

INTERVIEWS – NEWS – EVENTS (INE) ©2018

INE Note: All links to the listed works are at the end of the interview.

INE: Welcome all. Today I'm very lucky to interview Sara Pascoe, Owner of Trindles & Green, Ltd.

INE: Hi Sara. Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

SP: Thanks for inviting me, Laara!

INE: Tell us a little about yourself.

SP: I had a very interesting career in psychology. This took me into many different and fascinating worlds from slicing brains and studying them under the microscope in neuroscience labs, to working with people as a therapist, to public policy, including a year “on the Hill” as a Congressional Fellow. I'd always loved writing including in the professional spheres. Each arena -- scientific, clinical, public policy had its own style and demands. I learned a lot about the craft of writing, and I also learned not to take criticism personally. There is a lot of editing by colleagues and superiors with these types of writing, and it was a great experience. I had always dabbled in fiction, submitting to the occasional contest over the years. More recently I was able to wind down my psychology work when I started taking writing courses and writing the stories that had long been living in my head. I was able to stop the psychology work and write fulltime in 2014.

INE: I see you've authored several books. List a few and tell us what you are most proud of for each one.

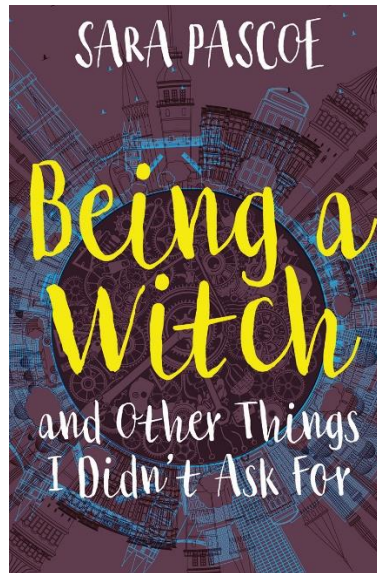
SP: *Being a Witch and Other Things I Didn't Ask For*. I guess I'm most proud of having woven lots of real history into a story of emotional healing and change. This is a Young Adult Historical Fantasy about a four-teen year old foster girl, Rachel (nicknamed Raya). She's sick of living in care and believes she's ready for and needs a life on her own. She is also wounded from all the disruptions in her early life, and her mother has quite severe mental illness. She doesn't know she's a witch, so when her powers start to come on, they frighten her, and she's worried she might be developing mental illness like her mom – all the more reason to have some “real” independent life now.

But with her powers not yet in control, she accidentally travels back in time. First to the Essex Witch Trials in England, 1645. And of course, with her spikey hair, and spikier personality, and wearing what look like boys' clothes back then, she's picked up for being a witch and thrown into the Colchester Castle dungeon, along with other real-life victims who were in that dungeon at that time. Her social worker-witch mentor, Bryony, and the sarcastic talking cat Oscar (doesn't every witch have one?) go back in time with her and try to rescue her, bring her back to the present. But Raya's powers are still wonky, and although they miss a dreadful end at the Witch Trials, they end up in 1646 Istanbul. There, life is amazing, and Raya finally gets her independence. It's more amazing than she'd ever dreamed, and in the an absolutely amazing

place and time. But then she has to make some very difficult decisions. Can she stay in 1645 Istanbul? Should she? And, at what cost?

Being a Witch has won awards and has had some lovely reviews. (INE note: See all book links for reviews at the end of this interview.)

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Cover photo © Sara Pascoe

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SP: *Oswald, the Almost Famous Opossum* is another book very close to my heart. This was a way for me to honour friends I love, and the funky little town where I used to live, Mount Rainier, Maryland, on the edge of Washington, DC. This is a Middle Grade Fantasy novel about a shy ten-year-old boy, Joey, and his best animal friend, the rather narcissistic opossum, Oswald.

