



Hear hear! Local Narrators are Finalists for Audiobook 'Oscars'

By Ted Gregory, Tribune reporter
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Pam Turlow was finishing her narration of a challenging scene when an engineer walked into the studio to give her the news. Wayne Shepherd was in his Glen Ellyn office when he got an e-mail notifying him. Rebecca Gallagher, of Algonquin, was in her home office where she and her husband run a graphic design business when she saw the same e-mail.

The news? They were almost, sort of, famous. Turlow, Shepherd and Gallagher are nominees for Audies, the recorded book industry's version of the Academy Awards. Winners will be announced Tuesday at a gala in New York City.

"I honestly did the slack-jawed face for about a solid minute," Turlow, of Elmhurst, said when the engineer told her she was nominated for two Audies. Her version of "Kiss," by Ted Dekker and Erin Healy, is an Audie finalist in the inspirational/faith-based fiction category. Turlow's narration of "Face of Betrayal," by Lis Wiehl and April Henry, is a nominee for fiction.

Shepherd, whose narration of "The Birth Order Book," by Kevin Leman, is a finalist in the personal development category, said he smiled when he got the news, partly because he was happy for his friend Leman.

"I also smiled at the irony," Shepherd said. "Of all the books that I've done, I don't know that I'd done anything different with 'The Birth Order Book' than I did with any other book."

Gallagher is a finalist in the biography/memoir and inspirational/faith-based nonfiction categories for the same book narration: her telling of "The Secret Holocaust Diaries," by Nonna Bannister and Denise George.

"I initially contacted some friends in the audio industry to find out what exactly an Audie nomination is," Gallagher said, laughing. "Once I found out, I was really excited and honored."

Audies are awarded in 30 categories — from audiobook adaptation, and multivoiced performance to package design and Spanish language — with five finalists in each. A total of 1,056 titles were entered this year, said Janet Benson, president of the Audio Publishers Association, which has been running the Audies since 1996.

That number of Audie entries continues to rise, an indicator that the recorded book industry — which has struggled to gain acceptance in the publishing world — is experiencing robust health, Benson added. Audiobook publishers reporting to the APA generated \$331 million in revenue in 2008, the first year of declining revenue, she noted.

"From the mid-1980s until 2008, there was constant growth," Benson said. "There wasn't a single year where we experienced a downturn."

Those are somewhat reassuring figures for the erratic employment prospects of narrators. Fewer than 100 people across the U.S. are full-time audiobook narrators, Benson estimated. Almost all narrators have cobbled together other work, including voiceover, radio shows and live theater.

Fascinated with the human voice since her childhood on Chicago's Southwest Side, Turlow has been providing voices for commercials on radio, TV and video since graduating from Rosary College 23 years ago. She has also worked on industrial films and lent her voice to some cartoons.

She had been narrating children's short books when she got a full-length book narration offer in 2008 from Oasis Audio, a Carol Stream recorded-book company specializing in Christian and inspirational titles.

"It sounds a little scary," she said, "but I love creating these little worlds in my head, these little mind movies. I'm setting up that movie; I'm setting it up for people, and it's mine. I love that."

Shepherd, 58, also has been using his voice to make a living since he graduated from college in 1974 and went to work for Moody Bible Institute and its radio network centered on WMBI-FM in Chicago. He said he has narrated dozens of books.

"I just like the performance part of it," he said. "All the way back when I was a kid and I would be called to read, I always felt it was such a thrill."

Gallagher, 37, performed in plays while a student at Rolling Meadows High School and has performed in a few community theater productions. She got her start in audio work about five years ago, when she auditioned for a radio drama at her church, Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington. She got a part, which led to someone at Oasis asking if she would like to do more.

"One of the things I really enjoy about it is that idea of reading a story in such a way that you actually pull the listener in by your voice and how you tell the story," Gallagher said. "It was something I'd regularly do with my children when I would read to them."

As sedentary and simple as reading aloud may seem, book narration requires a challenging mix of focus, vocal stamina and acting skills — all while the mouth remains precisely positioned near the microphone.

Shepherd, who said that his practice of recording in his office eases the strain, focuses on "getting your eyes in front of where your mouth is" and taking breaks about every hour. Turlow is known for thorough preparation, which includes marking characters' lines in different colors of highlighters, practicing complicated dialogues and jotting notes in the margins of the manuscripts, the pages of which she enlarges for easier reading.

She also said she refrains from caffeine and alcohol the day before she starts a book narration job. After the typical three days of narration, she said, the first person she sees is her chiropractor.

Like Turlow, Gallagher likes to read aloud the entire manuscript and highlight key or complicated parts before she sits at the microphone.

Those approaches obviously have paid dividends, although winning an Audie won't directly pay. Audie recipients receive an engraved statue and the sales boost that may come from winning the award. The three local finalists said they would be honored to win, but only Gallagher will attend. Turlow said it's too expensive. Shepherd said he'll be in California on another job.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-x-0519-book-narrator-20100518,0,995552.story?page=2>