

HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 1.6

Book 1, Chapter 6: The Journey from Platform Nine and Three Quarters

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter re-read podcast, wherein two friends who read the books way back in the day as adults re-visit the series through a post-2020 lens. Your hosts are Lorrie Kim, author of *Snape: The Definitive Analysis*; and JC, an educator and long-time HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle Book One, Chapter 6: The Journey From Platform Nine and Three Quarters.

Lorrie: Well, this is an exciting chapter. Here we are, JC. We're about to go to Platform Nine and Three Quarters. Harry is about to take the train into his new life.

JC: Amazing.

Lorrie: So, tell us some of the many, many things that stood out for you from this chapter.

JC: The very beginning of the chapter is very interesting because this idea of, "What could be worse than having to live with the Dursleys for 10 years, living with them while they completely ignore you?" I thought that was very interesting; even though with this idea that Harry said it was an improvement in some ways, it was also really depressing to suddenly be a non-entity in their lives, and that's how they treat him for the rest of the series, really. They just pretend he doesn't exist.

Lorrie: This is, in my opinion, what led to capslock Harry in book five, because Dumbledore won't look at him.

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: And especially, when you're a baby -- as Harry was when he came to the Dursleys -- being acknowledged, being looked at, being held as a baby is so crucial to your development, and you know that one-and-a-half-year-old Harry was not being looked at the way you're supposed to look at a baby and adore them. The thing that I always worried about, thinking about infant Harry at Petunia's, was diaper rash.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: It's so realistic. Yeah. Babies need to be looked at or held, or if you're not sighted, to be constantly in contact. To have feedback that you exist, you're important; I love you.

JC: Oh, that just opened up a whole Pandora's Box of shit, what you just said. This idea of, what would it be like to have a baby that you neglect? Diaper rash, okay, but if he cried in the middle of the night, no one would come.

Lorrie: Nope.

JC: Did anyone read him stories at night or rock him to sleep? No, no, so he would be put down in there, abandoned. That sounds horrible.

Lorrie: Self-soothing, the master of self-soothing.

JC: Yes. Oh, my God, yeah.

Lorrie; Yeah. It's too much to think about.

JC: Oh, yeah. It is, actually.

Lorrie: But that is what Petunia has done to her own soul. So in book five, Dumbledore won't look at him. Dumbledore knows things about him and not only will Dumbledore not tell Harry; Dumbledore won't even let other people tell Harry. That, in my opinion, is all that's necessary to turn Harry into capslock monster. You've triggered him, Dumbledore.

JC: Wow. He does have this room that he can escape to that's not a closet, that Hedwig can come in and out. Also, the detail that Harry actually read enough of *A History of Magic* to pick out a name for his owl, and I'd missed that detail in the past. On the train later, Hermione says, "We'll, I've already memorized all of our textbooks," and Harry's horrified, like, "Oh, crap, I haven't," but he did read some of it.

Lorrie: Harry's a good student. We get that in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, too, that Harry likes doing his homework.

JC: So here's a question. Where did the trunk come from?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They did not buy it in Diagon Alley, right?

Lorrie: No.

JC: But when Harry gets to the train station -- when he sees the Weasleys, they've all got a trunk just like his. He's got his. Where did this trunk come from? Did an owl deliver it? Did it just appear in his room one day?

Lorrie: I guess the Dursleys had it.

JC: I don't know why I got hung up on that detail.

Lorrie: No, it's good, though, because that's something that really stood out to me, too. When you're an unwanted child who has no privileges, not only do you not have any privileges, you

don't really have rights either; what rights you do have are constantly under negotiation. He has to get the nerve to ask them to take into the station, not knowing if they're going to say yes or no, and that was so real. Does he have a trunk? Every detail like that is so fraught when you have to ask, "Do I dare to exist?" Sometimes, you have to ask. But yeah, when we see him realize at the platform that he's just going to have to figure it out on his own, his life has prepared him for that.

JC: Yeah. That's true.

Lorrie: Definitely, strangers will be nicer to him than people he knows.

JC: Yes. That cruelty of, "There's no Nine and Three Quarters; haha, good luck," and dropping him off and leaving and laughing. It's unimaginably cruel to abandon a child like that. I can only think that they must have known he's going to figure it out, because there's going to be lots of other freaks and weirdos there and they'll shepherd him along, but they didn't. Yeah, just abandoning him.

