

A BSB Interview With Catherine Friend

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Publicist/Author Liaison

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What made you decide to become a fiction writer?

In the 1990s I just couldn't find the types of books I love to read and with lesbian characters (this was obviously before BSB began!), so I decided to write my own! I love to read books that are adventure and quest and romance and time travel and historical fiction all meshed into one.

What type of stories do you write? And why?

I write stories that are adventure and quest and romance and time travel and historical fiction all meshed into one!

While I love to travel, I also love to stay home and nest with my wife, so in my fiction I live vicariously through my characters by sending them off on challenging journeys. I force these poor women to get off their butts and go somewhere in search of something while I stay home, safe and warm by the wood stove. In *The Spanish Pearl*, Kate accidentally ends up in eleventh-century Spain so her quest, not surprisingly, is to find her way back home again. Christian-Moor tension, angry soldiers, a sexy Moorish princess, Kate's lack of survival skills, and falling in love sort of mess everything up.

What do your family/friends think about your writing?

They love my work, but then again, I pay them well.

My parents and aunts and uncles are especially proud and are always waving copies of *Hit By a Farm* in people's faces. Not sure what they'll do with *The Spanish Pearl*, however, so we'll see. My writer friends have been so supportive, listening to me whine for years because no one was buying my work, and continually giving me feedback and encouragement. I would have quit long ago if not for these friends.

-continue page 2-



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A BSB Interview With Catherine Friend

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Page 2

Where do you get your ideas?

I guess they come from a mix of real events, real people, and my imagination. I love combining totally fictional characters with actual people in history. During the time of *The Spanish Pearl*, a real Christian king and a mercenary soldier were always picking on each other, and the king kept throwing the soldier out of his country, then letting him back in when he needed his sword. The relationship between these two guys was like a major pissing contest, and my poor Kate gets caught between them.

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

I map out the major scenes, but often don't know exactly what's going to happen between those scenes. Before I actually write a scene, I play it over and over again in my mind like a movie until I like it. Only then do I sit down and write, since the thought of writing without that little movie rolling in my head terrifies me! The farther I get into the novel, the more real the characters become to me, so I'm constantly running ahead in the plot to make sure my main character will actually do what I've planned for her.

What makes *The Spanish Pearl* special to you?

The Spanish Pearl is my first novel and---true confession---I wrote the book not to entertain readers, but to entertain myself! I had so much fun, and every day I would leap out of bed wondering "What's going to happen to Kate today? What horrible things can I dish out for her next, and how the heck will she get herself out of her latest mess?"

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

Very little. Putting myself into my characters would make for boring characters, and putting people I know into my characters could be very dangerous!

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

I really loved Sarah Dreher's *Stoner McTavish* series, which came out a long time ago. Paula Martinac's *Out of Time* showed me a writer could successfully merge history and romance and a touch of the paranormal. I loved Edith Forbes's *Alma Rose*, a novel about a woman who carves, with dynamite, a naked, reclining woman into the top of a mountain, sort of a monument to her true love, Alma Rose. One winter after a snowstorm, Melissa plowed the snow into a huge mountain along the driveway, so I got out my leather mittens and started sculpting the snow. A few hours later I had a naked, reclining snow woman, larger than life---our own Alma Rose. The snow didn't melt for at least a month, so my beautiful snow woman lasted a long time. The UPS driver never said a word.

-continue page 3-

A BSB Interview With Catherine Friend

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Page 3

Do you have any suggestions for new writers?

I once read that tightrope walkers give each other this advice: "Don't look down." Instead, you're supposed to keep your eyes focused on what's ahead, the end of the rope. As a writer, I know I'm supposed to stay focused on reaching the end of the novel, but I get halfway through, "look down," and realize I'm trying to write this huge thing and I'm losing the thread and I'll never finish it and who the hell do I think I am to try something so audacious? This happens to me every *#&\$ time. I "look down," freak out for a week, three weeks, two months, then struggle to get myself back on track.

So my suggestion is to not "look down," to not pay attention to the enormity of what you're doing, but to just keep doing it. Some day I hope to be able to actually take this advice myself.

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

Oh, this reveals me for the boring person I am. I watch movies, take walks, visit with friends, and try to get Melissa to go biking with me. I read. I put together jigsaw puzzles in the winter and hang out in my hammock in the summer. We choose not to have TV or satellite reception out here, so we're pretty creative when it comes to entertaining ourselves...and each other. ☺

Which is the favorite of the books/stories you've written and why?

Each book is my favorite when it comes out. Right now my favorite is *The Spanish Pearl*. I still can't believe I was able to marshal all those characters and events and dialogue into a fairly cohesive plot. I still can't believe I had so much fun working so hard.



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