

A BSB Interview With Gill McKnight

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Consulting Publicist

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What made you decide to become a fiction writer?

It was something I always wanted to do, along with being an astronaut, but just never got around to doing. Then, when I was introduced to the world of fandom the notion re-emerged, and it suddenly seemed like such an uncomplicated thing to attempt. (By that time I had found out that astronauts had to be good at math, so that was never going to happen.)

Plus I was working away from home and had lots of time to kill in the evenings. It was easy to settle down with my laptop and tap away at the biggest load of old Uber nonsense. I loved it, it was great fun.

What type of stories do you write? And why?

I have always had a weak spot for romcom. I love the old movie spats between Rock and Doris, and Katherine and Cary. Also I'm a sucker for the sly wit of Austen. I also adore the style and humor of PG Wodehouse and EF Benson.

I'm from a culture where practically every sentence from an elder begins, "I'll never forget the time..." It's a nation of storytellers and fireside entertaining. An easy habit to pick up and practice.

Where do you get your ideas?

Anything that catches my imagination. I mull, and daydream, and stare out windows 'til they steam up. I have a supreme sense of the ridiculous, which is not always useful. And I usually have several projects on the go at once as I have the attention span of a gnat and like to jump from one story to another. It keeps the flow fresh.

I write about things that make me happy. Things I like and want for myself. It's all about me, really. The rest of you are innocent bystanders.

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

No real planning, unfortunately. All that window steaming is for naught.

What happens is I *think* I have a plan, then I sit down and write like a riot and suddenly realize I have wandered—much like a sheep. (For someone so crappy at math I have no problem with tangents.) This leads to more gazing out of windows and probably accounts for the vacant look often commented on.

Eventually I herd my plan back on course and return to the story. I hate stuff left undone. Can't abide it. That's how I know I will never die. I won't be able to leave this mortal coil until all the dishes are done and the cupboard tops are dusted.

What makes *Falling Star* special to you?

It was the first story I ever wrote, (apart from an Enid Blyton rip-off when I was seven, which was 12 pages long and begged for a sequel). And it was for a great friend...my audience of one. Every word of it was for our own amusement, just our own wee joke. That's the truly special bit.

The rest is all good, too. In that it went to a fandom site and was popular. Then I tidied it up and it was contracted by BSB, after they realized I was just going to keep sending it until they said yes.

But for me the real beauty is in the intimacy of the initial story and the laugh my pal Effy and I had with it. That's what made it special for me.

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

I'm a magpie. I steal from all around me. If I stood beside you at a bus stop long enough you'd be in a story. I have no shame. I write about what I like, what I want, what I think I know, what I don't know and can Google. And I make up the rest because I don't know any real-life stuntwomen, or kidnappers, or werewolves, though Lord knows I've tried. Then I put all my research in a blender and sip and see.

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

I'm going to look over my shoulder for this question and talk about earlier books that affected me before the Bella and BSB days when the market expanded.

I really like Carol Anshaw (Virago) and Cameron Abbott (Alice Street). My first lesbian read was Jane Rule's *This is Not for You*, but I recovered and went on to explore the rest of the Naiad catalogue.

In fact, Karin Kallmaker's *Painted Moon* and Katherine V. Forrest's *Curious Wine*, both read back to back, left me with a terrible penchant for snowed-in log cabins. I purposely look for them in lesbian fiction now. It's the saddest fetish ever.

Do you have any suggestions for new writers?

Learn to *rewrite*. Avidly. Frequently. Happily. Look, listen, and learn from critiques, writing sites, and other people's writing that appeals to you. Find friends to beta, write, and chat with. It doesn't have to be a solitary pursuit.

Have a discerning eye for what will help or hinder you. The biggest hindrance is probably ego. Learn to let go as much as you take onboard. You're creating, not hoarding, and all acts of creation involve a release.

Oh, and never, ever think you have a muse. It's like saying 'Hamlet' in the Green Room. If you allow yourself to believe in this artistic phenomenon you will begin to blame it for your own lazy ass and lack of creative imagination.

If you're blocked go find a window, sit beside it, and write until both you and it are steamed up. Write everyday, just a few hundred words on truly bad days. Then you will at least have something to self-edit and rewrite, and behold another crisper version will appear before your eyes on a good day. It's all about moving forward. You know the drill. Keep at it.



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