Lorrie: There are two different ways my mind goes on this. One of them is the literary way, which is: this is one of those passages that actually makes me really happy and proud for the author, because later on in *Deathly Hallows*, we find out oh, Petunia *has* been there. That's one of those artifacts of this series, having taken ten years to write and become something so enormous and different at the end than anyone could have imagined when they were writing book one. You can't go back and edit and put it in there that Petunia knows.

JC: I had forgotten about that.

Lorrie: But that just makes me proud of what a phenomenon this series becomes. The other thing -- and this is again dark; I can't really talk about Harry Potter for very long without going super dark, but that's just me. This is something that my friend -- who I've mentioned before, who comes from a background with a lot of foster homes, an adoptive mom, and all sorts of trauma. She and I noticed about our children's lives -- because the childhood we were able to give our children had more stability, emotional stability than what we went through -- we encountered in our children the phenomenon of people who don't actually believe that things could be this bad. They don't believe there are really people who would leave an 11-year-old and laugh and not care. My friend and I would look at each other because our kids would say, "Well, nobody would really do that," and that would just open up all sorts of thoughts. It's like, "Okay, how are we going to raise children, and try to get across to them, that there is a world where people do that? Either you believe that about people or you don't, and this is relevant to you because you're going to be raised by somebody who comes from that and you won't know where that comes from if we don't explain it to you." It's really hard if you've never been broken that way. If your faith in humans has never been broken that way, it's hard to believe it. It's hard to accept it when somebody explains it to you. On the other hand, if you're somebody who *has* been broken that way, the gulf between yourself and what seemed to be normal people to you can be so bitter, almost too much to think about. I will say that the Dursleys laughing at him and leaving him at the station struck me as perfectly realistic.

JC: Yeah. For where that train was going, yeah. For how those characters have been portrayed, yeah.

Lorrie: There really are people like that.

JC: It's also interesting to me, too, though, that this could just be a, I don't know, cultural generational thing. It wasn't that long ago that the idea that you could just drop a 11-year-old kid off at a train station and they'd find their way. Yeah, of course they could. That idea that we have to protect our children and spend a lot longer time guiding them and protecting them from whatever is out in the world, that's a lot... not newer, but just more intense, maybe, now. I think about the stories that my parents and grandparents told, or even my own childhood stories of going off and doing things on my own that my child didn't do. My kid didn't, at the age of eight, walk a half a mile down a busy road to a store to buy something. That didn't happen. I think, too, there's a little bit of the distance of that idea that it's okay for kids to be that independent. I don't know.

Lorrie: Well, this is one of those areas where what we read is a mirror of our experience and our living memory and heritage, because what you're describing is a change in generation in a family that has lived in roughly the same country for two or three generations. I have an immigrant background: I was born in the U.S. a year after my parents emigrated from Korea, and when they were Harry's age, it was post-war. There were lots of orphans. There was no safety and stability; it was grueling post-war poverty. Disabled people -- people disabled from the war. There was no security; you could try to protect your children, if you could afford to keep them. That's the childhood that my parents experienced in a different country in living memory, and that influenced how they raised me and what they thought. They didn't know any other childhood. Automatically, when we start talking about what we collectively remember from our parents' generation, that instantly shows how this one story refracts as soon as there's more than one reader, which is good. That's the point of having a hit series. And it all automatically shows the significance of the unusual success of Harry Potter as an internationally bestselling series, because for every country that reads this book, it means something different -- different elements of the story show up. I have experienced that, more than people from a lot of other countries, American readers tend to downplay that it's a war story. American readers will say something that I don't think people from a lot of other countries would say: "Why didn't Dumbledore keep Voldemort out of Hogwarts?" It's a war. "But he should have been able to!" Sure, in peacetime. This innocence about having a war in your own home territory: readers who have that kind of security are different from readers who are accustomed to the notion of orphaned child soldiers. A lot of Americans have nostalgia for this series as a gingerbread kind of cozy story; it's really amazing how if there are parts of the story that don't speak to your experience, you don't register them. So yeah, 11-year-old on his own, on a platform? That's not too bad. He can read. He's got money.

JC: He's got a pocket full of money he can only spend in the world he can't get to, but yeah.

Lorrie: It doesn't work, but yeah.