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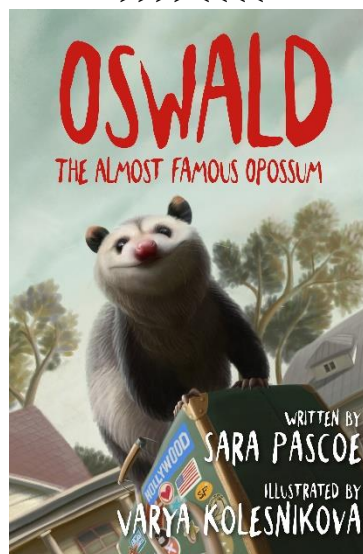


Photo © Sara Pascoe

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It is beautifully illustrated by a very talented and award-winning illustrator, Varya Kolesnikova. Working with Varya was one of the great pleasures of creating this book. She ‘got’ what I was after immediately. And it was as though she’d been to the house and neighbourhood where the story takes place, which is thousands of miles away from where she lives in St Petersburg Russia.

Oswald is determined to become famous, and he is sure getting his antics into the *Washington Post* will be his launch to fame. (There is a wonderful column, [Animal Watch](#) in the *Washington Post* that I read all the time when I lived there. Some of the antics the animals got up to made me start to imagine that they were doing these things on purpose). Oswald enlists the help of Joey and Joey’s pet cat Melvin to help him in his various ideas of what will get printed in the newspaper. Sneaking into the library, writing poetry for Joey’s mother (it looks more like chicken scratches of course) and other stunts all fail, and in fact make things worse. Then, a goose crashes into Joey’s roof in a storm, and this ends up getting into the newspaper. Oswald is fuming, and steps up his game. This only makes things worse and, after yet more dumb ideas go bad, Joey’s mother is wrongly arrested for animal cruelty and Joey has to go live with his dad.

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Photo © Sara Pascoe

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For once, Oswald stops thinking about himself and with the help of the other animals (raccoons, a maniacal groundhog, the neighbor’s dog with a mysterious past, and more) work to get Joey’s mom out of jail. Both Joey and Oswald go through emotional journeys. Oswald learns that it’s friendship and connection that really make him happy, not fame. And Joey learns that even if things didn’t work out in the past, trying to make friends again is worth it.

Oswald won 1st in Children’s books in the 2017 Mill City Press Author Awards.

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INE: Let us in on the steps you follow for your writing process.

SP: My writing process is a combination of organic – the stories taking root in my imagination, and lots of research and planning. Once I commit to making a story into a book, I then do the following. I do full biographies for each character. This helps me bring them to life and know what choices they would make and how they would behave in various situations. This also gives an unwritten backstory that helps make the characters more believable, when they behave in a way consistent with a specific “personal” history even if that history is never articulated in the book.

I also plot out the story quite carefully using the classic eight act structure described in so many places both for novels and screenplays. I am a naturally meandering story-teller. So, properly plotting is essential for me to get a strong story arc. With that said, I also utilize serendipitous experiences to feed into the stories and plots. But once I’m satisfied with the general outline of the story, I definitely plot the full structure.

Then, there’s the research. *Being a Witch* took a LOT of historical research including original sources such as court records and books written in the mid-1600s both from England and the Ottoman Empire. For *Oswald*, the research was about animal behavior for all the various animals in the book. Even though they all talk and act in ways we know animals don’t, I also made sure to match up their general characteristics to their species. For example, Pixie, the pushy, and annoying groundhog is short-sighted, not too bright and aggressive – all natural characteristics of groundhogs.

Being a Witch grew out of my very moving work with foster children when I worked as a clinical psychologist over a number of decades. As a child, to *know* that the people taking care of you can send you back if they fancy, if you’re too much of a pain, must be weird and devastating. I can’t imagine the knot that would have been in my stomach as a child if when I went to school, on some level I didn’t know if I’d have that family to come home to for much, or even any longer. And fostering tends to end when the child turns eighteen. There are some programs in place to extend this, but from what I’ve seen these are sparse and are put in place infrequently.

Can you imagine at eighteen having nowhere to go for Thanksgiving? Christmas or Kwanza or Eid? No home to go to for the weekend, or for dinner once in a while? There are many wonderful foster parents doing amazing work, giving often deeply emotionally wounded children healing that changes the trajectory of their lives. But there are also a lot of placements that don't work out.

