Lois Lowry Says 'The Giver' Was Inspired By Her Father's Memory Loss

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**Listening activity: listen to the sound recording that I play for you and fill in the missing sections.**

SCOTT SIMON, HOST:

Just for a second try to imagine without war, conflict, grief or memory. Now that's the premise of Lois Lowry's novel "The Giver." Since it was published in 1993, it's won nearly every major for young adult literature. "The Giver" is assigned reading in thousands of schools. The movie version with Meryl Streep and Jeff Bridges opened this weekend. NPR's Neda Ulaby has more.

NEDA ULABY, BYLINE: The Giver's world is a scary sterile world. Every person in this dystopian community must wear uniforms and take drugs to suppress their .

(SOUNDBITE OF FILM, "THE GIVER")

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE ACTOR: I can tell why you've been acting this way. Your levels are extremely low.

ULABY: Only two people get to feel deep emotions. The Receiver, whose job it is to remember humanity's history and the Giver, who passes those on. Everyone else has an orderly but colorless existence.

(SOUNDBITE OF FILM, "THE GIVER")

ODEYA RUSH: (As Fiona). I know that there's something more -

KATIE HOLMES: (As Mother). .

RUSH: (As Fiona). - Something missing from our lives. No, not missing - something that has been from me and from you.

ULABY: Author Lois Lowry came up with the idea for "The Giver" after her father went to a home.

LOIS LOWRY: He didn't have Alzheimer's but he began to lose pieces of his memory the way people do as they .

ULABY: One day, Lowry was showing him family photos, including one of her sister, who died when she was only 28.

LOWRY: And he said I can't her name. And I told him her name. And then he said whatever happened to her? And I had to tell him about her .

ULABY: That made Lowry think the way perhaps so many of us have after the pain of losing someone. Wouldn't it be easier if we didn't have memories at all?

LOWRY: And so I began to think about writing a book about people who had found a way to manipulate human memory so that they wouldn't have to remember anything .

ULABY: Lowry's written a lot of books - more than 40 - but none with the impact of "The Giver." Since it was published over 20 years ago, it sold more than 12 million copies.

(SOUNDBITE OF OPERA, "THE GIVER")

UNIDENTIFIED PEOPLE: (Singing together). On this day.

ULABY: "The Giver" has been turned into a play, a musical and an opera performed last year in Kansas City.

(SOUNDBITE OF OPERA, "THE GIVER")

UNIDENTIFIED PEOPLE: (Singing together). On this .

ULABY: Something about the book lends itself to adaptation, says Michael Mitnick, who co-wrote the movie version. That's not to say it was easy.

MICHAEL MITNICK: It was extremely intimidating. I think I did about 87 drafts of the .

ULABY: Mitnick read "The Giver" as a fifth-grader in school. Now he's 30. He says the book works in so many different forms because of its spare but hauntingly visual language and because of the it raises for young readers.

MITNICK: Would I prefer a world where there isn't and there isn't starvation and greed and envy?

ULABY: Or instead believe -

MITNICK: - That with the good there comes the bad and there always have to be both sides of it.

ULABY: A book for young people that includes euthanasia and -control was controversial.

(SOUNDBITE OF FILM, "THE GIVER")

MERYL STREEP: (As Chief Elder). The boy must hold in the .

ULABY: Walden Media bought the book's rights early on and it's co-producing "The Giver" now. But executive Chip Flaherty says the company hesitated about the project at the beginning.

CHIP FLAHERTY: Because of the fact that it has been in some places and things like that, you know, you would take a second look.

ULABY: Meaning "The Giver" did not seem like the world's most bankable property. But then came "The Hunger Games." Suddenly, a dystopian with a built-in following of millions seemed well-worth a second look. Lois Lowry, the book's author, says "The Giver" did not presage any trends.

LOWRY: I didn't think of it as futuristic or dystopian or science fiction or fantasy.

ULABY: It was, she said, just a story like so many of her other ones - about a kid making sense of his or her complicated world. Lowry was a brat who moved all over throughout her childhood - often after the school year had begun.

LOWRY: So I would be thrust into a as the new kid.

ULABY: Training her, she said, towards hyper-vigilance to each place's rules and . For example, in one school the girls might wear their socks artfully scrunched down.

LOWRY: And then you'd be in the next place and their socks were carefully folded over. It was important to know that. So I would those things.

ULABY: Lowry says that's what made her a writer. She to tell me what she's working on now except in terms of her garden at her farmhouse in Maine.

LOWRY: As female hormones decrease, they're replaced with an overwhelming urge to grow delphinium.

ULABY: Lois Lowry says it was worth the years it took to see "The Giver" transferred to the big screen. And at 77 years old, she hopes it won't take quite as long to see the other books in "The Giver" series become movies too. Neda Ulaby, NPR News.

Name: Block:

1. Which of the words that you filled in are ones that you can’t define?
2. Which of the words that you filled in is the most important to understand *The Giver*? Why?
3. What type of life do you think the author, Lois Lowry, had growing up?
4. What was Lois Lowry’s inspiration for writing *The Giver*?
5. What’s something that may seem bad, but has actually helped to inspire you? What was the bad thing? What did it inspire you to do?