JC: Yeah, exactly. So, the whole scene where he's searching for platform Nine and Three Quarters, and he hears Molly Weasley's voice and he connects with the Weasleys: all of that is really iconic. It's really fortuitous that these are the first people that he meets. But so many questions popped into my head reading that scene this time around: the fact that Molly asked which platform, and the response is Nine and Three Quarters, implies that there are many other platforms in this station.

Lorrie: Yes, there are.

JC: But we never see Platform Two and One-Third or Platform Seven and a Half.

Lorrie: It's extra-canonical, the fact that there are other fractions among the platforms. It's extra-canonical, but it makes sense.

JC: Oh, that is an extra-canonical thing.

Lorrie: Yeah, absolutely. There are others. Yes!

JC: I did not know that. There was that period of time when all that extra stuff was coming out and it just... *mind explodes*

Lorrie: Yeah. This is another thing that holds up a mirror to the fandom. Everybody has their own comfort level with how much they do or don't admit extra-canonical information. I like it and I consider it secondary canon, but this is also a Ravenclaw thing: I just want more information. What we do with it is up to us, but if the information is there, I want to know what it is. There are so many other ways to approach this, all of which are valid for that person. There are people who are like, 'If it's not in the seven books, it doesn't count'; there are people who say, "Well, the author's dead, so I don't even hear that." Whatever. There's as many different ways to do this as there are readers.

JC: That brings up so many questions for me: how exactly do magical trains and Muggle trains interact in that station? The fact that they use the same station must mean they use the same tracks. Here, I'm just going to go off on this small tangent. They must use the same tracks; otherwise there'd be no reason to use the Muggle train station. They would build a separate train station that you would get to some other way. There must be coordination between the National Rail Service and the Wizarding World's ministry of transportation or whatever. I love all these little -- 'hints' may be the wrong word, but I'm head canoning -- that at the highest levels, the governments are intertwined and they know about each other, and they have to cooperate in order to keep the Wizarding World safe and protected and secret. There's a lot of things that that raises for me about the larger structure of the society, because infrastructure.

Lorrie: When we meet the Knight Bus later, they do mention a little bit like, "Oh, the Muggles, they don't notice anything," and we see streets widening and narrowing and squeezing past. Yeah, somebody is concerned with this, even if Harry isn't seeing it.

JC: Yeah. That idea of there must be an incredibly powerful Confundus charm cast on this entrance. My assumption is that every kid who goes to Hogwarts is going through this station, or I'd say most of them. That's a lot of families coming to drop kids off, a lot of weirdly dressed people with their big trolleys with the Hogwarts stuff. The fact that the Muggles don't notice all these people running into the barrier, there must be a big Confundus charm here, and that could only really be done in cooperation with... yeah. So the idea of the governments cooperating, I find that really interesting.

Lorrie: We get some introductions in this chapter. We get the introduction of tokenism, racial tokenism...

JC: Yes, we do.

Lorrie: With Lee Jordan being introduced as a boy with dreadlocks. This is definitely not the

worst form of tokenism we see, because a number of other students are also introduced with details about their hair or whatever. It's not weirder or lesser than a bunch of other minor players, but it is one of those first, "Okay, this is a racial indicator and this is how she's indicated it." Also good, though, is -- well, he has dreadlocks, but his more important trait is that he has a tarantula and he's cool. We meet the trolley witch -- who is another one of those guardian spirits -- and in this form, we think she's a smiling young woman. We don't find out later until Cursed Child -- which for me is canon -- that she's also a harpy. And we meet traumatized Neville.

JC: Oh, no.

Lorrie: Who acts like somebody whose mind is scattered, and we meet geektastic Hermione, who has terrifically memorized all their books.

JC: The introduction of Hermione is one of my favorite scenes in this entire series. She just comes in, 'Blah blah blah,' in that way that, if you were that kind of child, is so familiar. She's trying to make a good impression and she can't help herself.

Lorrie: She can't help herself.

JC: And other kids are looking at her, like, "What the hell is wrong..." Yeah. But it's so familiar. It's so familiar.

Lorrie: Yeah. And by the time she says, "Oh, you're doing magic; let's see it," the other kids are still trying to catch up to half a paragraph earlier.

JC: Right. I love the way that it's written, honestly, too, where run-on sentences don't describe it. It's just sentence, comma, sentence, comma, sentence, comma. There's no punctuation except for this comma to indicate that that's where she takes a breath and then she just keeps going.

