

# A BSB Interview with Rachel Spangler

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## What made you decide to become a fiction writer?

I didn't consciously decide to become a fiction writer; it just happened. I started writing mainly to amuse myself and sometimes my friends. I wrote a lot to keep myself entertained and avoid doing my school work. One day I heard a conversation in my head and wrote it down; the next day I wrote some more and the characters started to emerge from the dialogue. From there the story took on a life of its own, and *Learning Curve* was born.

## What type of stories do you write? And why?

Broadly, I write romances because that is what I like to read. More specifically, I try to write characters that come from very different walks of life but are connected by human characteristics that we can all identify with. I try to create characters that remind me of people I know and care about, and I try to put them in situations that can occur to any of us on any given day. I want readers to really feel "that could happen to me," or "she's just like my sister" when they read my books.

## What do your family/friends think about your writing?

Mostly my friends and family get a real kick out of my writing. Several friends have read early drafts of *Learning Curve* and really encouraged me to keep writing. My partner, Susan, was especially influential in giving me to courage to send the original manuscript to Bold Strokes. Overall, my friends and family are excited for the book to come out, though I think some family members may proudly buy copies of the novel and then be too embarrassed to actually read it. That's fine with me though; no one really wants to read steamy love scenes written by their granddaughter.

## Where do you get your ideas?

I hear voices, which I know sounds a little crazy, but it's a real creative drive for me. I heard the characters from *Learning Curve* while listening to Melissa Etheridge's "Come On Out Tonight," and the characters from my next book spoke to me on a ski trip with some really good friends. Conversations hit me while watching T.V., driving the car, or even passing people on the street. I'm also terrible about eavesdropping on other people's conversations when out in public, and I am forever pulling random bits of dialogue from complete strangers. I never know when the muse is going to strike.

## How do you write; do you plan everything out or just write?

In the beginning I just write what I hear in my head and don't question it. As the story begins to take shape and the characters start to form themselves, then I step back and take a look at where it's all headed. At that point I usually do character studies to flesh out my characters. I generally don't outline until I am well into the book, and even then it's pretty general. I try to make sure I fit in the crucial actions without writing scenes that don't forward the plot. Any details are developed in the moment.

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## What makes *Learning Curve* special to you?

It's my first, and you always remember your first time, right? No, honestly I really love these characters, and actually I'm a little in love with Carrie. They became so real to me, like friends I interacted with on a daily basis. They filled my mind for over a year, and when the novel was finished I missed them. I even got a little bit lonely without Ash, Carrie, and Tess around; they were that much a part of my life.

## How much of yourself and the people you know are in your characters?

It varies; all of my characters have certain aspects of me but some more so than others. Then there are characters that consist more of who I would like to be than who I am. I wish I had Ash's cool car and rock-hard abs, but that's the great thing about fiction. As for people I know, that is almost 100% of my characters, but no one character is exactly like any one person. They are a combination. Carrie, for instance, is a combination of all the amazing professors I had at Illinois State University. She incorporates a little bit of each of them, and I think that's what makes her authentic.

## Which lesbian authors inspired you the most? Do you have a favorite of this author(s)?

My wife got me a copy of *Ruby Fruit Jungle* and *Venus Envy* for our first Christmas together, so Rita Mae Brown was my introduction to lesbian fiction, and her work played a huge role in getting me hooked. I've also been greatly influenced by Radclyffe, first as an author and then as a publisher. She really sets the gold standard. I have so many favorites it's hard to list just a few, but I will say that Georgia Beer's *Too Close to Touch*, and Kim Baldwin's *Whitewater Rendezvous* both played a huge role in my decision to send the manuscript of *Learning Curve* to Bold Strokes Books. Since then, I've been burning my way through the BSB catalogue, and each new book teaches me something that helps me develop as a writer.

## Do you have any suggestions for new writers?

Just write what you like. There will come a time to focus on point of view and sentence structure, but that's not now. If you are really just getting started, then you should be writing because you enjoy it, because no other motivation will keep you going when it gets tough. Also, if you haven't joined the BSB author connect listserv, you really should. There is nothing more inspiring than being around other people who share your passion.

## When you're not writing what do you do for fun?

It should go without saying that I love to read, but there I said it anyway. In the winter I live to ski, and you will see that come out in my next book. I am currently planning a big ski trip that I am justifying as "research." When there isn't snow on the ground, you can pretty much bet I am thinking about the St. Louis Cardinals. I am a bit of a fanatic. I really enjoy sports in general, but Cardinals baseball is an addiction. Year round I love spending time hanging out with my wife, and now my son is part of that as well. We are very family-oriented people, and we just have a great time being around each other no matter what we're doing.



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