I had been working on plotting *Being a Witch* and knew she was going to time travel to the 1645 Essex Witch Trials, but I wasn't sure what would happen after that, when we had a trip to Turkey. We visited friends in Istanbul and I fell in love with the city and the culture and decided I wanted to bring the story to Istanbul, so I could learn more about this astounding place.

Oswald grew out of my reading the *Washington Post* Animal Watch column and having three racoons and an opossum as regular visitors when I lived in Mount Rainier, Maryland. They helped me with leftovers. The opossum especially liked my lasagna. Also, I had witnessed what research bears out; children increasingly want to be famous, as a life-ambition. No more do children want to be fire-fighters, veterinarians, teachers and the like. As of the 2010's, the single most popular response to the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?" was "famous". And this answer, "famous" was not even accompanied by a profession. If you asked the kids how they wanted to become famous, they typically said "it didn't matter". This hollow ambition worries me for people as individuals and for society as a whole. Narcissism may be the lead lining in our vessels. And story is a powerful way to convey messages. For me, writing books always includes social issues in a way I hope will be helpful.

INE: Tell us why you started Trindles & Green, Ltd. and your vision for the company.

SP: I created Trindles & Green as my publishing name, and company. It is a tricky balance, I sure don't have it down yet, but given there is still a lot of stigma against self-publishing in the general public, I decided to create a publishing company to make my books look more "legitimate". Luckily, in the UK it is quite simple and inexpensive to set up your own 'dormant' company. This also saves the name and no one else can register a company as Trindles & Green in the UK. The reason it is dormant is that I do all business, receiving and making payments under my own name and bank accounts. I do need to file a tax form with the UK government once a year. This has been one of the challenges of self-publishing, learning about the business of publishing and business! Whereas I would much prefer to spend all my time of writing and researching, I've been shoved onto this learning curve.

My vision for the company is to continue as my publishing 'badge' and possibly include other non-book works, such as videos or tee-shirts with funky messages.

INE: Do you have a set publishing schedule?

SP: No, I often feel frustrated with the in between book phases. During these periods I am also reading as fast as I can, but not always on topics I *thought* would be pertinent to the next book I envisioned. But just recently, through political activism work and reading about off shore banking and some of the very strange facts about "The City Corporation of London", which is the UK's Wallstreet, the sequel for *Being a Witch* came together. In the upcoming book *Raya* will time travel again. And again, she will have problems controlling the "controls". This time,

without giving too much away, Raya along with other characters will travel back to the Middle Ages in pre-England, when William the Conqueror was conquering. See, he never did capture this square mile of London, and it has maintained its independent status from England and the rest of the UK to this day – “The City”. And what it does with this independence is gob-smacking and horrifying with equal measure. Raya unconsciously goes back to that time, thinking just maybe if she tweaked history just right, The City would not be.

INE: Do you accept submissions?

SP: [No.] I’m afraid I don’t look at submissions because this company is solely for me to publish under. This is the only downside of having created a publishing company – that people will occasionally contact me about taking on their book. And I know that hopeful feeling of enquiring with publishing companies, so I kindly explain the situation.

INE: I see your books are available at B&N. What process did you follow to have your books accepted at this and other book stores?

SP: I follow the advice I’ve read in a number of places about self-publishing. That you are best served by publishing your book on Amazon and through Ingram Spark. This is more bother and a bit more money to upload your files to both platforms (and the cover requirements are slightly different for Amazon and Ingram). But Ingram gives you the advantage that your book is available to book stores worldwide if you can convince them to try it. I haven’t had a lot of luck with any of the big chain. I have had some luck with small, individually owned book stores, where they have graciously carried my book.

INE: How much travel do you set aside for author events, book fairs, and school visits?

SP: I set as much time as I get opportunities for book fairs, other fairs, and events.

INE: What are the top 3 tidbits you can offer authors?