Lorrie: That's when she takes a breath. We meet Ginny -- and we don't know yet, but I love this so much -- I loved the moment when we find out that her name is not Virginia. It's Ginevra; it's a version of Guinevere.

JC: Ooh.

Lorrie: God, I love that.

JC: When do we find that out?

Lorrie: *Deathly Hallows*. Here's the fanfic that I've never read that I would love to read; I'm much more accustomed to seeing it gender-swapped where there are families with an enormous string of daughters and one youngest son, after which they got what they wanted, so they don't have any more children. Then all of the daughters are drains on the family income. That's more what I'm accustomed to. Here, the genders are swapped, so they have a zillion sons and one tiny girl. The fanfic I would love to read is: what happened during the one year that their house was quiet, and it was just Molly and Ginny?

JC: Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm.

Lorrie: This incredibly bustling, noisy, disorderly place just has the two of them: Molly with the daughter that she wanted. What did one witch teach another? I would love to read that. The other thing that this sets up is the biggest introduction we get in this chapter: was Ron unwanted? Was he an extra? Because when he was conceived, Fred and George, A.K.A. children four and five, were two-year-old twins.

JC: Oh, my god.

Lorrie: There's no such thing as peaceful two-year-old twins, but these are the worst two-year-old twins in history. Who has *them* as their fourth and fifth children and thinks, "You know, what I'd really like is a sixth son. I think I'm just going to get knocked up again!" We don't know. We have no idea why Molly and Arthur had the family the way they did. We don't know, but that gnawing fear is in Ron, and it's also a question when people look at the family. It's part of Ron's burden.

JC: Absolutely. The introduction of that family is so interesting, because I think Harry -- having never really had a loving family -- looks at this and thinks, "This is what a family must be like." He's watching them. First of all, they help him enter the world, so they are the people who take him through the barrier in a sense, or show him the way; then he has to take that leap of faith of running into the brick wall. "Am I really going to go through?" which is a really cool moment. But when he gets in the car and he's peeking around the corner and he listens to their conversation, he hears the banter and the brothers teasing each other and they're teasing their mom and all of this stuff. You can see the envy.

Lorrie: The craving.

JC: Yeah. What would it be like? And so when Ron joins him on the train car -- which I think is another whole interesting thing; he's sitting in this empty train car, and Ron chooses to come out of curiosity but also with the intention of making a friend. That whole moment of Harry saying, "Tell me about your family," and Ron's like, "Ugh, it's awful," and they're so different in that way. Their background is so different, but they complement each other really well.

Lorrie: They're very kind to each other.

JC: They're so kind to each other. That's the other thing: the contrast to Draco is really clear. Ron reacts completely differently to Harry's ignorance of the magical world, like, "Oh, let me tell you all about the things that I like, and maybe you'll like them, too, and we'll be best friends." There's that, and then Harry has the money to buy all the sweets, and so he instantly clues in on, "Here's something I can do. If this person's been so nice to me, here's something I can do," and they bond over this. But this idea that -- for Ron, Harry's friendship is the first thing that he's ever had that's completely his own; everything he's had has been handed down. He's had to share it with somebody else, it's been handed down from his brothers, it's old, it's worn out, it's broken, it doesn't completely work. This is the first thing Ron ever has that is just his, and it's so cool to watch that. Harry also has never really had a friend before. Knowing where their friendship goes, this whole moment of them bonding from the very beginning is just so much fun to read.

Lorrie: To me, the most important sentence in this chapter is: "'Go on, have a pasty,' said Harry, who had never had anything to share before *or indeed anyone to share it with.*"

