

Interview with Hydra Publications

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Do you have a specific writing style?

I think my style is pretty simple and down to earth. I want my characters to seem real, and I want my writing to speak to people where they are. I want it to be brutally honest when the scene calls for it, and tenderly sweet if it calls for that. But always, I want it to be utterly believable and interesting. I think that's the kind of style that captivates readers of all ages, because it treats them with honesty and respect. The story is all about what will satisfy them, not me.

Is there a message in your novels that you want readers to grasp?

There's always one message in every book that I write, although it plays out a little differently in each case. It's the message that, at rock bottom, the universe can be trusted. That when all is said and done, there will be love for all those who are lost in the dark, and justice for every wrong ever done. Even if current circumstances might make it look like that's not true, there will come a day when it happens. It's not a matter of if, it's only a matter of when.

How much of your work is realistic?

I try very hard to keep as much of my writing completely realistic as possible. This is very important, especially for a fantasy writer. The whole premise of a fantasy novel is that you're asking the reader to believe something which is impossible. They can do that much, but if you start asking them to believe two or three or four impossible things, then you run a serious risk of making your whole book unbelievable, or even silly. Stick with only one unrealistic element per book. Logical consequences that flow directly from that one element are fine, but don't start putting alien spaceships in a book that was supposed to be about vampires, or your readers will probably laugh at you.

Are experiences based on someone you know, or events in your own life?

A lot of things I write about are based on events in my own life or in the lives of people I know, but not always in obvious ways. For

example, in “More Golden Than Day”, Zach talks about the glistening mist on Jolie’s hair while they walk together under the live oak trees and how beautiful he thinks she is at that moment. That was something that really happened to me, but it wasn’t in Louisiana and the circumstances were a lot different. Or in “Cry for the Moon,” he has to spend some time living in a doghouse after he runs away. That’s not something that happened to me personally, but the way the doghouse was built matches the description of one we had when I was a child.

What books have influenced your life most?

There are three authors who have influenced me the most. J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and George MacDonald. I read The Silmarillion by Tolkien when I was 12 years old, and I was never the same afterward. It’s hard to describe what that book did to me, except to say that it broke my heart with longing for something I couldn’t even put a finger on. Nothing in the ordinary world was ever good enough to satisfy me after that. The other two writers only hammered the lesson in even harder. They made me an incurable dreamer, and after that how could I ever be anything but a fantasy writer?

Do you see writing as a career?

I’m not sure I see it as a career. That word implies something you do to make a living. Writers are very much like musicians or sculptors; we just work with different materials. All of us work for other people sometimes, and there’s nothing wrong with that. A sculptor who is paid to carve a statue isn’t much different from a writer who works for Hallmark. Those types of things are “careers”, so to speak. But working for Hallmark isn’t quite the same thing as being an author. To me, an author is someone who writes for the sake of telling an amazing story, whether he gets paid for that work or not.

If you had to do it all over again, would you change anything in your latest book?

No, I’m content with my books as they stand. Looking back, there are always things you’d like to change or that you feel you could have done better, of course. But there comes a time when you have to take a piece of work and call it finished. Otherwise you’ll keep tinkering with it for

the rest of your life and never move on to anything new. I want to keep telling new stories, not endlessly rehashing the same old thing.

Do you have to travel much concerning your books?

No, not much. Every now and then I'll give a presentation somewhere in Texas or Arkansas, and sometimes I have to visit a place I intend to write about just so I can get the proper flavor and understand it better. But other than that I don't really do much traveling.

What genre do you consider your books?

I consider all my work to be young adult fantasy. When I first started writing I didn't pay much attention to genres at all, but most readers seem to place me in that category and I'm content with that. But nevertheless, I like to write in a way which speaks to more than one small audience. I want to write something with enough depth for my adult readers to enjoy it, while being adventurous and entertaining enough for my young readers, who may not grasp the subtleties immediately. My work is sometimes classified as Christian Fiction because some of my characters are people who take their faith seriously and try to use it to help them decide what choices they should make. But I don't use my writing as a soap-box for preaching.

Do you ever experience writer's block?

Maybe a little. There are times when I get mentally tired and just can't think of anything else to say, but whenever that happens I lay off for two or three days and come back to the work with a fresh viewpoint. That's usually all it takes to cure me.

Do you write an outline before every book you write?

I never use outlines at all. Usually I'll start with a single image or idea in my mind, like a fountain with a golden cup beside it, or a boy walking alone down an empty street at night, and then I'll start imagining a story of how that image came to be and where I could go from there. Writing is always amazing, because I never know how the story will end until I get there myself.

What is your favorite theme/genre to write about?

I like to write about ordinary young people who find themselves in totally unbelievable situations that they never expected and certainly didn't ask for. I've seen so many situations in real life of kids who faced terrible things with courage and even humor, and I've always been humbled by that. I admire them, and those are the kinds of stories I like to tell. I write fantasy because I think of it as the purest expression of the storyteller's art, and because sometimes when dealing with those terrible situations, it's easier to make your point if you don't cut too close to the bone, so to speak. If I write about werewolves when I'm really talking about the pain of rejection and the necessity of standing up for what we believe in no matter what the cost may be, then that makes the point a little easier to take.