

# A BSB Interview With Nell Stark

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Publicist/Author Liaison

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

I don't think I ever did make a conscious decision. I've been making up and writing down stories since I could scrawl on paper. And even if every method of writing were taken away from me, I'd still dream up tales in my head. Everyone writes, of course, in some way—we make choices about whether to write emails, letters, grocery lists, memos, papers, etc. every day. But I believe that if you're a *writer*—if, in other words, writing is your vocation—you never really got that choice. You just have to live with it. Whether you share your writing or not, publish or not—it's a part of who you are.

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

My mission in writing is to make my readers *feel*. In order to do that, I write about people. My stories, whether short or long fiction, are centered on my protagonists and their emotions. That's partly why my fiction tends to be erotic in nature; sex, in its incredible diversity, is a perfect vehicle for the exploration of any character. By allowing my protagonists to experience desire, I can see through their walls and discover what makes them tick. And then, I can bring that out for the reader's benefit. If my readers "lose" themselves in the story—if they begin to strongly empathize with my characters—I've done my job.

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

This is a tricky question for me. When I was younger, and straight, my family was very supportive of my writing. They encouraged me when I embarked on my first novel in high school (a very sappy fantasy story about a brave young heroine who saves the world, of course), and continued to be proud of my creative work when I chose "English with Creative Writing" as one of my majors in college. However, they raised strong objections when I finally came out, and they've made it clear that they do not approve of my lesbian-themed writing. That's hard to hear, but fortunately, I have *many* wonderful friends who are proud of me and eager to read my work. I can't thank them enough for their support!

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**Where do you get your ideas?**

I'll answer that with three "I-words" – literature, life, and my lover. For example, shortly after I learned how to sail, I began to "see" two characters in my head who were sailors, and who were falling in love with each other while falling in love with the sport. That story eventually became Running With the Wind. On the other hand, my current book project was inspired by John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which I had to reread for a class that I was teaching. Regardless of where the initial "seed" comes from, my partner is an invaluable sounding board and fellow brainstormer. She has an intuitive approach to storytelling that makes my tales much stronger than they would be if I were working without her input.

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

I like to have a cursory outline of every chapter before I begin, but I don't need every detail at my disposal. Sometimes, for me, there's no way to know what will happen in a story until I start writing. So, I begin with the "skeleton" and allow my characters to flesh it out for me as I write

**What makes *Running with the Wind* special to you?**

It's my first published novel! How much more special can you get?! I hope to go on to write many more books, but RwtW will always be my "debut" in the lesfic world, and I know I'll always be especially proud of it.

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

Ah, a dangerous question! Let me try to maintain my authorial mystique by answering this circumspectly. I don't know about other authors, but I could never effectively pen a character with whom I had nothing in common. But at the same time, my characters are forces unto themselves. I'm one of those crazy people who can (and does) speak with the "voices" in her head. The short-short version is that there are pieces of myself and those I know in all of my characters, but that each character is also her own person, distinct from any "real" individual.

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

The first lesbian romance I ever read was Curious Wine by Katherine V. Forrest. I'm completely in awe of her, and of that book—she does a masterful job of evoking emotion in her readers, and I strive to emulate that example. Years later, I discovered Radclyffe's work via X-Files fan fiction (Scully and Marsh forever – woohoo!). I found that I immediately latched on to Rad's characters; she's adept at crafting people who you care very deeply about, despite knowing rationally that they're fictional. Rad was my "gateway drug," so to speak, into the world of lesbian fiction, and I now find myself learning so much about "the craft" from a wide variety of authors, especially Karin Kallmaker, Lynn Ames, Reese Szymanski, Susan Smith, and JD Glass.

**Do you have any suggestions for new writers?**

The motto of the Writing Center where I teach is "Every writer needs a reader." It's crucial to workshop with others, and to find readers with whom you can have honest discussions about your work. Aside from that, *persist*. Write what you're passionate about—trust yourself. And when you're stuck, take a long shower—Muses tend to like massaging showerheads.

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

Right now, I'm thoroughly obsessed with *World of Warcraft* – a "massive multiplayer online roleplaying game" produced by Blizzard Entertainment. I play a female paladin, who specializes in healing other characters. It's *great* fun, and an excellent way to relax. I also enjoy reading, most sports, and cooking.

Thanks for the opportunity to interview, Rad and Connie!



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