JC: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Lorrie: That bond where you get to enjoy the company of another person, and their company and similar parallel enjoyment enhances the experience and turns it into something else: that bond is the thing that this whole series is based on. That's the thing Harry has that Voldemort doesn't have. That's the thing that lets you make a patronus. That's the thing that lets you Occlude. That's the thing that lets you grow and have empathy, which Voldemort can't without stealing Harry's blood. The feeling of 'let's do something together.' Later on, when we see child Snape and child Lily, we see the same thing happening to them when they do magic together. Doing it on your own is one thing, and that's beautiful. Having someone to share it with and to amplify that feeling is comforting to Ron; Harry might have money, but he's never had any of these things either before. This is his first time buying candy. Ron isn't sure if he should be ashamed, and Harry's like, "Don't be ashamed in front of me. I've never had this either." The way that they don't shame each other is one of my favorite things about their friendship. Going along with that, the chocolate frog cards are super important to me. A few years ago, I was challenged to think about Ron because I never think about Ron. On the other hand, the chocolate frog cards that are introduced in this scene are super, super important. When I sat down to think about Ron, chocolate frog cards are the biggest honor you can have. In my opinion, they're better than an Order of Merlin; they're better than being elected to something. You can be famous, you can win an election, you can be a quidditch star. But are you so important that you're acclaimed as part of the whole culture's story? That is a level of emotional importance and cultural identity that is beyond whether you win things or you're president or whatever. Ron is going to be on a chocolate frog card. He is going to be the most successful of Molly's children, and what is he going to do to get there? He's going to be *with* people. That's his gift, and he does it so well that he saves the Wizarding World. That is a humble gift that he learned from Molly. He's not fancy; he's not Bill with his fancy job. He's not Charlie, who's all glam. He's not the greatest inventor of his generation. The same things that make Molly a low-status but very effective housewife are the things that get Ron his legendary status as a chocolate frog character. This whole scene about Ron being excited about his 500-card collection, and the phrase that stands out to me when I think about what is important about chocolate frogs is – on Dumbledore's card, it says "chamber music and ten-pin bowling." What's important is the personality. You cannot tell the story of Harry Potter without mentioning Ron Weasley. Alright, I'm done. That's my Ron talk. Thank you.

JC: There's so much. Their friendship is so central. One of the things that I really love about this chapter is that Harry makes some choices -- or maybe it's just things happen -- but so much of the relationships that are going to define his life happen right here in this chapter. He meets Ron and Hermione. He meets Neville. Draco comes back and, once again, completely bungles the attempt to befriend Harry because he doesn't know how to talk like a human being. This is the moment when he comes -- he's been sent on a mission by his father to befriend Harry Potter, and he just doesn't know how to do it for whatever reason. So he comes in, haughty and insulting, and Harry's like, "Yeah, no," and there's the famous rejected handshake.

Lorrie: The rejected handshake is so -- nobody, no matter how clueless and snobby, wants their handshake rejected.

JC: Oh, my gosh. It's just... ugh.

Lorrie: You're doing it very wrong, Draco. It's amazing how wrong you got this.

JC: Yeah. The first time you read the series, I think he just comes across as a little asshole. I look now -- having had a child who's socially awkward and doesn't know how to interact with kids sometimes and comes across the wrong way, and knowing where Draco's story goes -- I read that as, "Oh, this kid, he just screwed it up."

Lorrie: You're just watching the train crash happen.

JC: Yeah. He had to make the mistake and he had to live with it and live with the consequences.

Lorrie: And he has no idea what he did!

JC: Yeah, he still... yeah.

Lorrie: He still doesn't know what's wrong with being an elitist asshole.

JC: I've been rewarded for it my entire life. My parents pat me on my head.

Lorrie: There's no other way to be.

JC: Going back to the beginning of the chapter: the idea that Dudley is getting the pigtail surgically removed, it's just so preposterous. The idea of the Dursleys having to go to the hospital and explain this or give some excuse, and also, the fact that it's going to end up in a medical journal. This kid has a freaking pigtail. What happened? Yeah. Poor Dudley. Also, another thing that stood out to me here is Molly is described as plump; that's the second time in the series that I've seen that word used. Both times were in reference to a woman in a traditional mom role. It's so interesting, because the author is signaling that she's fat, but she's one of the good ones, so it's such a pleasant word, 'plump'. This idea that, "Okay, well, of course, moms can't help being a little chubby, especially if they've had seven babies." Moms are so sacrosanct in this series that they can't possibly be evil just because they're a little bit fat. Yet, the fact that we have to point out that she's plump is interesting.

Lorrie: I understand the stock image that she's trying to conjure -- a very comforting image -- but there's such a distinction, because obviously Molly Weasley is the opposite of lazy. Yet when Dudley is described as fat, we're supposed to infer that this equates to laziness.

