

Randall Receives New York Times Book Award

By JACKIE R SCHECHTER, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

December 2, 2011

0 COMMENTS  EMAIL  PRINT

 Like  

Last month, Physics Professor Lisa J. Randall '84 experienced a thrill unusual for scientists: she saw her name in lights on the marquee of a 2000-person theater. Randall was speaking in Portland, Oregon while on tour for her new book, "Knocking on Heaven's Door: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World." The book, which was published on Sept. 20, was recently named one of the New York Times's 100 Notable Books of 2011.

"Knocking on Heaven's Door" is the second award-winning book that Randall has published in her eleven years of teaching at Harvard. The first, titled "Warped Passages: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Universe's Hidden Dimensions," was one of the Times's 100 Notable Books of 2005.

"You work very hard on a book, so it's really nice to know that people appreciate it," she said of the success of her latest book. "I tried hard to write it well so people could read through it and enjoy the experience—not suffer through it."

In "Knocking on Heaven's Door," Randall weaves together several main topics: the importance and nature of scientific thinking, the relationships between science and religion, the state of particle physics today, the implications and history of the Large Hadron Collider, and the state of cosmology and dark matter searches.

Randall, who was named one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in 2007, said she focused on making these topics accessible to the general public.

“I think people who realize that they are allowed to read it as an individual, that they are allowed to skip parts that are too technical for them, really enjoy it,” Randall said.

The book’s accessibility to readers of all fields is exemplified by the diversity of reviewers on the book jacket, who range from former President Bill Clinton to Psychology Professors Daniel T. Gilbert and Steven Pinker to former Harvard President Lawrence H. Summers.

Physics Professor Arthur Jaffe, who taught Randall when she was an undergraduate, said he looks forward to reading her book.

“Randall is a great communicator, as well as a really outstanding physicist. I think that she will motivate many young people to pursue physics,” he said.

“Knocking on Heaven’s Door” has been translated into Spanish, and Randall’s book tour has taken her to cities across the United States as well as Barcelona, London, and “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.”

Before she considers writing another book, Randall said she plans to focus on her work on dark matter as well as her research on the Large Hadron Collider and model building.

Professor Howard M. Georgi ’68, who taught Randall when she was an undergraduate and later served as her PhD adviser, said that he hopes Randall’s book will generate excitement among the general public for the importance of science. Reading her book, he added, is “a project for winter break.”

TAGS COLLEGE, SCIENCE

Want to keep up with breaking news? [Get the latest, straight to your inbox.](#)