

AUTHOR CHAT!

Native Mobilian Lauren K. Denton shares with ACCESS her debut novel, The Hideaway, and discusses the challenges and joys of balancing life as both writer and mom. / By Eleanor Inge Baker

Native Mobilian
Lauren K. Denton



EIB: Tell us about your debut novel, *The Hideaway*.

LKD: Sara Jenkins, a 30-year-old New Orleans antique shop owner, goes home to *The Hideaway*, a ramshackle B&B in Sweet Bay, Alabama, which belonged to her recently deceased grandmother, Mags. Sara intends to quickly tie up loose ends, then return to her busy life and thriving shop in New Orleans. Instead, she learns Mags has willed her *The Hideaway* and charged her with renovating it—but that's only the first surprise. A motley crew of elderly B&B residents, a handsome contractor, and a box in the attic containing clues to Mags's real life tie Sara to Sweet Bay in ways she doesn't expect. When a sleazy land developer with an eminent domain contract threatens to replace *The Hideaway* with a string of trendy condos, Sara is forced to make a choice—stay in Sweet Bay and fight for the house and people she's grown to love, or leave again and return to her successful but solitary life in New Orleans.

EIB: Out of all your creative ideas, how did you decide to develop *The Hideaway*?

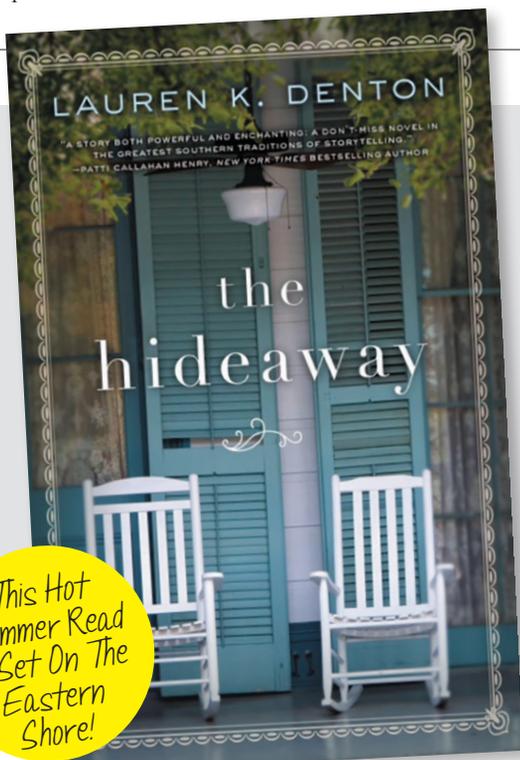
LKD: The idea came after I decided the manuscript for my first novel was not going to print and was destined to be in a box under my bed. I still had the itch to write though, so I tried other story ideas. I kept getting stuck after writing 20, 30, 40 pages. I'd just run out of steam or lose interest. One day I asked myself what I wanted to read about. If I could pick the perfect book to read, what would it be like? My first thought was Mobile—specifically the Eastern Shore area of the Bay. And I thought of New Orleans—I've always loved the city and love reading stories set there. Then came the idea of a bed and breakfast and an eccentric grandmother who lived there. The setting got me excited at first. When I began to outline what a story set there could look like and who these people were, I knew it could be something special.

EIB: How do you balance the demands of work and family?

LKD: It's a constant juggle of priorities—as in, reminding myself that when the kids are home, they are my priority. I live in Homewood, just outside Birmingham, with my husband, Matt, and our two daughters, Kate and Sela. After school pickup, I have to force myself to take off the Writer hat and put on Mom hat, which is hard. When I'm in the middle of a story, it's always chugging away in the background of my mind. I keep pen and paper everywhere in case inspiration strikes while I'm busy doing other things!

EIB: What was the biggest obstacle you faced in publishing *The Hideaway*?

LKD: Querying agents was a long, draining process. All the rejection you hear writers talk about? It's real and you have to have really thick skin. There are a lot of agents looking for authors, but many of them receive 50+ queries every day, so the odds of finding one who loves your story are slim. Once I began researching how to query agents, Twitter became a lifeline. So many agents and editors are on Twitter sharing what types of books they're looking for, the best ways to contact them, and what they want (or don't want) in query letters. It was such a huge help. That's also how I initially discovered so many other writers who were having great conversations about writing, books, and publishing in general. It made the process feel much less lonely.



ELEANOR INGE BAKER'S TAKE ON THE HIDEAWAY:

I stayed up way too late finishing Lauren K. Denton's debut novel, *The Hideaway*. I could not put it down. I'm not usually one to cry, but I boohooed through the last half of the book. This lovely, multigenerational story is one of love lost and love redeemed. The writing is measured and easy at the same time. I hate it when I feel a writer is manipulating my emotions. That's not the case here. Lauren is a skillful wordsmith who has carefully crafted her story and formed her characters and the world they live in. I cared about what happened and couldn't but share in their joys and heartaches. For Mobilians there's the added plus of reveling in her descriptions of the familiar places we love. *The Hideaway* is set in New Orleans and the fictional Eastern Shore enclave of Sweet Bay. The brackish smells, the quality of light reflecting off the water and filtering through Spanish moss and live oaks, the complex transformation of the Eastern Shore from sleepy Bay towns and farmland to quick real estate developments, is all part of the story. Fairhope, Point Clear, and Mobile are also woven into the story.

I'm so happy for and proud of my friend and former roommate. When we lived together at Auburn, I remember her voracious appetite for reading. I remember her saying how much she hated finishing a book she loved, because that meant it was over. Last night, even though it was so late, and I knew my little ones would be up and raring to go early, like always, I was sad to turn the last page because that meant the book and the story she'd written was over too. I can't wait to read the next one!