JC: Yeah. I don't trust the author with any descriptions of body size. Not at all. Every one is going to raise a flag for me from here on out. Ron's reaction to Harry saying Voldemort is really funny to me. He's like, "Ooooh, you dare to say his name?!" It was the same way like that first time when you're in elementary school and some other kid says 'fuck,' and you're like, "OOOOOH." That feeling around it, like a little bit of awe and terror and looking around, "Did anyone hear? Can we just say that?"

Lorrie: Is lightning going to strike?

JC: Exactly. It was so funny, but it's also interesting, too, that Harry is starting to realize that he can't just go around saying that name. It was just a word to him a couple of weeks back; now, he's like, "Every time I say this, people freak out." It's giving him a little more information about...you know.

Lorrie: Yeah. "This is who I am here."

JC: One more thing that stood out to me is the fact that Neville has the toad, and I love how that is just being used. Not only does he have a toad -- which is apparently supposedly out of style and embarrassing -- that signals to us that Neville is behind the times and he's a nerd and kind of awkward. But he keeps losing the toad. It's such an interesting introduction to Neville.

Lorrie: Going back to the previous chapter, the whole concept of getting your Hogwarts letter. There's a whole generation of young readers -- millennials -- for whom that's a thing; they're genuinely disappointed that they didn't get one, and that's something that I don't understand because I was an adult reading this. I'm reading this in my 30s, thinking, "Oh, yes, this entire series is your Hogwarts letter. You do it by your imagination, blah blah blah." No, these seven- and eight-year-olds don't experience it that way. They really want it. Before TERFpocalypse, I amused myself sometimes, thinking the closest that you get to a Hogwarts letter in this life is your AARP letter when you're about to turn fifty, and you don't know that they've been watching you this whole time.

JC: Reading your Facebook posts.

Lorrie: But when you're 49, you get a letter. If you're American, you get a letter. Oh, what does AARP stand for?

JC: American Association of Retired People, or something like that.

Lorrie: Yeah. They offer you membership, and they're reminding you that it's time to go for your colonoscopy. For a long time, I thought, "AARP -- around the year 2040 -- should license the right for their letters to go out looking like Hogwarts letters."

JC: Oh, my gosh. That's incredible.

Lorrie: Then TERFpocalypse happened, and I thought, it's not fun anymore. Aside from the fact that it would be prohibitively expensive for a dumb joke. The joy is out of it. Yeah, on the other hand, 2040, who knows what cultural changes will have taken place by that?

JC: True.

Lorrie: I don't know what further plot twists there are going to be in the saga of Harry Potter and J.K. Rowling as it impacts our world. I don't know. I don't know, so to be continued. But along with the letter, there's the whole concept of getting your wand when you're 11. We did that with my older child. We did take her on a vacation to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Orlando, and we knew that if you go to the Ollivander ceremony, if you're lucky, you get chosen. One person gets chosen in every group to go through the ceremony, so I decided: "You know what? I'm going to make this happen." First of all, we went first thing in the morning, so it's guaranteed to be a smaller crowd. Then I made her wear her Marauders Map dress knockoff that we bought off of a fly-by-night company from Etsy, and I made her wear her Time-Turner necklace. I also made her wear her butterbeer cork necklace and her radish earrings. She tried to argue with me and say, "You can't do that. The Time-Turner is Hermione, and the radishes and the butterbeer cork are Ravenclaw and they're Luna." I said, "Don't argue with me; just put them on," so she did. I had printed out temporary tattoos that said "Magical Eleventh Birthday" and I put one of them on each cheek. So, then she was ready, and I said to her, and I thought I was very funny; I

didn't realize she didn't realize I was joking. I said to her, "Now, look excited." Oh, she really did. Oh, my God, she really did. I thought she was going to levitate. So it was a small group, and we could see the actor who was playing Ollivander. I saw his eyes flick over her cheeks where it said "Magical Eleventh Birthday", and then, of course, he chose her because it was a very small group. I filmed it. I filmed her going through that thing where you go through three different wands, and then the thing happens and you're chosen, and then he tells you how special you are and how this one is special for you because of, and then they say something that sounds magical but can apply to any child.

JC: Like a horoscope, yeah.

Lorrie: Which she totally bought. She's like, "That is me! That's me!" I was surprised to find myself crying. Yeah. I'm like, "Come on, I know what this is." No, I cried. It was amazing and she was transported. And as we left, I just said to the actor, "Thank you." Yeah, I think there had been about five people in our group, and as we left, he stopped the other child. The two youngest people in this group had been my kid and another kid around the same age, and he stopped that kid and he said, "Excuse me, are you here for your wand?" So that kid and his parents got -- whoever was waiting in line could wait a few minutes. It was first thing in the morning, and he did the whole thing for another kid, too. I was so impressed and happy.