SP:

1. Everyone says promotion is the hardest part. It’s true. And it’s much harder than I had thought, even with the warnings. So be prepared.
2. Don’t quit too soon. You have to keep on with promotion for a LONG time, years. Read more ideas, try different things, but don’t give up too soon. I was at a conference where one of the speakers said he found that this was a real vulnerability for self-publishing authors – we tend to give up too soon.
3. Internet is the way to go. You can reach *many* more people via social media, blogs, online advertising than you can at school fayres. Do the school fayres, but don’t neglect the online promotion. Like they say, only ten percent of all you do in promotion will work. The problem is you don’t know what that ten percent is until after it works!

INE: Any advice for illustrators?

SP: Communicating in words about visual things can be tricky. So, error on the side of over communication, at least until you know you and the author are on the same page.

INE: What is your favorite quote?

SP: “Enjoy yourself, it’s later than you think,” Originally a song written in 1949, music by Carl Sigman and lyrics by Herb Magidson.

“Too old to quit,” State Senator Ralph Dills, the longest-serving State legislator, serving in California.

INE: Who is your favorite author?

SP: Ta-Nehisi Coates

INE: Do you have a favorite childhood book?

SP: *Winnie the Pooh*

INE: Is there anything else you would like to add that I haven’t included?

SP: No, thank you.

INE: How can readers discover more about you and Trindles & Green, Ltd. books? (**Note: if any of the links don’t work by using Ctrl + Click, please copy and paste into your search window**).

SP: Website: www.sarapascoe.net

Blog: <http://www.sarapascoe.net/blog/>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SaraPascoeAuthor/

Twitter: @pascoesara

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/sara-pascoe

Amazon Author Page: www.amazon.com/Sara-Goldsmith-Pascoe/e/B007DGTKQO

Amazon US: bit.ly/beingawitch

Amazon UK: bit.ly/beingawitchUK

Amazon USA: bit.ly/OswaldUSA

Amazon UK: bit.ly/OswaldUK

Goodreads: [/www.goodreads.com/author/show/6066772.Sara_Pascoe](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/6066772.Sara_Pascoe)

Additional links and reviews

Being a Witch has won awards and has had some lovely reviews:

The Sun, the London Newspaper said, “It’s a rollercoaster plot with gorgeous historical detail and fabulous characters...Magical” (this was only in the print version of the paper, not online).

The US Review of Books said, “There is much to explore and admire within the pages of Pascoe’s magical, award-winning tale...Overall, the novel is a marvelous read and should appeal to all

ages.” <http://www.theUSreview.com/reviews/Being-a-Witch-and-Other-Things-I-Didnt-Ask-For-by-Sara-Pascoe.html#> [Or the bitly link: bit.ly/USRB_BAW]

Being a Witch won 2nd in Fantasy in 2017 Mill City Author Awards (<https://www.mcpauthorawards.com/winners/2017-july.html>) and was a Finalist in the 2018 Eric Hoffer Award, Eric Hoffer Book Competition (<http://www.hofferaward.com/Eric-Hoffer-Award-category-finalists.html#.Wv6jhZch2Ns>)

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Oswald won 1st in Children’s books in the 2017 Mill City Press Author Awards. (<https://www.mcpauthorawards.com/winners/2017-july.html>)

Illustrator Varya Kolesnikova (<https://www.behance.net/paskamarja>)

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“**Enjoy yourself, it’s later than you think,**” Originally a **song** written in 1949, music by Carl Sigman and lyrics by Herb Magidson. Covered by The Specials.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPd_awQuH4o

INE: Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to interview. Best of luck and much success for the future.

INE: To suggest more interviews for INE – provide event news – or suggest a general topic you would like to read on this blog, please add your name to our contact form with a brief note in the comments box found at www.lcoakes.jimdo.com.

Please follow us on Twitter by selecting the ‘follow me’ button on our website, or by logging onto Twitter and selecting @oakes333.

We are also on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/laara.oakes.9>

~end~

INE Note: answers are provided by the interviewee and are not altered by INE unless the response is deemed inappropriate for a general audience.