Which *Lowly* character is your favorite?

I don’t have just one. Lola, George, and Earley are my three favorites. I love Lola because of her spirit, as well as her many imperfections, and the growth journey she takes during the story. I love George, well, because he’s George. He’s popular and has a good dose of self-confidence, yet he’s funny, down-to-earth, and despite his youth, has a good head on his shoulders. Sounds almost too perfect, right? Lastly, I love Earley because he’s real. He has a ton of potential and a good heart, but he still makes mistakes. I put a lot of thought into his character and motivations as well as Lola’s. They have good, even pure, intentions (Well, I’ll admit Lola deviates from this during the course of the book.); and they’re brave, but they’re often off the mark in their actions. I feel this reflects the reality of life for the majority of us, but particularly for teens, and I hope I conveyed it in a forgiving manner.

9. What future do you imagine for Lola?

I imagine a life that's messy but good. In the near term, I wonder if she'll be forced to confront her past while in college. Maybe one of those two bullies will reenter her life as a changed person.

10. Do you plan to write a sequel, and if not, what are you working on now?

I don't plan on it, but like I mentioned above, my thoughts sometimes meander back to Lola and how her continuing story might unfold.

I'm working on a young adult, hero fantasy with Christian overtones.

11. How does your Christianity influence your writing?

It influences how I perceive everything, so it certainly influences my writing. Once you decide to follow Christ, you see the world through the lens of Jesus. For me, that means that themes like salvation, hope, perseverance, granting and seeking forgiveness, community, faith, and from where a Christ-follower's strength originates will be woven into my writing.

12. What would you like young writers to know?

Don't be discouraged by the wrong kind of criticism. Don't let anyone stifle your creativity by making fun of your work. However and even though it's okay to make mistakes, you should be grateful for constructive criticism—the helpful kind. It's a treasure! Then when you're ready for your writing to be taken seriously, you should practice good grammar and punctuation rules for the most part. If you need to brush up on those rules, you might want to consider obtaining a copy of *Painless Grammar* by Rebecca Elliot. Although written for children, it's straightforward, easy to understand, and useful for any age.