JC: Oh, that's going to make me cry. That's so cool. That's really cool. That's one of those 'knowing who your audience is', and oh, my gosh, the importance of it.

Lorrie: Knowing the important thing is that this young, you want to be recognized. "It looked like we didn't know you, but we know you. It looks like maybe you're not important, someone else got picked; you're also important." Ah, beautiful, beautiful.

JC: That was really amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah. And we did buy the wand.

JC: Yes, because you have to at that point. Yeah.

Lorrie: Because it's hers. It chose her.

JC: Yes. So after you have that experience: my child is three years younger than your oldest, so I was like, "We're doing that. I'm copying every single thing." My kiddo is not as... it's just not his thing, but he was excited to do the thing. So we went to Orlando and he got the Hogwarts letter the night before, or actually in the morning. That morning, he woke up and he had the Hogwarts letter. I had done a Hogwarts letter and he was like, "Cool," but he wasn't like over the moon about it. Which is interesting because I remember, back in the 90s and I was in grad school, one of my fellow grad students had a child who turned eleven and I remember being in a group -- a meeting or a class or something -- where she said, "Oh, yeah, it's my kid's birthday, he's eleven today," and she sighed and said he's a little bit sad about it. I remember saying, "Why is he sad about it?" She said, "Because it's his eleventh birthday and he didn't get a Hogwarts letter," and I only vaguely knew what Harry Potter was at that point. I was like, "Well, okay." That was my first indication that there's something here. Anyway, that could have memories, too. I was like, "When my kid turns eleven, we're going to..." He appreciated it, he did. We went to the park, so I did the same thing. I had made him a t-shirt that said, "Magical Eleventh Birthday" in big Harry Potter font and we went to Ollivander's first thing; we rushed straight there, so we were in one of the first groups as well. I shoved him up to the front, and we went into the room, I was like, "Get

up there!" and the Ollivander character picked him out, so he got to do the thing. I also videoed it. I also cried, tears streaming down. I didn't think I was going to cry. "My baby's graduating." Something amazing about it. He really loved the experience, and then we bought the wand and everything. Those wands are expensive, too.

Lorrie: They are!

JC: Oh, my god. Then he got to do the thing where he ran around the park and used the wand in all the places you could use the wand. And so I think, honestly, it was more for me than it was for him in the end, because it wasn't like... he wasn't a huge Harry Potter fan in the way that I think maybe your daughter was. Also, as a parent, I could not let his eleventh birthday go by and not do something. After being involved in the fandom and being so immersed in all of it, I just couldn't have let it go. I would have always regretted it if I didn't do something, so I'm really glad that we were able to do that.

Lorrie: Well, my younger child is the same age as your kid, and that was a whole other, very funny story. When she was ten and a half, she timidly asked me, "Is it okay if I don't want a Harry Potter eleventh birthday?" It was so funny. "It's your birthday. What do you want?"

JC: It was the same year, so when he was in the fifth grade, I was a room parent that year for his fifth grade class. There were several room parents, and the room parents were in charge of putting together the parties. For the winter party, one of the teachers had suggested that we make it a Harry Potter-themed party, because I guess a lot of the kids were reading Harry Potter anyway and they were really into it. I just sat straight up in my chair in that meeting and said, "I can do it. Let me do this. I will be in charge. I will take this on. Leave it to me."

Lorrie: I love it!

JC: It was so great, and the parents were like, "Okay."

Lorrie: "You won't regret this."

JC: I was like, "Really, this is going to be amazing," so from that point on I was like, "This is going to be the most amazing Harry Potter experience any of these children have ever had, even if they have been to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter." So I planned it, I got all the stuff. I made posters of the Daily Prophet; I put Daily Prophet pictures up. I put up everything I could think of in the hall. There's a hall and four classrooms, you have to imagine. I closed off both ends of the hall; the kids left, and we had an hour to do decorations.

Lorrie: An hour?!

JC: They had specials or something, so everything had to be ready to go.

Lorrie: Holy. How many people did you have helping you?

