

Interview with Young Adult Books Central

May 19, 2009

Did you always want to be a writer?

I started writing when I was seven years old, while watching my mother compose poetry at the kitchen table. Ever since then, I've always wanted to be a writer.

Do you have any advice for young writers?

Never give up. You're going to face a lot of obstacles and roadblocks as a writer, and it's easy to get discouraged. Know what your goals are, and keep working toward them. It can take years to be successful. Also, be thick-skinned about reviews and writing suggestions. You want your work to be the best it can be, so don't get upset if someone doesn't like what you wrote. Take their suggestions and use them to get better.

If you weren't a writer, what would you be?

I'm a high school teacher in "real life", and for the most part I love my work. Not many authors can afford to make a living just from writing, so we have to have a day job.

Are you working on anything now?

I'm in what I call the "thinking stage" for my next project. I just finished writing "Cry for the Moon" three months ago, so I needed a little time to rest from that. I haven't settled on exactly what I'll write next, but I'll probably choose an idea soon and get to work on it. I try to finish about one book per year.

What is your working environment like?

I sit at a computer in the corner of my bedroom.

What is your working style?

I work in fits and starts. There are times when I'll sit and write for hours at a time, and then there are other times when I'll go for a week or two and write nothing at all. Most of the time I do try to write at least a little bit every evening. It just doesn't always work out that way.

Do you believe in outlining?

Oh, good heavens, no! I could never write that way. As I said in my bio, I just take the story and run with it, and I never have the faintest idea where I'll end up or what will happen along the way.

What is your goal as a writer?

My goal is to give my readers some good clean fun and maybe some thought-provoking things to chew on after they're done reading. A lot of people have written to me to tell me how much they loved this or that story and how much it meant to them, and that makes me happy. And of course my ultimate goal is always to give glory to God in everything that I do.

How much of your writing is based on your own experience as a child or teenager?

Some of it is, some of it isn't. I guess that's probably true for every writer of young adult fiction. Since my work is fantasy, none of it can be strictly from my own personal life, of course. I do pull specific incidents, though. For example, in my most recent book "Cry for the Moon", the main character finds himself having to survive by living in a dog house for a while. I never had to do that personally, but the description of the dog house he lived in came from one we had when I was a child.

Do you prefer to write longhand, on a typewriter, or on a computer?

The only way I ever write is on the computer. It's too much work to have to retype it all into the word processor later.

What are you reading right now?

Currently I'm reading the "Professor Jameson" series by Neil R. Jones. It's classic science fiction which any sci-fi fan should absolutely read. I also just finished reading "Asulon" by William McGrath, which is an excellent Christian fantasy set in an alternate version of America which is still medieval.

What's on your current reading list?

I don't keep a reading list, per se. When I'm done with something, then that's when I start looking for something else to read.

What was your favorite book as a child?

As a child my favorite book was "Charlotte's Web" by E.B. White. Then, when I was 11 years old, I picked up "The Silmarillion" by J.R.R. Tolkien. I'd never heard of him before, but as soon as I opened the pages I was hooked forever.

What are your favorite books now?

The Silmarillion, Perelandra by C.S. Lewis, At the Back of the North Wind by George MacDonald, The Neverending Story by Michael Ende. I love to read

What is the one book no writer should be without?

"On Fairy Stories" by J.R.R. Tolkien. It's the absolute non-negotiable must-have for any fantasy writer. For other types of writers I'd say a good thesaurus and a current copy of "Writer's Market"

What are some of your hobbies?

Other than reading and writing, I enjoy listening to music and I like doing things outdoors. I like fishing and swimming, working on old trucks, and playing with my kids.

How does your spouse/significant other feel about your writing career?

Writing is not her thing, but she's always been proud of me for doing something good with my life.

What's your favorite movie?

The Neverending Story

If your book, Cry for the Moon, was turned into a movie, who would you like to play the main characters?

You know that's a really good question. Zach is really the only main character. I always thought of him as being a Southern boy with blondish hair, so maybe someone like Brad Renfro (who was the kid who played Mark Sway in "The Client"). He's too old by now of course, but somebody like that.

What's your favorite (or least favorite) book turned movie?

I usually don't like movies that are made from books, because they almost always disappoint me. They leave too much out, and they change too many things. But I do think the recent movie that was made of "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe" was excellent.

What're your favorite things about Young Adult as opposed to writing for adults?

There are several things, but I think it's mostly just that I can write about the things I love. I'm a dreamer and a lover of bright and beautiful things, and as people get older I think there's a strong temptation to forget all that and put on blinkers. In some ways, teenagers see the world with clearer eyes than most of them ever will again. There are always exceptions to the rule, of course, but adult fiction is often expected to portray a dull, boring world with no room left for wonder or magic. . . even fantasy for adults suffers from the same problem. I don't like that kind of writing.

Do you think eBooks will ever completely replace traditional publishing?

No. There will always be a certain group of people who love their paper books. Booklovers often see books not just as products, but as objects of artistic beauty in their own right. The smell and feel of the different papers, the heft of a physical book in your hands, all these things are pleasures which many of us simply wouldn't get from e-books.

What's the biggest mistake that new authors make?

I'd say it was thinking that success will come instantly. It never does.