

A BSB Interview With Yolanda Wallace

by Connie Ward, Bold Strokes Books Consulting Publicist

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What made you decide to become a fiction writer?

I started writing fiction because the stories I wanted to hear weren't being told. I began by writing fan fiction so I could "fix" the endings of books and movies that didn't conclude the way I wanted them to. I then progressed to original short stories and eventually longer works.

What type of stories do you write? And why?

My interests are varied so I like to dabble in all genres—drama, romance, historical fiction, etc. No matter which category I choose, however, romance is always an underlying theme. Though often secondary to the plot, the connection between the characters remains of primary importance.

What do your family/friends think about your writing?

My family and friends have always been supportive of my writing. Most can't wait to see which character seems most like them. My 91-year-old grandmother is especially guilty. Ever since I won a writing contest with an expository essay titled "My Grandmother's Hands (1918-)," she constantly asks when I plan to write a sequel. I should probably get to work on that.

Where do you get your ideas?

I am inspired by anything and everything. A gesture, a news story, a piece of music. All have prompted me to put pen to paper at some point. In fact, one of my favorite short stories ("The Girl in 8G") was inspired by a meaningless line in Fight Club

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

I begin with a general story idea and move forward from there. I pre-plan most of the plot but I don't anticipate the end. I allow the characters to take me to the most natural conclusion, even if it isn't the one I might have had in mind when inspiration first struck.

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

I place a part of me in each character I write but, thankfully, I have many facets to my personality. My wife often jokes that she never knows who she's going to come home to. I also have a large extended family so I am guaranteed never to run out of material.

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What makes *In Medias Res* special to you?

In Medias Res will always hold a special place in my heart because it is my first novel that has been accepted for publication. Though I have had several short stories published over the years, I didn't feel like a "real" writer until Bold Strokes Books gave me the thumbs-up. *In Medias Res* feels like validation. The years of rejection slips were worth it. I wasn't wasting my time on a hobby. I was honing the skills it took to become a better writer.

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

I admire strong women so Rita Mae Brown has always been an inspiration to me. She was on the front lines of the fight for lesbian rights even when the women's rights movement didn't want her there. *Rubyfruit Jungle* was the first lesbian-themed book I ever read. When I was in high school and just beginning to come to terms with my sexuality, reading the experiences of a fellow Southerner helped me take my first tentative steps out of the closet.

Do you have any suggestions for new writers?

"Write what you know" is a wonderful piece of advice, but it is also misleading. Writing what you know is a good beginning, but it should be just that—a beginning. Writing what you **don't** know is equally important. If writers limit themselves to telling stories culled solely from their own personal experiences, they run the risk of telling the same stories over and over. I often challenge myself by tackling subjects with which I am not intimately familiar. That way I can become more well-rounded as a person and as a writer. My second novel, *Rum Spring*, for example, is set in Pennsylvania's Amish community, a world completely different from my own. Researching for the novel was both eye-opening and rewarding.

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

I am an avid amateur photographer and a serious sports fan. Tennis, though I play it horribly, is my passion. I don't follow the sport as fervently as I did before Martina Navratilova retired, but if there's a match on—either current or classic—I am guaranteed to be parked in front of the TV. I am currently at work on a tennis-themed novel detailing a player's attempt to win Wimbledon.



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