JC: A bunch of parents. I just put out a call for volunteers.

Lorrie: Okay.

JC: On one end of the hall -- actually, I had done it the day before. I did castle wall -- I bought like this plastic sheeting you could put up -- and I made a castle that went into the wall. I set it

up as, "Here's a photo stop," so it was a photo booth thing so you could take pictures and stuff with little props. There were owls and all kinds of magical things. There were wands and all that stuff. Then I closed off that end of the hall with all these big Hogwarts banners, and then we had candles hanging from the ceiling in the hallway. You know how schools have those tiles and you kind of push them up? I bought battery-operated candles that would flicker, and we tied them with fishing twine. I had a whole team of parents; I was like, "Here's what you're going to do: you're going to tie them like this, you're going to do this, you're going to hang them in the ceiling." We had ladders -- it was an army of people. The bathroom that was in that hallway, we put Moaning Myrtle stuff all in the bathroom, which was fun. Only in the girls bathroom, though; the poor boys didn't get anything. But in the girls, they got Moaning Myrtle. Then I bought a big brick sheet of plastic. I closed off the opening of the hallway with that, I cut a slit in it, and then I put a sign that said "Platform Nine and Three Quarters." And what happened was that when the kids came back from specials and they were ready to go have their winter party, they had to walk through Platform Nine and Three Quarters; when they emerged on the other side, the candles were magically hanging from the ceiling and music was playing. One of the dads set up his phone and he played music from the movie soundtrack. All four classroom doors were decorated as a House and it was funny because in the class that got the Slytherins, they were really mad. They were like, "Why are we Slytherin?" It was actually kind of cute. Then they had activities they were doing. We made butter beer, I made chocolate frogs. I spent weeks developing the chocolate frog process so that they would look good, so I made a hundred chocolate frogs in little bitty bags. We made a little Monster Book of Monsters, and I cut all that fabric. It was so much work -- it was really wild -- but the look on their faces when they came and they saw, "Oh, this is what we're doing," and it was just this magical moment. I have videos of it and stuff. Then a few weeks later was when my son turned 11, and we went to... It was this month of maxing out my Harry Potter stuff, and this is into 2018, beginning of 2019, so it's right before the pandemic and then right before TERFpocalypse, basically. It was the last big blow-out of Harry Potter stuff.

Lorrie: Of innocence.

JC: Of innocence, yeah. Yeah. But interestingly enough, the next year I got a call from the person who is the lead classroom parent, asking if I could help them do it again. And I had a whole Google Drive folder full. I documented everything. I had written out instructions. I passed it all on. I was like, "Here you go!"

Lorrie: Nice.

JC: I don't know if they did it. I know it was not as good as what I did.

Lorrie: Well, I guess they weren't a witch.

JC: Exactly, that's the thing. Oh, I also dressed in robes to welcome the kids. I was standing at the platform in my robes. Yeah.

Lorrie: Was it your Hufflepuff robe?

JC: No, because I don't have Hufflepuff robes. I bought Ravenclaw robes years and years ago when I thought I was a Ravenclaw. Turns out I was wrong.

Lorrie: Ah. It is great.

JC: A great memory. A great way to send off the elementary school experience by having a blowout party that all those kids will hopefully remember.

Lorrie: And then they get off the Hogwarts Express and Hagrid greets them on the boats to their new home.

JC: One of the things that is so iconic about that is getting on the boats; the boats take them across the water and they see the castle, and you get their first view of Hogwarts.

Lorrie: Crossing the water.

JC: Yeah, crossing the water. Oh, and then Neville finds his toad. Also, again, Hagrid is the one to lead them across, so that idea that you brought up before, of Hagrid being the person who takes you across the boundary.

Lorrie: So, what chapter do we have coming up after this?

JC: I think it's The Sorting Hat.

Lorrie: Oh, my god.

JC: It's The Sorting Hat.

Lorrie: Every new chapter makes me excited in a different way.

JC: Ah, yeah.

Lorrie: Well, I'm looking forward to talking about The Sorting Hat with you next time.

JC: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Caroline: You've been listening to Harry Potter After 2020 with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at HPAfter2020.com. There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts, and more. If you like what you heard, consider giving us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Harry Potter After 2020 is produced and edited by Lorrie Kim and Caroline Rinaldy. Original music was composed by C.L. Smith. Thank you for listening.